

HMLA-269 is Back in Service

On July 1, 2024, Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269, “The Gunrunners,” was reactivated at MCAS New River in North Carolina. HMLA-269 was formed at New River in February 1971, and was activated on July 1, 1971. The squadron was deactivated in December of 2022 as part of Force Design 2030, leaving MCAS New River, and the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, with one light attack helicopter squadron, HMLA-167, creating a shortfall in helicopter air support within the II Marine Expeditionary Force leading to the reactivation.



Photo: An AH-1Z Viper with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 flies over Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, July 31, 2020. HMLA-269 practiced close air support and aerial surveillance to maintain mission readiness. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Cody Rowe)

At the reactivation ceremony, commanding officer LtCol Jens Gilbertson spoke of the squadron's history as the first attack helicopter squadron in the Marine Corps, and the pilots and aircrew of HMLA-269 who received the Distinguished Flying Cross. The Gunrunners have been recognized eight times by the Marine Corps Aviation Association as the Light Attack Helicopter Squadron of the Year. HMLA-269 operates the AH-1Z "Viper" attack helicopter and the UH-1Y "Venom" utility helicopter. A statement from the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing reports that "[b]oth aircraft are manned, trained, and equipped to fight from the sea into austere environments and confined littoral spaces, and support the Marine Air-Ground Task Force by providing offensive air support, utility support, armed escort, and airborne supporting arms coordination." Another "first" of Carolina Marines continues to serve.



Photo: U.S. Marines with Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 269 fly an AH-1Z Viper near Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina, Nov. 7, 2022. This was the last flight for HMLA-269, which is deactivating in accordance with Force Design 2030. HMLA-269 is a subordinate unit of 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, the aviation combat element of II Marine Expeditionary Force. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Pfc. Rowdy Vanskike)