Lockheed Martin F-35 Team Begins The Shift From Development To Production

A transition is under way at Lockheed MartinF-35 sites around the world, as the heart of the program migrates from engineering development to aircraft production. All four major subassemblies of the first F-35 have now been joined, and parts- fabrication is under way for the second aircraft.

"While development work continues on the F-35, technical issues now have been largely settled and we are placing added emphasis on entering into production-and-sustainment agreements with our JSF partner countries," said Tom Burbage, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and general manager of F-35 JSF Program Integration. "We are also sharpening our focus on meeting our proposed low-rate initial production commitments and on ensuring that the production of our test airplanes proceeds smoothly."

The F-35 is a next-generation, supersonic, multi-role stealth aircraft designed to replace the AV-8B Harrier, A-10, F-16, F/A-18 Hornet and the United Kingdom's Harrier GR.7 and Sea Harrier.

Speaking at the Paris Air Show, Burbage emphasized that a key element of the joint-service and coalition-based F-35 concept is the integration of nine nations and 13 military services into a coherent production program as well as a global sustainment and training system.

"Assimilating the requirements and needs of all JSF program partners is hard work, but it's ultimately rewarding because of the great leaps in efficiency and effectiveness the F-35 will bring to everyone involved," Burbage said. "Additionally, the program's economic and industrial benefits are a profound outgrowth of JSF partnership, and we're committed to meeting all expectations in that regard."

The JSF program partners are the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey, Canada, Australia, Denmark and Norway. Each country is involved in the funding and development of the aircraft system.

Brig. Gen. C.R. Davis, deputy program executive officer for the JSF program, predicted that the F-35's next-generation systems and performance will change the face of air combat worldwide. "The capabilities of the Joint Strike Fighter will really force U.S. and allied services to rethink how they will use fighter aircraft in future conflicts. Direct comparison of the F-35 to legacy aircraft simply falls well short of providing accurate capability assessments. Future concepts of operations will change in ways we can only begin to imagine."

Citing one example, Davis noted the capability for interoperable coalition warfare that the F-35 will bring to all partner nations. Many of the unique F-35 systems that will provide these capabilities are well beyond design stages and are up and running in labs across the world. In addition, the first F-35 is proving that the time requirements for many mating and assembly steps were overestimated.

"Bottom line -- we are well on our way to making the transition from development to production," Davis said.

The first F-35, currently being assembled at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth, Texas, is scheduled for its first flight in the third quarter of 2006. A total of 15 flight-test aircraft, seven ground-test articles and one pole model for radar-signature testing will be built during the current System Development and Demonstration phase of the program.

Production, sustainment and follow-on development agreements, through which JSF partner countries will place orders for F-35s, are slated to be signed in late 2006. Low-rate initial production of operational F-35s commences in 2007.

Three versions of the F-35 are planned: a conventional takeoff and landing variant, a short-takeoff / vertical landing variant and an aircraft carrier variant. All versions will bring capabilities that are unavailable in current-generation multi-role fighters.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., U.S.A., Lockheed Martin employs about 130,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2004 sales of $35.5 billion.

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