F-35 Lightning II - Strong Global Partnership, Ready To Begin Production And Sustainment

With a new name, its first flight on the near horizon, six aircraft in various stages of subassembly and plans being laid for operation and support, the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II, the only 5th generation fighter available on the international market, is moving quickly into production with an eye toward long-term sustainment.

Joining many of his F-35 team members in the Media Hall at the Farnborough International Air Show, F-35 Program Executive Officer Rear Adm. Steven Enewold and Deputy Program Executive Officer Brig. Gen. Charles Davis remarked on the program's progress.

"After 56 months of development, we are encouraged by the tangible progress in the flight qualification of our designs," said Enewold. "Most notable is the first flyable test aircraft, but we are also demonstrating performance on the major avionics systems in laboratories and flying test beds. There are still many challenges, but I am encouraged by the team's achievements."

According to Davis, soon-to-be Enewold's successor as leader of the program, "I've worked in flight test and acquisition for 16 plus years and have never seen a program this advanced in its development at this stage ... B-2, F-22, etc. None were this far at this point in time. Sure we've got challenges -- and we'll have challenges we've not thought of yet -- but we're seeing them much earlier and fixing them faster than any legacy program I've known," said Davis.

Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and F-35 program general manager, agreed and said the aircraft possesses significant technical maturity compared to past fighter programs at this stage of their development. "We believe the F-35 is ready for low rate-production because the program systems are maturing well beyond those of legacy programs. The program's devotion to affordability, risk-reduction and its ability to exploit new advances in digital design tools and manufacturing technology are combining to promote design stability, more reliable cost forecasts and adherence to schedules," said Crowley.

Tom Burbage, Lockheed Martin executive vice president and general manager of F-35 Program Integration, added that the U.S. and F-35 partner nations are already planning for the F-35's long-range sustainment, one of the program's biggest components. "This is an affordability-based program, both in terms of aircraft price and the cost of maintaining it," Burbage said.

"We are sharply focused on sustainment as a means to an end -- and that end in this case is an F-35 that is affordable to operate and support. All of our partner countries will be deeply involved in that endeavor down to the local level," he added.

In a ceremony on July 7 at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth, Texas, the F-35 made its public debut and received its name -- Lightning II -- which echoes two great fighter aircraft of the past: the World War II-era Lockheed P-38 Lightning and the supersonic, Mach 2, Lightning fighter developed by English Electric in the middle 1950s.

The F-35 Lightning II is a 5th Generation, supersonic stealth fighter designed to replace a wide range of existing aircraft, including AV-8B Harriers, A-10s, F-16s, F/A-18 Hornets and United Kingdom Harrier GR.7s and Sea Harriers. The F-35 will be the most powerful single-engine fighter ever made.

Lockheed Martin is developing the F-35 with its principal industrial partners, Northrop Grummanand BAE Systems. Two separate, interchangeable F-35 engines are under development: the Pratt & Whitney F135 and the GE Rolls-Royce Fighter Engine Team F136.

The inaugural flight of the first F-35, a preproduction conventional takeoff and landing variant, is planned for later this year. Fifteen F-35s will undergo flight test, seven will be used for static testing and another will validate the aircraft's radar signature.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 135,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2005 sales of $37.2 billion.

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