Twenty-Five Years Of Stealth And Sustainment Experience Supports Lockheed Martin 5th Generation Systems

This week the aerospace industry gathers for the Paris Air Show to celebrate aviation and advancements, like the Lockheed Martin 5TH Generation F-22 and F-35 stealth fighters. This time also marks 25 years since delivery of the first production F-117, the world's first operational fighter to exploit low-observable stealth technology - technology upon which the current 5TH Generation fighters are built.

"From its first flight in 1981 through more than 20 years of operational service that includes deployment in three major conflicts, the stealth capabilities of this black jet have revolutionized air warfare," said George Zielsdorf, vice president of F-117 and U-2 programs for Lockheed Martin. "Lockheed Martin's lessons-learned and experience in stealth, associated technologies, and reliability and sustainment have defined the 5TH Generation systems of today."

Lockheed Martin won the contract to build 59 F-117 fighters at the famed Skunk Works(TM) in Burbank, Calif., in 1978. The F-117 flew for the first time on June 18, 1981, only 31 months after the contract was awarded. Deliveries began in 1982 and ended in 1990. The aircraft achieved initial operational capability in October 1983, less than 5 years after program go- ahead.

"The unique design of the F-117 provides exceptional combat capabilities and its low observables make it extremely survivable," said Zielsdorf. "Once inside enemy airspace, sophisticated navigation and attack systems integrated in a digital avionics suite allow it to employ a variety of weapons from internal weapons bays. An automated mission planning system, developed to optimize the F-117's capabilities, performs detailed planning for missions into highly defended target areas."

The F-117 is powered by two General Electric F404 turbofan engines and uses fly-by-wire flight controls to produce excellent flying qualities and maneuverability. The F-117 stealth fighter is based at Holloman AFB, N.M., and flown by personnel assigned to the 49th Fighter Wing.

Besides its operational capabilities, the F-117 has demonstrated solid performance in the areas of supportability and maintainability. While its design incorporates sophisticated low observable techniques and materials, these non-traditional aircraft components have not impacted the ability of maintenance personnel to effectively support the fleet.

"After 25 years of operation, the F-117 continues to demonstrate the highest levels of readiness in the Air Force and many of these same technologies, processes and lessons-learned are being applied to the F-22 and F-35," said Zielsdorf.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 140,000 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 2006 sales of $39.6 billion.

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First Call Analyst:
FCMN Contact: joe.w.stout@lmco.com

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