First U.S. Marine Pilots Lockheed Martin F-35

Maj. Joseph T. "O.D." Bachmann today became the first U.S. Marine Corps pilot to fly the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II, logging the flight-test program's 90th mission. He is the fifth pilot to fly the stealthy, multi-role fighter.

Bachmann departed the runway at Lockheed Martin's Fort Worth plant at 11:29 a.m. CDT and flew the aircraft to 15,000 feet, checking handling qualities and engine response before landing one hour and 15 minutes later.

"The plane performed wonderfully," said Bachmann, a member of the F-35 Integrated Test Force and one of the team test pilots who will fly the F-35B Lightning II at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md., test site, beginning this summer. "The U.S. Marine Corps will be getting an aircraft with extraordinary capabilities that is very easy to fly. Today is another step toward delivery of the first jets to Marines on the front line."

Bachmann's first flight was in F-35 AA-1, a conventional takeoff and landing variant with controls and flying qualities essentially identical to the short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) F-35B. The F-35B will replace Marine Corps AV-8B STOVL fighters and F/A-18 strike fighters. It will be the Marines' primary fighter, and will provide a unique combination of capabilities: stealth, supersonic speed, STOVL basing flexibility and network-enabled mission systems.

Bachmann is the second active-duty service member to fly the F-35. U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. James "Flipper" Kromberg first piloted the Lightning II on Jan. 30, 2008. Bachmann has more than 2,000 hours of flight time in more than 30 different types of aircraft and is currently qualified in the F/A-18 A-F.

During his military career, Bachmann made two deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom - one from the "Harrier Carrier," USS Bataan, and the other land-based at Al Asad, Iraq. During flight operations in Iraq, Bachmann earned four Air Medals and a Navy Commendation with a Combat V.

The F-35 is a supersonic, multi-role, 5th generation stealth fighter. Three F-35 variants derived from a common design, developed together and using the same sustainment infrastructure worldwide will replace at least 13 types of aircraft for 11 nations initially, making the Lightning II the most cost-effective fighter program in history.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin is a global security company that employs about 146,000 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 2008 sales of $42.7 billion.

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