

Lockheed Martin F-35 Poised To Be Backbone Of USAF Fighter Fleet

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The United States Air Force officially becomes the first F-35 Lightning II customer later this year, when the first of the stealth fighters is delivered to Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The delivery will initiate a massive recapitalization of the Air Force's multi-role fighter fleet, and will usher in profound increases in capability, a Lockheed Martin executive said Friday.

"The first two production F-35s are in final assembly at Lockheed Martin's Fort Worth plant, and the training wing at Eglin is primed to receive them and get their pilots in the seats," said Steve O'Bryan, Lockheed Martin vice president of F-35 Business Development and Customer Engagement. "The Air Force is by far the biggest F-35 customer, and the fact that the largest and most powerful air force in the world is staking its future on the capabilities of this aircraft speaks volumes." The Air Force plans to operate 1,763 F-35As, which along with the F-22, ultimately will replace all of the Air Force's current fighter fleet.

"The F-35 will be flown by the U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps, as well as our closest allies. This means that the USAF and the rest of the world's great air forces will be flying the F-35 together in the future," O'Bryan said. "The F-35 provides 'best value' in a package that not only deters hostilities but enhances interoperability."

Speaking Friday at the Air Force Association's Air Warfare Symposium at the Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel, O'Bryan pointed to the pillars of the F-35 program - affordability, survivability, lethality and supportability - and highlighted the F-35's value proposition. "As a 5th generation fighter, the F-35 is redefining the term 'multirole fighter' combining unprecedented situational awareness, net-enabled systems, sensor fusion, advanced sustainment, stealth and fighter performance in an affordable and supportable package."

With more than 150 test flights completed, all systems operating in F-35 aircraft, other surrogate test aircraft and laboratories, and 35 aircraft in assembly, the program is demonstrating steady progress toward meeting its commitments to the U.S. Air Force. Last November, AF-1, the first optimized conventional takeoff and landing variant (CTOL) aircraft, celebrated its initial flight, piloted by Lockheed Martin test pilot David "Doc" Nelson.

Of particular interest to the Air Force, the CTOL variant establishes new levels of operational availability. With simplicity and ease of maintenance designed in, the aircraft has unprecedented reliability and maintainability requirements, along with a reduced deployment footprint. The F-35A will provide unequalled multi-mission capability with a fraction of the support required by legacy fighters.

The F-35 Lightning II is a 5th generation fighter, combining advanced stealth with fighter speed and agility, fully fused sensor information, network-enabled operations, and lower operational and support costs. Lockheed Martin is developing the F-35 with its principal industrial partners, Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin is a global security company that 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 2009 sales of \$45.2 billion.

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