



F-35 Lightning II Program

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F-35 Lightning II Testing Begins on USS America

PACIFIC OCEAN (NNS) -- Five Lockheed Martin F-35B Lightning II aircraft landed on the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) on Friday, October 28.

America will embark seven F-35Bs -- two are scheduled to begin the third shipboard phase of developmental test (DT-III) and five are scheduled to conduct operational testing.

America, the first ship of its class, is an aviation-centric platform that incorporates key design elements to accommodate the fifth-generation fighter.

The ship's design features several aviation capabilities enhanced beyond previous amphibious assault ships which include an enlarged hangar deck, realignment and expansion of the aviation maintenance facilities, a significant increase in available stowage of parts and equipment, as well as increased aviation fuel capacity.

America is capable of accommodating F-35Bs, MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, and a complement of Navy and Marine Corps helicopters.

The third test phase will evaluate F-35B Short Take-off Vertical Landing (STOVL) operations in a high-sea state, shipboard landings, and night operations. The cadre of flight test pilots, engineers, maintainers, and support personnel from the F-35 Patuxent River Integrated Test Force (ITF) are assigned to Air Test & Evaluation Squadron (VX) 23 at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland.

"It's exciting to start the execution phase of our detachment with VMX-1 (Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron 1) on USS America," said Lt. Col. Tom "Sally" Fields, F-35 Patuxent River ITF Government Flight Test director assigned to VX-23. "During the next three weeks, we will be completing critical flight test for both Developmental Test (DT) and Operational Test (OT). The F-35 Pax River ITF and VX-23 will be conducting DT work that will establish the boundaries of safe operation for the F-35B in the 3F configuration. VMX-1 will be conducting OT operations focused on preparing maintenance crews and pilots for the first deployment of the F-35B aboard USS Wasp (LHD 1), scheduled to start in just over a year."

The operational testing will also include simulating extensive maintenance aboard a ship, said Col. George Rowell, commanding officer of VMX-1, based at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona.

Rowell stated one of the VMX jets on board will be placed in the hangar bay, taken apart, and put together again, just to make sure everything goes well.

The maintenance work will include the replacement of a lift fan, the specialized equipment made by Rolls Royce and Pratt and Whitney that gives the F-35B variant its short take-off, "jump jet" capability, Rowell said.

The Marine Corps variant of the F-35 Lightning II reached the fleet first, with the service declaring initial operational capability July 2015.

"The F-35 Lightning II is the most versatile, agile, and technologically-advanced aircraft in the skies today, enabling our



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Corps to be the nation's force in readiness -- regardless of the threat, and regardless of the location of the battle," said Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, deputy commandant for aviation, Marine Corps. "As we modernize our fixed-wing aviation assets for the future, the continued development and fielding of the short take-off and vertical landing, the F-35B remains the centerpiece of this effort."

"The America class of amphibious assault ship design enables it to carry a larger and more diverse complement of aircraft, including the tiltrotor MV-22 Osprey, the new F-35 Lightning II, and a mix of cargo and assault helicopters," added Davis. "America is able to support a wide spectrum of military operations and missions, including putting Marines ashore for combat operations, launching air strikes, keeping sea lanes free and open for the movement of global commerce, and delivering humanitarian aid following a natural disaster."