



F-35 Lightning II Program

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F - 35 B MARINE CORPS MAJOR SELECTED AS TEST PILOT OF YEAR

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The test pilot responsible for leading the planning effort for the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter’s initial sea trials in October received accolades for his leadership during a ceremony here Feb. 16.

The John H. Glenn squadron of the Marine Corps Aviation Association (MCAA) selected Marine Corps Maj. Richard Rusnok as test pilot of the year for his role in the successful embarkation and deployment of more than 250 people and 140,000 pounds of supplies and equipment with two F-35B test aircraft on USS Wasp (LHD 1).

“Major Rusnok was the focal point for an extremely complex event, and the amount of coordination, thought and planning he put into it was enormous,” said Navy Capt. Erik Etz, military director of test and evaluation for F-35 naval variants. “Initial sea trials were a resounding success, and his award is well deserved.”



NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, Patuxent River, Md. -- U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Richard Rusnok in the cockpit of an F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Rusnok was honored Feb. 16 for his work in preparing for sea trials on USS Wasp (LHD 1) in Oct. 2011. (Photo courtesy Lockheed Martin)

“It’s every naval test pilot’s dream to be involved with initial ship trials,” Pittston, Pa., native Rusnok said. “It’s such a rare occurrence – a once-in-a-generation opportunity – for us to take a new aircraft to sea.”

Rusnok, an operational test liaison, spent almost a year planning the trials.

“It was an incredible opportunity for me to see the plan evolve over time,” Rusnok said. “It sounds trite, but nothing I did was noteworthy. I had a lot of support and the virtually unlimited resources of a talented team.”

Rusnok was also one of four test pilots hand-selected to demonstrate the Marines’ amphibious air power with the first short takeoffs and vertical landings on the Wasp.

“It was really satisfying to see the payoff of all the hard work we did, like the Field Carrier Landing Practices with the Wasp crew,” Rusnok said. “Flying at sea felt like coming home again.”

“I was surprised and happy to be selected,” Rusnok said. “However, this award probably ruins some of my tactical street cred with the fleet,” he joked.

This year, Rusnok will transition to Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., where operational testing on the F-35B will commence.

Rusnok was among three Marines honored at the squadron’s 7th Annual Acquisition Awards Banquet. As Test Pilot of the Year, he will be considered for the national Commandant of the

Marine Corps' Award for Acquisition Excellence, to be announced by the national MCAA organization in May.

The F-35B is the Marine variant of the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft. It is capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings for use on amphibious ships or expeditionary airfields to provide air power to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force. Initial ship trials for the F-35B began Oct. 3 on USS Wasp (LHD 1). The F-35B is undergoing test and evaluation at NAS Patuxent River prior to delivery to the fleet.

