



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2012 03 28

SECAF VISITS EDWARDS F-35 INTEGRATED TEST FORCE

EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. -- “You continue to make history - literally every day - with the work you do here.” These words of affirmation were given by Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley during his visit to the Edwards F-35 Integrated Test Force March 28 at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

Donley, who was at Edwards March 26-28 to meet with Airmen and base officials, had the opportunity see the ITF in action and learn about the unit’s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter testing activities.

The ITF mission is to plan and execute the flight test portion of the Joint Strike Fighter verification and testing effort. The organization is currently comprised of approximately 800 contractors, active-duty military, government civilians and representatives from the F-35’s eight partnering countries.

“You’re always finding ways to push the limits with new technologies,” Donley told the ITF team. “You make sure our pilots operating these systems not only have the maximum capabilities available, but you also make sure our Airmen are safe in the operation of this advanced equipment.”

During his visit, the secretary asked Lt. Col. George Schwartz, 461st Flight Test Squadron commander, for his views on flying the Joint Strike Fighter. The pilot told Donley that “the handling qualities of the aircraft are simply outstanding...it’s very easy to fly.”

While the ITF currently has six F-35 aircraft assigned for developmental testing, the first of 29 operational F-35 aircraft to be assigned to the Edwards operational test facility are due to begin arriving this summer. As a result, in support of increased operations on base, the number of ITF personnel is expected to climb to 1,700 by 2015.

While the ITF has a lot to anticipate in the near future, the unit is proud of their flight test accomplishments to date, according to officials there.

“We had a really big year last year, completing 468 sorties, while we had only planned to do 422,” said Schwartz. As a result, the unit intends to increase its sortie goals for 2012 by 20



Lt. Col. George Schwartz, Commander of the 461st Flight Test Squadron at Edwards AFB, gives a tour of AF-2 to the Honorable Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley (brown coat). (Photo by Paul Weatherman, Lockheed Martin)



Lt. Col. George Schwartz, Commander of the 461st Flight Test Squadron at Edwards AFB, gives a tour of AF-2 to the Honorable Secretary of the Air Force Michael B. Donley (brown coat). (Photo by Paul Weatherman, Lockheed Martin)

percent and is currently on track to execute more than seven sorties each month on all of its aircraft.

“What many people don’t realize is that we deliver almost 100 percent of mission systems capabilities to the Air Force, Marines, Navy, and all of our international partners,” said Schwartz. “Almost all the mission systems developmental testing is being done here, as well as the flight sciences work for the (conventional take-off and landing) aircraft, so we have a big responsibility.”

Additionally, the ITF completed maturity flying for the training center at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., enabling that base to start its F-35 operations recently. Schwartz said this accomplishment was a true testament to the work done at Edwards, which helped to verify the system was safe to operate.

“A critical part of our testing is to identify issues ahead of time so that the aircraft is ready for operations,” added Mike Glass, Lockheed Martin’s site director at Edwards. “Challenges are an important part of our process, and the reality is that a lot of what we do can’t be learned in a laboratory environment.”

The importance of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program to U.S. defense strategy was recently reaffirmed by senior Defense Department leaders. During testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee March 20, Secretary Donley told the committee that the Air Force remains fully committed to the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which he said represents the future of the fighter force.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta echoed this view at a news conference March 27 following a meeting with Mexican and Canadian defense leaders in Ottawa, Canada.

"As part of the defense strategy that the United States went through and has put in place, we have made very clear that we are 100 percent committed to the development of the F-35," he said. "It's a fifth-generation fighter, [and] we absolutely need it for the future."

###