



F-35 Lightning II Program

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NAVY TEST PILOT KNOWS HIS ABCS

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – In the alphabet soup of military acronyms and abbreviations, it can be difficult to keep the ABCs straight.

Despite the alphabetical hurdles, one Navy test pilot used his ABC knowledge to write a new chapter in flight test history.

On March 23, Lt. Christopher Tabert completed the government acceptance flight for AF-14, a production-level F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) for the U.S. Air Force.

In doing so, he became the only military test pilot to fly the A, B and C versions of the F-35, said Marine Corps Col. Art Tomassetti, vice commander of the 33rd Fighter Wing, Air Education and Training Command at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

“I didn’t really have time to reflect on that,” Tabert said of the distinction. “We were busy trying to get the test completed. I was just lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and was glad to help out the team.”

The three versions of the F-35 include the U.S. Air Force F-35A, the U.S. Marine Corps F-35B short takeoff and vertical-landing model, and the U.S. Navy F-35C carrier variant.

“The ability for a pilot to move seamlessly across the F-35 variants really puts the ‘Joint’ in JSF,” Tomassetti said. “We’ll be able to leverage the capability in training and in future joint operations.”

For Tabert, the differences between the models are slight.

“The flying qualities of the A felt a lot like the B and C,” Tabert said. “You really can’t tell much of a difference between the three from the cockpit.”

Even though Tabert started testing the F-35 only nine months ago, he already has a number of milestones on the aircraft under his belt: the first steam catapult launch; the first weapons pit drop for an inert 1,000 pound GBU-32 GPS-guided bomb; a supersonic flight; and the first launch from the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launching System.

The F-35B and F-35C naval variants of the Joint Strike Fighter are undergoing test and evaluation at NAS Patuxent River prior to delivery to the fleet. The 33rd Fighter Wing will provide initial fleet training on the F-35.



Navy Lt. Christopher Tabert on March 23 completed the government acceptance flight for AF-14, a production-level F-35A Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter for the U.S. Air Force. In doing so, a Marine Corps official said he became the only military test pilot to fly the A, B and C versions of the F-35: the U.S. Air Force F-35A, the U.S. Marine Corps F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing model, and the U.S. Navy F-35C carrier variant. (Photo courtesy Lockheed Martin)