



# F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2013 03 21

## CORPS' FIRST OPERATIONAL F-35B CONDUCTS FIRST VERTICAL LANDING

**MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, ARIZ.** -- Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 watched in amazement and satisfaction as the Corps' first operational F-35B Lightning II squadron conducted its first Short Take Off, Vertical Landing operations aboard Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz. March 21, 2013.

Maj. Richard Rusnok, an F-35B Lightning II test pilot, conducted VMFA-121's first short landing and takeoff as well as the Corps' first F-35B hover and vertical landing outside of a testing environment in BF-19. VMFA-121 is the first F-35B squadron to join Marine Aircraft Group 13 which is currently composed of four AV-8B Harrier squadrons a Marine wing support squadron and a Marine aviation logistics squadron. Rusnok was accompanied by VMFA-121's commanding officer, LtCol. Jeffrey Scott, flying a second F-35B as a chase aircraft.

"The first STOVL flight for an F-35B outside of the test environment was another milestone achieved by the Marine Corps and the Green Knights today here at MCAS Yuma," stated Scott. "The F-35 program and specifically the F-35B have made significant progress to make this possible."

As the squadron expands its operations and end strength, they will continue revolutionizing expeditionary Marine air-ground combat power in all threat environments through the use of MCAS Yuma training ranges in Arizona and California. VMFA-121 will be home to approximately 300 Marines and is expected to receive additional F-35s throughout the next 8 to 12 months, with a total of 16 aircraft scheduled to arrive by late 2013.

Differently from previous fixed wing capabilities across the Department of Defense, the integration of U.S. Air Force, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps and coalition F-35 Lightning II aircraft on a common platform will provide the dominant, multi-role, fifth generation capabilities needed across the full spectrum of combat operations to deter potential adversaries and enable future aviation power projection. Specific to the Marine Corps, consolidating three aircraft, the AV-8B Harrier, the F/A-18 Hornet and the EA-6B, into one is central to maintaining tactical aviation affordability and serving as good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

VMFA-121 will continue to set the pace for the F-35 program based on a common platform. The U.S. Air Force and Navy can now integrate best practices from VMFA-121 in preparation for the future operational basing of the F-35A and F-35C.



1. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, Marine Aircraft Group 13, Third Marine Aircraft Wing conducted its first operational F-35B Lightning II short take off and vertical landing at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., Mar. 21, 2013. VMFA-121 is the Marine Corps' first operational F-35B squadron which is currently building its operational capabilities to include 16 total aircraft and up to 300 personnel. (photo by U.S. Marine SSgt. Jessica Smith, Combat Correspondent)

2. An F-35B Lightning II from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, Marine Aircraft Group 13, Third Marine Aircraft Wing conducts a vertical landing on the Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz. flightline Mar. 21, 2013. BF-19, piloted by Maj. Richard Rusnok, an F-35B test pilot, marked an important milestone in the evolution of the aircraft conducting the first short take off, vertical landing training operation outside of a testing environment. (photo by U.S. Marine SSgt. Jessica Smith, Combat Correspondent)