F-35 Lightning II Program

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F-35B LIGHTNING II: FROM THE DECKPLATE OF USS WASP

An F-35B Lightning II aircraft lands on the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1) during the second at-sea F-35 developmental test event.

USS Wasp (LHD 1) Sailors are supporting testing and validation of the F-35B Lightning II until Aug. 30. In this blog, the ship's commanding officer, Capt. Brian Teets, explains how Wasp has prepared for the testing.

For 24 years, USS Wasp (LHD 1) has been honored to be the first in class. Now, we are honored to be the first warship to support F-35 Lightning II (Joint Strike Fighter) operations.

Since Wasp's designation as the F-35B LHD test platform, she has undergone a series of alterations and training evolutions to support hosting both the first and second underway phases of developmental testing; Development Testing I in October 2011 and now, Development Testing II in August 2013.

During Development Testing II, the F-35B Integrated Test Force is focused on expanding integration of the F-35B with large deck amphibious ships. This testing provides the baseline for the aircraft's operational test in 2015. In preparation for Development Testing II, Wasp has been modified with special and unique infrastructure to accommodate test equipment, some deck-edge equipment has been moved, and accommodations for monitoring performance and environmental factors were added.

For example, we modified deck markings and lights to include the tramline and short take-off cue, we installed new materials to support thermal loading, and brought aboard temporary facilities to handle charging and storage of Lithium-Ion batteries. In some cases, the modifications not only accommodated F-35B but solved legacy ship-aircraft integration issues associated with the MV-22. For example, the new non-skid solution used for the F-35B is now an option for addressing MV-22 deck heating in operations and maintenance areas. That could be a big win for reducing maintenance time and keeping ships at sea.

In addition to making strides in aircraft-ship integration, the Navy-Marine Corps partnership is strengthened by the F-35B's capabilities, which expand the expeditionary naval force's ability to deliver Marine fire power to their targets, on time, with significant combat capability improvements and information sharing across the battle space. Further, the short takeoff/vertical landing capability of F-35B provides forward-deployed combatant commanders with more flexible basing options. In particular, when this aircraft deploys from LHDs – and soon, America class LHAs — squadrons will be able to reach targets inaccessible from shore-based runways.

In addition to the structural and testing alterations, Wasp's crew received specific training to support F-35B testing and operations. Our flight deck crew attended F-35 training at Naval Air Station Patuxent River to become more familiar with features and operating criteria unique to the aircraft.

The F-35B adds to a substantial list of aircraft Wasp's crew is trained to operate. In just the past year, we have landed and launched a variety of aircraft from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard in support of exercises, services and operations. Over the past two weeks, we've expanded our proficiency with the F-35B through on-the-job training and testing, working hand-in-hand with the Marine Corps, the embarked F-35B Integrated Test Force, Naval Sea Systems Command, Naval Air Systems Command and Lockheed Martin. The successful training, planning and integration to effectively conduct at-sea testing has truly been a team effort.

The Sailors aboard USS Wasp are extremely humbled to take part in this historical contribution. The crew's dedication, sweat, and hard work keep this ship alive and ready to fight. It is the crew that determines the success or failure of the ship across the full spectrum of operations in times of peace or combat. During DT-II, they have enabled success at every turn.

We are Wasp.