



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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by Richard W. Essary  
75th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

**HILL AIR FORCE BASE, Utah** -- Lt. Gen. Chris Bogdan, who heads the Pentagon's F-35 program office, visited Hill Air Force Base Jan. 21 to discuss the weapon system with senior leaders and to see firsthand the installation's F-35 depot maintenance operations that began in Sept. 2013.

During his visit, Bogdan gave an interview to the 75th Air Base Wing public affairs office and discussed the need for a new fifth generation weapon system; what it brings to the table in terms of national security, how the airplane impacts the viability of the installation and the communities surrounding it, and how he is working to address criticism of the F-35 program.

### *Formidable weapon system*

In order to understand what the fifth generation F-35 fighter brings to the table for our nation and our allies, Bogdan said people need to first understand what the term "fifth generation" really means.

In short, he said it means the F-35 can go places where other airplanes today simply cannot go safely.

"The F-35 will be able to shoot things down before the enemy ever knows it's there; making it a very formidable weapon system," Bogdan said.

It has stealth capability, or the ability to avoid being detected; it has high-tech sensors, giving the pilot 360 degree awareness of the battlefield; and the ability to communicate and share information to other battlefield systems and platforms.

"When you put those three things together -- the stealth, the unprecedented sensors and situational awareness and (the F-35's) ability to connect in the network to other airplanes and platforms and people to make them smarter -- you have a pretty darn good weapon system," Bogdan said. "Take all of that and now give that capability to our allies so they're fighting and flying right alongside us and you have a really, really powerful weapon system."

Currently, the program of record is to build more than 3,000 F-35s, with 2,443 of those airplanes being generated between the Air Force, Navy and Marines.

With the last of the F-35s projected to come off the production line sometime in the 2050s, the program has a time horizon approaching 50 years.

The longevity of the program will impact Hill Air Force Base and northern Utah, which is home to a major depot for the F-35 and an operational wing of up to 72 aircraft.

### *Not without criticism*

Since the beginning, the F-35 has received a fair amount of criticism concerning program delays and cost overruns, both of which have delayed delivery of the weapon system to the warfighter.

However, Bogdan pulled no punches when he discussed the program's history.

"Let's clearly, unequivocally say this airplane has had a tragic past and I do not disagree that we have spent a lot of money on this airplane," he said. "It wasn't a good past."



Lt. Gen. Christopher C. Bogdan, Joint Program Executive Officer for the F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office, discusses F-35 depot maintenance with Ogden Air Logistics Complex senior leaders. Bogdan visited Hill Air Force Base Jan. 21 to see the F-35 depot maintenance process firsthand. (U.S. Air Force photo by Alex R. Lloyd)

For people who claim the F-35 is a waste of money, Bogdan said he can't change the past or where the program has been; he can only change where it's going.

Accordingly, he said his number-one priority on the program has been and continues to be "... to reduce the cost of buying the airplane and reduce the cost of sustaining and maintaining the airplane."

To that end, Bogdan said the F-35 program was overhauled in 2010 in terms of cost, in terms of schedule and in terms of the risk.

He is also focused on developing a new culture within the F-35 community and the way it conducts its business -- specifically as it relates to integrity, transparency, accountability and discipline within the F-35 program office and all of its decision makers.

"My team needs a level of attention to detail that goes beyond the norm, because the program is so big and complicated that if you don't get into the details and you don't understand how to connect all the dots on the program and do those things with discipline, it can easily -- once again -- get out of control.

"And we don't want that to happen," Bogdan said.

The general said program stakeholders should look at the program and how it's working now instead of looking in the rearview mirror and judging it on its past performance.

#### *Sound of freedom*

Aside from program delays and cost, also drawing criticism is the noise the F-35 is capable of producing.

It should go without saying; all airplanes are noisy Bogdan said.

"When you're on the ground with this airplane it's similar to other high performance airplanes," Bogdan said. "If I put a blindfold on you and I taxied an F-15 past you, and I taxied an F-18 past you and I taxied an F-35 past you, you couldn't tell a difference."

However, it could be a different story when the F-35 is airborne.

"When the F-35 is flying, there are some altitudes and airspeeds where you wouldn't be able to tell and there are some altitudes and airspeeds on the F-35 where you would be able to tell and you would say, well that's louder," Bogdan said.

He said understanding that noise level and working to ensure that both the community and the air base have a win-win situation is important.

"We've done that with many bases in the past to ensure both the community and the base can exist harmoniously," Bogdan said. "It's not going to be any different with the F-35."

#### *Here to stay*

Even with all the criticism, there is ample reason to explain why DoD is resolved to buy the F-35.

First and foremost, there's a dire need to replace an already costly and aging fleet of fighters across the services with a new weapon system.

Today the U.S. Air Force's fighter fleet is about 24 years old on average, Bogdan said. The Navy's is a little younger than that, but still, there's a need.

He said eventually those airplanes are going to get too old and it's going to cost a lot of money to keep them flying.

Additionally, they're not going to be able to keep up with the changing threat.

The general noted the last time a U.S. soldier was killed by an enemy aircraft was during the Korean War.

"That kind of air superiority doesn't happen by accident; you have to invest in the technology and the training to be that good," he said. "The F-35 is just the next step for DoD to continue to honor the promise that we're going to try and keep all of our Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen safe."

Looking to the future, the general said he's confident the F-35 will be ready for prime time when it's delivered to the services -- including Hill Air Force Base -- and F-35 "initial operational capability" will be declared within the planned 2015-2016 timeline.