



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## FIRST USMC STUDENT SELECTED TO FLY F-35B EARNS HIS WINGS

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KINGSVILLE, Texas – Marine Corps 1st Lt. Taylor Zehrung, from Seattle, a Student Naval Aviator with Training Squadron (VT) 22 located at Naval Air Station Kingsville, Texas, earned his Wings of Gold October 23, 2015, becoming the first jet pipeline aviator to be selected to train and fly the new F-35B Lightning II.

Lt. Col. Robert George, Commanding Officer of VT 22 said, “1st Lt. Zehrung will be the first CAT I pilot selected to fly the F-35B. This is a big step towards the transition of sustaining a long term F-35B fleet.”

In 2008, the first six pilots to fly the F-35B operationally were chosen by the Marine Corps. All six were former weapons school graduates and most were weapons school instructors at Weapons and Tactics Instructor course or at Top Gun. In the last few years, the Marine Corps selected more junior pilots to transition to the F-35B to balance out the experience in the F-35B ready rooms. Until today, all current F-35 pilots are experienced Marines selected from operational units flying other fleet aircraft (F/A-18, AV-8B, EA-6B).

“1st Lt. Zehrung will be the first to go directly from flight school to the F-35B Fleet Replacement Squadron,” said George “His training will start at MCAS Beaufort, SC flying with the “War Lords” of Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 (VMFAT-501). He was chosen from a very competitive group of peers in large part due to his impeccable officer-like qualities to include professionalism, integrity, and sound judgment. He did a phenomenal job as a student aviator and his grades were exceptionally high earning him the distinction of being on the Commodore’s list. We’re very proud of him and are excited to be a part of this significant milestone for 1st Lt. Zehrung and the Marine Corps.”

When 1st Lt. Zehrung was asked how he felt being the first student selected to fly the F-35B, he said, “I feel very honored and proud. It is very exciting and exhilarating, and I truly am looking forward to the future. I know that the program is going to require a lot from me, but I am ready to give 100 percent and set the bar for future student naval aviators.”

The F-35 is a single seat, multi-role fighter aircraft with the capability to perform ground attack, reconnaissance, and air defense missions. The aircraft is in full production at the Lockheed Martin plant in Fort Worth, Texas. The F-35 is designed to eventually replace the F/A-18 Hornet and AV-8B Harrier tactical fighter aircraft and was planned with a common design, but has three unique service variants: to keep development, production, and operating costs down.