



F-35 Lightning II Program

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Japanese official visits MCAS Yuma, learns firsthand of F-35B's capabilities

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION YUMA, Ariz. -- As a preamble to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 121's relocation to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, the squadron welcomed Yoshihiko Fukuda, mayor of Iwakuni, Japan, aboard Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, Oct. 24.

Col. Marcus Annibale, commanding officer of Marine Air Group (MAG) 13, and Lt. Col. J.T. Bardo, commanding officer of VMFA-121, greeted Fukuda upon his arrival to the air station.

"We're hosting the mayor of Iwakuni and introducing him to the F-35B here in Yuma and prepping him for what he can expect when the squadron moves to Japan," said Annibale.

During his visit, Fukuda established relationships with VMFA-121's leadership, observed the F-35B Lightning II's operational capabilities and expanded his knowledge of the aircraft.

"The government of Japan already briefed me about the deployment plan," said Fukuda. "However, I would rather have real information based on firsthand experience rather than the information given over the tabletop ... I wanted to confirm by being on site."

While MCAS Iwakuni already houses aircraft, VMFA-121 will be the first F-35 squadron to be permanently based in Japan.

According to Bardo, Marines with VMFA-121 are both excited and honored to be part of this move.

Fukuda began his visit at MCAS Yuma's flight line to observe the F-35 as it took off, performed maneuvers and conducted various landings – specifically the vertical landing, a capability of the inherent with the F-35s.

"The type of training we will be conducting will be very similar to that of the F-18 you already see in Iwakuni," said Bardo. "The opportunity to be in Japan and as one of the first units to be able to train jointly with our partner services, there is a great honor, and we are looking forward to it." Fukuda also spoke with Maj. Gen. Mark Wise, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing commanding general, and Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, deputy commandant for aviation, Headquarters Marine Corps.

"I would like to thank all the commanders, leaders and pilots that provided me the information about the F-35B's safety, how the Marine Corps would respond to the community's concerns, and also the benefits from having the most state-of-art, advanced technology and what it has to offer," said Fukuda.

"The relationship with the mayor is very crucial," said Bardo. "The town of Iwakuni is our host, we're in their country. It's very important for us to represent the Marine Corps, the squadron and our country."

The squadron is scheduled to move to MCAS Iwakuni early 2017.



Yoshihiko Fukuda, left, mayor of Iwakuni, Japan, meets with Lt. Gen. Jon Davis, deputy commandant of aviation, Oct. 24, 2016 to expand his knowledge of the aircraft before the Squadron relocates to MCAS Iwakuni next year.