

F-35B Test Jet Begins Sea Trials with Japanese Destroyer in Eastern Pacific



An F-35B Lightning II lands aboard JS Kaga (DDH-184) off the southern coast of California to begin developmental testing. (Darin Russell)

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From Michael Land

PACIFIC OCEAN – A U.S. F-35 Lightning II aircraft landed aboard Japan's Izumo-class multi-functional destroyer JS Kaga (DDH-184) for the first time Oct. 20 off the southern coast of California to begin developmental test aboard the allies' largest ship.

A test pilot flew a specially instrumented F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) variant of the 5th generation air

system and touched down about 3:15 p.m.

Sea trials will leverage the ship's recent modifications to conduct fixed-wing aircraft operations. Changes to the Kaga included painting its flight deck with heat-resistant material that tolerates the F-35B's vectored-thrust engines, installing lights for nighttime operations, and reshaping the flight deck's bow from a trapezoid to a rectangular shape.

The trials will also pave the way for allies' increased ability to operate in conjunction with each other.

"This test is essential for strengthening Japan's defense capabilities and is of utmost importance. We will do our best to achieve good test results together with the ITF," said Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Capt. Shusaku Takeuchi, commanding officer, JS Kaga. "This test does not merely enhance the capabilities of the Maritime Self-Defense Force. It also improves the interoperability between Japan and the U.S., strengthening the deterrence and response capabilities of the Japan-U.S. alliance, thereby contributing to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

The F-35 is detached from Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Two Three (VX-23), Naval Air Station Patuxent River (NAS Pax River), Maryland. It joins a test team from the F-35 Pax River Integrated Test Force (Pax ITF), who embarked the ship in San Diego.

In addition to F-35 test pilots, the Pax ITF team includes aircraft maintainers, flight test engineers, flight test control engineers, flight deck personnel, logisticians, and others, with support from the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.

"We are proud to be part of this joint effort to test the compatibility of F-35B aboard JS Kaga," said Seth Dion, Pax ITF team lead. "Our team has prepared meticulously for this

mission, and we are committed to working closely with our allies to achieve our shared goals and strengthen our partnership.”

The sea trials are scheduled to take approximately three weeks.

JS Kaga set sail from its homeport at Kure Naval Base, Japan, in early September.