F-35C Lightning II Fighter Achieves Initial Operational Capability



SAN DIEGO – The F-35C Lightning II, the aircraft carrier variant of the Joint Strike Fighter, has met all requirements and has achieved Initial Operational Capability (IOC), the commander of Naval Air Forces and the deputy commandant of the Marine Corps for aviation announced Feb. 28 in a joint statement.

The announcement comes shortly after the Navy's first F-35C squadron, Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 147, completed aircraft carrier qualifications aboard USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) and received safe-for-flight operations certification.

To declare IOC, the first operational squadron must be properly manned, trained and equipped to conduct assigned missions in support of fleet operations. This includes having 10 Block 3F, F-35C aircraft, requisite spare parts, support equipment, tools, technical publications, training programs and a functional Autonomic Logistic Information System (ALIS).

Additionally, the ship that supports the first squadron must possess the proper infrastructure, qualifications and certifications. Lastly, the Joint Program Office, industry, and Naval Aviation must demonstrate that all procedures, processes and policies are in place to sustain operations.

"The F-35C is ready for operations, ready for combat and ready to win," Commander Naval Air Forces Vice Adm. DeWolfe Miller said. "We are adding an incredible weapon system into the arsenal of our carrier strike groups that significantly enhances the capability of the joint force."

Naval Air Station Lemoore is the home-base for the Navy's JSF wing, Navy F-35C fleet squadrons and the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS), VFA-125, that trains Navy and Marine Corps carrier-based JSF pilots.

To accommodate the F-35C program at NAS Lemoore, several facilities were built or remodeled to facilitate F-35C maintenance and training requirements, including a pilot fit facility, a centralized engine repair facility, a pilot training center and a newly remodeled hangar. Future projects are planned as additional Navy squadrons transition into the F-35C. The Marine Corps plans to transition four F-35C squadrons that will be assigned to carrier air wings for deployments.

"We're very proud of what our sailors have accomplished in the Joint Strike Fighter community," said Capt. Max McCoy, commodore of the Navy's JSF Wing. "Their commitment to mission delivered fifth-generation capability to the carrier air wing, making us more combat effective than ever before. We will continue to learn and improve ways to maintain and sustain F-35C as we prepare for first deployment."

Meanwhile, Rear Adm. Dale Horan, director of the Navy's F-35C Fleet Integration Office, said, "The F-35C will revolutionize capability and operating concepts of aircraft carrier-based naval aviation using advanced technologies to find, fix and assess threats and, if necessary, track, target and engage them in all contested environments."

The F-35C's stealth technology, state-of-the-art avionics, advanced sensors, weapons capacity and range provides unprecedented air superiority, interdiction, suppression of enemy air defenses and close-air support as well as advanced command and control functions through fused sensors, according to the joint Feb. 28 statement.