Winter: F-35 Test Flight This Week Will Wrap Up SDD Flight Tests

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The joint program manager for the F-35 joint strike fighter said the last test flight of the aircraft's system design and development (SDD) program is imminent.

Speaking April 11 to an audience at the Sea-Air-Space Exposition, Vice Adm. Mat Winter said, "the last SDD test flight event will occur this week, maybe even today."

Winter said the SDD program has accrued 9,000 flight and 67,000 test points. So far, 82 percent of the specification verification has been completed, with 100 percent completion scheduled by the end of the year.

Winter also said the program has "started some of the pre-IOT&E [initial operational test and evaluation]," with formal operational test scheduled for the fall.

Full-rate production, scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2019, will formally mark the end of SDD.

So far, the program has delivered 280 F-35s of all types out of a planned total of 3,220 aircraft for all nations involved in the program. All aircraft rolling off the line now are equipped with the Block 3F software, which brings all combat capability developed in the SDD program. The first post-3F software will be delivered in June, Winter said.

The Navy eventually will procure 353 F-35Cs and the Marine Corps will procure 273 F-35Bs and 67 F-35Cs.

The Marine Corps F-35B deployed with a detachment of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 121 on board the USS Wasp last

month, and the USS Essex will take on board a detachment from VMFA-211 this summer for deployment. VMFA-211's F-35Bs will mark the first deployment of the 3F software. The USS America and the USS Makin Island will be the next amphibious assault ships to operate the F-35B.

The Navy's first operational fleet squadron, Strike Fighter Squadron 147 (VFA-147) is in F-35C training and is scheduled to become safe for flight in October, the same month it will conduct its carrier qualifications. The squadron is scheduled to deploy on board USS Carl Vinson.

The USS Abraham Lincoln will be the second carrier to deploy with the F-35C. This ship also will host the F-35C's at-sea IOT&E in August with Carrier Air Wing Seven.

By the end of 2024, the F-35 is scheduled to be operational on eight amphibious assault ships and four aircraft carriers.

Winter said the prices for Lot 10 F-35s, being delivered in 2018, are: F-35A, $94.3 million; F-35B, $122.4 million; and F-35C, $121.2 million.

He said that for Lots 14/15, "all three will be under $100 million."

The current production rate for the F-35 is seven to nine per month. The goal for full-rate production is 12 to 15 per month.