



F-35 Lightning II Program

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PILOT CALLS F-35 'BIG LEAP' IN FIGHTER CAPABILITY

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American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON- The F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter jet will be a strategic deterrent for the nation because of its "huge leap in capability," a Marine Corps pilot said.

Lt. Col. Jeffrey Scott, commander of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing's Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz., recently told the Pentagon Channel the F-35 will allow Marines to perform missions in high-threat areas, unlike existing aircraft.

The F-35 will be able to do every mission now performed by the AV-8 Harrier does now, but will be able to do it in more situations, said Scott, who is involved with flying and testing the new aircraft. The new fighter will provide access to more areas, he explained, and will allow more time for rolling back enemy defenses.

The Defense Department and Lockheed Martin reached an agreement in principle last week to manufacture 32 F-35s in the Pentagon's largest weapons program. Lockheed Martin will produce 22 F-35A conventional takeoff and landing variants for the Air Force, three F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing variants for the Marine Corps, and seven F-35C carrier variants for the Navy.

Scott said flying the F-35 is an easy transition from the Harrier, and that it did exceptionally well, during a recent trial at sea.

"The sensors and systems are the big leap deploying the aircraft in terms of tactics," he said.

"The Lightning will fulfill a lot of the functions of Marine Corps aviation -- such as [our] air support role, anti-air, targeting enemy ground locations and supporting the troops on the ground -- as Harriers and [F/A-18] Hornets do now," he added. "But it brings more in one aircraft in its ability to protect itself from the enemy."

Scott said the F-35 will give the military "a huge leap in capability, probably five or six steps beyond what we now have."

"We're going to have this aircraft for a long time," he said. "As we get more and more of these aircraft in all of the services, we're going to see a lot of the benefits that the aircraft has in terms of commonality. As we start operating tactically, some of the communications [and] capabilities will become more and more valuable to the services, ... and it will be in demand to combatant commanders around the world."