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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES SUBCOMMITTEE

STATEMENT

OF

LIEUTENANT GENERAL JON DAVIS

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
DEPUTY COMMANDANT FOR AVIATION

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES

ON

F-35 LIGHTNING II PROGRAM

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Lieutenant General Jon Davis
Deputy Commandant for Aviation

Lieutenant General Jon M. Davis Lieutenant General Jon M. Davis assumed his current position as the Deputy Commandant for Aviation, Headquarters Marine Corps in July 2014.

Commissioned in May 1980 through the PLC Program, received his wings in September of 1982, and was selected to fly the AV-8A Harrier. He served in VMA-231, as an Airframes Division Officer and Instructor in VMAT-203, as WTI and Operations Officer in VMA-223, as a RAF exchange pilot with 3(F) squadron in Gutersloh Germany, AND as a MAWTS-1 instructor in Yuma, AZ. From 1998 to 2000, he commanded VMA-223. After completing the Executive Helicopter Familiarization Course at HT-18 in Pensacola, he served as Executive Officer and then Commanding Officer of MAWTS-1 from 2003 to 2006. From 2006 to 2008, he served as the Deputy Commander Joint Functional Component Command -- Network Warfare at Fort Meade, Maryland. He commanded the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing from July 2010 to May 2012. From May 2012 to June 2014, he served as the Deputy Commander, United States Cyber Command.

His staff billets include the 31st Commandant's Staff Group, the Junior Military Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Assistant Operations Officer, then Officer in Charge of the 3d Marine Aircraft Wing Red Team in Iraq. He served as the Deputy Assistant Commandant for Aviation from 2008 to 2010.

In the course of his career he has flown over 4,500 mishap free hours in primarily the AV-8, but also in the F-5, FA-18, and every type model series tilt-rotor, rotary winged and air-refueler in the USMC inventory plus general and experimental aviation aircraft.

LtGen Davis graduated with honors from The Basic School and was a Distinguished Graduate of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He is a graduate of the Tactical Air Control Party Course, Amphibious Warfare School, Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course (WTI), The School of Advanced Warfighting (SAW), and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He holds a Bachelor of Science from Allegheny College, a Master of Science from Marine Corps University and a Master of International Public Policy from Johns Hopkins.

Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Tsongas, distinguished members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces, and other distinguished members, thank you for your continued support. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on the F-35 Lightning II Program.

I had the opportunity to meet with many of your committee staff in January to discuss the Marine Corps Aviation Plan for FY17. As I'm sure you are aware, the F-35 remains a top aviation acquisition priority for the Marine Corps; we can't get into this aircraft fast enough. Along with sustainment and digital interoperability, modernization is one of three key lines of effort facilitating our transition to a fleet of 5th Generation Marine Tactical Aircraft (TACAIR). The Marine Corps declared F-35B initial operational capability (IOC) in July of 2015, five months ahead of the December threshold date. The aircraft is currently tracking to reach its full program-of-record operational capability (Block 3F) in the fourth quarter of calendar year 2017, and the full transition from legacy to F-35 will complete with the Marine Corps' transition of our second reserve squadron in 2031.

Additionally, thanks to the support of Congress, as of January, 2017, the F-35B is now permanently stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, at MCAS Yuma, AZ with VMFA-211, and at Beaufort, SC, with VMFAT-501, which is the training squadron with USMC, RAF and Royal Navy conversion pilots and five ab initio pilots – five Marine Corps Lieutenants who came to the F-35 directly from the training command. To date, the Marine Corps has accepted 50 F-35B aircraft. Ten of those F-35Bs are now forward-deployed with VMFA-121 in Japan. VMFA-121 will have their full complement of 16 aircraft by this summer and, by the end of this year, they will fill both the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) requirement and the land-based requirements within PACOM. The Marine Corps will reach full operational capability with 16 F-35B squadrons, 4 F-35C squadrons, and 2 F-35B training or fleet replacement squadrons (FRS). It is

important to note that both the F-35Bs and F-35Cs are required to fulfill the Marine Corps' operational plan and Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) requirements.

Additional events on the horizon for the F-35 include:

- VMFA-211 supporting a West Coast MEU in the summer of 2018.
- VMFA-122 transitioning from F/A-18 to F-35B in FY18 and relocating to MAG-13.
- West coast MEUs are sourced solely with F-35B by end of FY19.
- In FY19, VMFA-314 will be the first Marine Corps squadron to transition to the F-35C.

While VMFA-121's movement was not the first time TACAIR aircraft have been re-deployed across the Pacific, it is noteworthy that for the duration of the transit, all aircraft remained operational and in an "up" status. That is not usually the case with large movements like this for a brand new aircraft. Additionally, this redeployment provided valuable lessons-learned as we move forward with the program. For instance, the northern route we took was meant to reduce the number of times the aircraft were required to plug for air-to-air refueling. We have since learned that the fuel models are overly-conservative. Our movement generated data that will be used by the JPO to increase the model's accuracy. In the end it will benefit all three variants of the F-35 to be leveraged by the Marine Corps, Air Force and Navy.

From the operator's perspective the F-35's performance is unmatched. Joint Strike Fighters have participated in exercises such as Red Flag, Agile Lightning and our Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course or WTI. At Red Flag, the Marine F-35Bs were called game changing and decisive by Gen Goldfien – the USAF Chief of Staff. We have operated the aircraft from austere sites, like the 29 Palms Strategic Expeditionary Landing Field. We have also conducted shipboard flights aboard L-Class amphibious ships – to include deploying 12 F-35Bs to the USS AMERICA in a Lightning Carrier Demonstration of

capability. Throughout these large-scale tactical exercises and regardless of the location, the aircraft has proven its worth across all assigned mission sets.

The feedback we've received from Red Flag instructors is that, "The F-35B is doing things they have never seen accomplished at Red Flag." At WTI, the contributions of the F-35 immeasurably enhanced the effectiveness of the Marine Air Ground Task Force, most notably through increased lethality and battlespace awareness. As a result, we have recently seen an increased demand for F-35 participation in our legacy fighter exercises because the 5th generation capabilities that the Joint Strike Fighter brings to the mission increase the synergy, awareness, lethality and survivability of the entire force. To be honest with you – nobody wants to fight us now that we've got the F-35.

But the truly impressive feedback comes from our FRS where we have just begun training our initial accession pilots. The unanimous view of my FRS flight instructors is that these pilots, flying a tactical aircraft for the first time in their careers, are performing at or above the level of my legacy pilots who are two to three years into their first fleet tour. This increased capability can be directly attributed to the optimized systems of the F-35.

I offer those examples and anecdotes as evidence of not only the aircraft's contribution to the MAGTF, but also our pilots' ability to optimize this weapons system based on its capabilities. This jet is incredibly capable in its 5th generation day one configuration – but is unique in that we can install pylons on the bird and transition from a stealth strike fighter – to a 5th generation bomb truck – delivering up to 14,000 pounds of ordnance on the F-35B (3000 pounds more than my legacy Hornets) and 18,000 pounds of ordnance on the F-35C from internal and external stores. When we need to go back to a full stealth configuration – we have our maintainers take off the pylons. There is no aircraft in the world that can do that. The flexibility of the F-35B means it can sortie from short deck amphibious ships and small carriers like the Queen Elizabeth, and from short expeditionary airfields like our organic Marine

Wing Support Squadrons (MWSSs) build – and bring the incredible capabilities this jet delivers. The F-35C provides the Marine Corps with the exact same systems capabilities and allows us to employ the aircraft from forward deployed airfields or from US Navy carrier large decks in support of Joint or MAGTF operations. I remain convinced that we are buying the right aircraft and the right numbers of F-35B and F-35C, particularly as the F-35 continues to receive its planned follow-on modernization upgrades.

The F-35B is tracking for completion of the System Development Demonstration (SDD) in February 2018. The JPO is expecting an initial release of the 3F software this summer and a subsequent release in spring 2018. The program is meeting the services' requirements in SDD, and we expect the F-35B to gain full weapons and envelope defined for SDD prior to our Marine Expeditionary Unit deployments in 2018. We are actively identifying and correcting deficiencies discovered throughout testing and prioritizing resources to ensure the final release of 3F will provide the best multi-role fighter aircraft capability in the world.

There is some inherent risk in our timeline as it pertains to discoveries of deficiencies. However, to date none of these deficiencies are expected to delay SDD or reduce the capability of the aircraft. The largest risk to the timeline is associated with the corresponding 3F Mission Data Files (MDFs) which are required prior to updating the aircraft to the 3F software. This file is currently projected to be complete in the summer of 2018.

Looking at the future of the aircraft, we are satisfied with the Block 4 capabilities and are confident that our warfighting needs will be met. However, it is essential that Block 4 is fully funded in order to ensure our capabilities remain years ahead of the near-peer threat and allow for continued advancement to follow-on blocks. The capabilities being delivered in Blocks 4.1 and 4.2 have progressed through Systems Requirements Review and will move to phase 2 contracts on or around April of 2017.

Regarding the readiness of the Autonomic Logistics Information System (ALIS), the Marine Corps has demonstrated the ALIS system's ability to deploy and support a full range of military operations in forward locations. It is true that the system will continue to evolve, but in the configuration now fielded, we have proven its capability both on the LHD and in the field at our expeditionary landing field in 29 Palms.

The bottom line is this: the F-35 is the most capable aircraft in our fleet and we simply cannot transition into this aircraft fast enough. The Marine Corps owns the oldest TACAIR fleet in the entire DoD; the average age of Marine Corps TACAIR is 22 years. Our fleet of Harriers, Hornets and Prowlers – while proven – is exhausted. F-35B ramp for PB17 has us at 16, 20, 20, 20, 21 across the FYDP for a total acquisition of 97 aircraft. However, we will explore options to increase this procurement ramp based upon our desire to accomplish three things:

- First, get us out of legacy platforms faster, improving both combat effectiveness and overall TACAIR readiness;
- Second, by possibly accelerating procurement, we estimate the Department could achieve a net savings of up to \$1.2 billion dollars in procurement spending;
- Finally, by modernizing to one type of aircraft more quickly, we could eliminate a three-fold redundancy in manpower, operating materiel, support services, training, maintenance competencies, and aircraft upgrades.

Conclusion:

I will conclude by reemphasizing that Marine aviation, particularly our TACAIR assets, is in a readiness crisis. We do not have the number of aircraft that we need to fulfill our operational commitments – to be your “force is readiness” as mandated by Congress. Our readiness recovery lies in

recapitalization of our assets. We must continue to transition out of our legacy aircraft and into this new aircraft ***as fast as we can afford to buy them.***

Mr. Chairman, distinguished committee members, we appreciate your continued support of our Aviation programs and we look forward to answering all of your questions.