

**REMARKS OF
GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
LOCKHEED MARTIN'S INITIAL ROLLOUT
F-35B STOVL JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2007
FORT WORTH, TX**

(Applause)

Folks, we're here to celebrate this rollout today as a Nation at war. It's not the first time that Lockheed Martin has contributed such an act. Some 66 years ago, the first Lightning airplane, the P-38, was rolled out when this Nation was preparing for war. That aircraft in the skies over the Pacific and in Europe very much revolutionized the nature of air warfare for us at that point.

We have every expectation that the qualities of this aircraft are going to essentially do the same types of things for us. In a very real sense, you could call the F-35B the "Joint Combined Aircraft." With our partners from U.K. and Italy, it becomes that, and that makes it very attractive to us.

Your Marine Corps has long awaited the delivery of this airplane. For ten years, we have not purchased or procured a strike aircraft or a fighter. We have essentially made a conscious choice to skip a generation of aircraft, and now this aircraft will, in time, replace our venerable F/A-18s and the AV-8B. But, we think that we've been paying for this aircraft for a long time now, and we're very anxiously awaiting its arrival.

Our Service, by necessity and as a product of its missions, must be a two-fisted kind of capability. The first of those capabilities rests in the counterinsurgency environment like we're seeing right now in Iraq and Afghanistan. We're absolutely convinced that this aircraft is going to only further enhance what is a tremendous asymmetric advantage that we hold in terms of controlling the air, taking advantage of ISR capabilities, multi-sensor capabilities, and the ability, if need be, to drop a bomb with precision strike.

But it also has to perform for us in a major contingency operation. It has to be able to sweep the skies of enemy fighters, or it has to be able to take down a missile engagement zone around an enemy capital. Or, maybe even most importantly, it has to be able to put bombs on target in front of our Marines, so that we never have a fair fight on the ground when our divisions and our regiments engage.

We also look forward to the flexibility that the STOVL, the short takeoff and landing variant, will give us. We will be able to operate alongside our brothers in the Air Force at that expeditionary 6,000-foot runway. We'll be able to operate aboard the

carriers with our Navy brothers with the vertical takeoff capability if we need to have that there. Or, we can operate beyond that next tree line and at the forward operating base that our wing engineers would build us. That is the beauty of this aircraft, and no others can claim that kind of flexibility.

Folks – I’m talking now to the management and the employees here at Lockheed Martin – we’ll go back to Washington this afternoon. I’ve got lots of things that I have to worry about as Commandant. One of those things after today will *not* be that you keep this aircraft on its timeline, in budget, with the kinds of capabilities that you promised, because you have done that today. I’m absolutely comfortable that you can continue to do that in the months and years to come.

We believe that you will deliver to us an aircraft like the original P-38, an aircraft that, with these state-of-the-art capabilities, will truly be revolutionary in terms of what it is and what it does; and that you will keep us for now and for the future, that two-fisted force that the Marine Corps has to be for this great Nation. God bless you all for what you do.

(Applause)

(END)