

First Joint Strike Fighter Lands at Edwards

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EDWARDS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. (AFP) — One version of the Joint Strike Fighter program made its first flight early Sept. 18.

Boeing's X-32A demonstrator landed here after making a 20-minute, 30-mile hop from the company's aircraft facility in nearby Palmdale.

The quick flight, which reached 10,000 feet, went smoothly, said Boeing JSF chief test pilot Fred Knox.

"The airplane is a pleasure to fly," Knox said after delivering the plane. "It is already showing the precise handling qualities we expected based on hundreds of hours of simulator work."

During the flight, Knox put the X-32A through several initial airworthiness tests, including flying qualities and sub-systems checkout.

Another demonstrator for the JSF program, Lockheed's X-35A, is expected to arrive here within a few weeks. However, when both aircraft are here, they will not compete in a fly-off. Rather, the Department of Defense is requiring that JSF X aircraft successfully meet three objectives: commonality and modularity among JSF variants; low-speed handling quality features for carrier flight; and short takeoff and vertical landing.

Both the X-32A and X-35A will be flown here for five months, with each making approximately 50 test flights totaling nearly 200 hours to validate the fighters' flying qualities and performance for conventional and aircraft carrier operations.

Following that initial phase of testing, an X-32B and X-35B, which are the short takeoff/vertical landing versions, will be tested at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River test site in Maryland.

The JSF concept aims to have a single tactical fighter to be used by the Air Force, Navy, Marines, and



Joint Strike Fighter test pilot for Boeing's X-32A, Fred Knox, lands the demonstrator aircraft at Edwards AFB, Calif., Sept. 18. During the flight, Knox put the plane through several initial airworthiness tests, including flying qualities and sub-systems checkout. The X-32A, along with Lockheed Martin's X-35A, will be tested here for five months before "B" models are tested at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River test site in Maryland.

Photo by Ron Bookout

Britain's Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, and is meant to replace the aging F-16 Fighting Falcon, the A-10 Thunderbolt II, the AV-8B Harrier, and F/A-18 Hornet. Some 3,000 of the fighters will be built for U.S. and British forces. Another 3,000 will be built for various other allies.

The cornerstone of the JSF program is affordability by reducing development cost, production cost, and the cost of ownership.

Editor's Note: Johnson is with the Air Force Flight Test Center Public Affairs Office, Edwards AFB, Calif. This information is in the public domain at www.af.mil/news.