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Cherry Point hosts second F-35 activation conference

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. (Oct. 22, 2021) — Wednesday, the F-35 Site Activation Task Force (SATAF) returned for its second semiannual meeting to prepare the air station to permanently house six Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), or F-35 Lightning II, squadrons.

The conference began with opening comments from U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Clifford Sutcliffe, SATAF officer-in-charge, who introduced significant personnel and organizations, and provided a comprehensive update of requirements, tasks, and a long-term timeline of events. According to Sutcliffe, the station is still on track with the planned timeline.

The two-day session allowed key players from the air station, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 14, Lockheed Martin, Pratt and Whitney, Headquarters Marine Corps, JSF Joint Program Office and other stakeholders to assemble to discuss progress, construction efforts, and further requirements that would allow the F-35 to become operational at the air station.

While welcoming and providing leadership direction to attendees, MCAS Cherry Point, Commanding Officer Col. Mikel Huber reiterated, “The purpose of this SATAF is to bring everyone together to discuss challenges and create viable solutions for this immense transformation project. Doing so will ensure Cherry Point can support future squadrons like VMFA-542 by providing quality facilities for staff and aircraft, enabling them to train, operate, maintain and deploy when the nation calls.”

U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Brian Hansell, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) F-35 transition task force lead said, “We are resourcing the fleet and planning appropriately for this stand-up, and the hangars and facilities are exceeding all expectations.”

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542 will be the first F-35 JSF squadron to be activated on MCAS Cherry Point and is expected to be operational by June 2023. Hansell will serve as the incoming commanding officer for VMFA-542. While touring the construction site of his future command, Hansell said, “It’s great to see all the hard work that makes this a success, and I’m really excited to be part of this transition.”

MCAS Cherry Point will base the F-35 squadrons by 2027. The air station is the last Marine Corps air station to make the transition, following MCAS Beaufort in South Carolina, MCAS Miramar in California, MCAS Yuma in Arizona and MCAS Iwakuni in Japan.

More than one billion dollars in military construction projects are underway and planned to enable the air station to support the next generation fighter aircraft.

The SATAF is expected to meet again in spring of 2022.

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