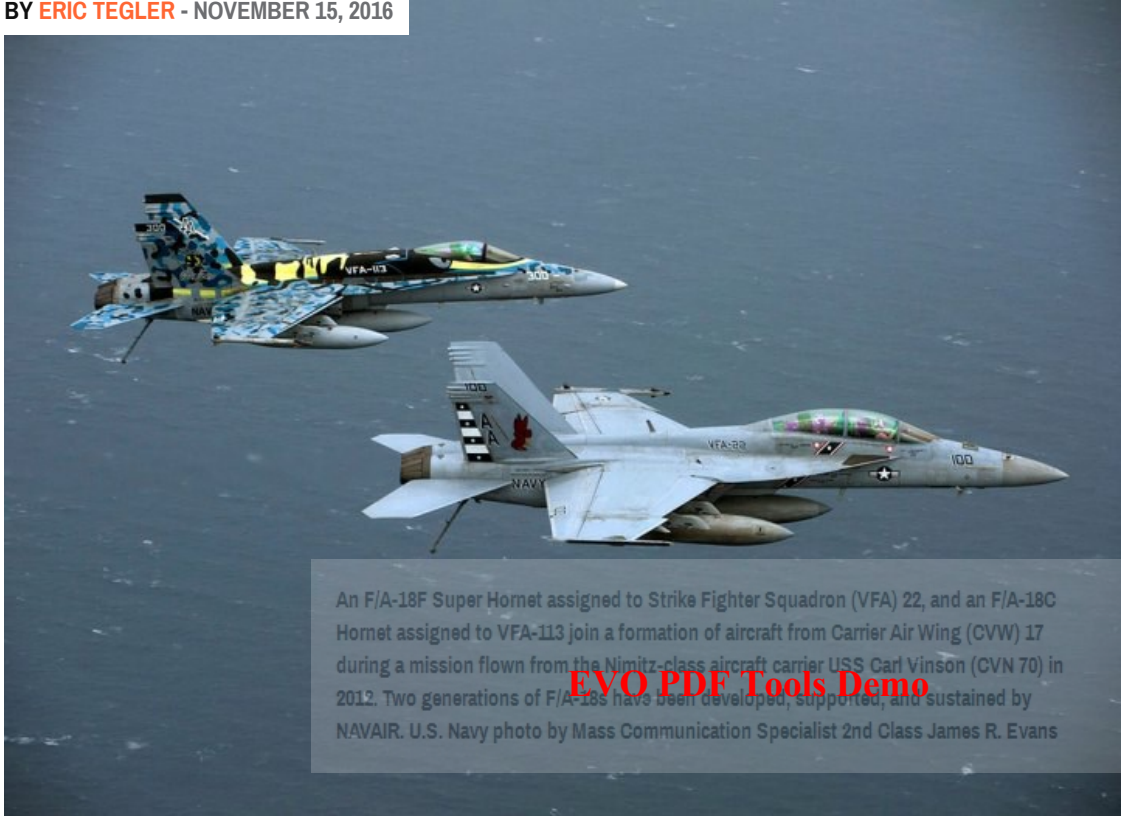


## NAVAIR Fixed-Wing Aircraft Programs

BY ERIC TEGLER - NOVEMBER 15, 2016

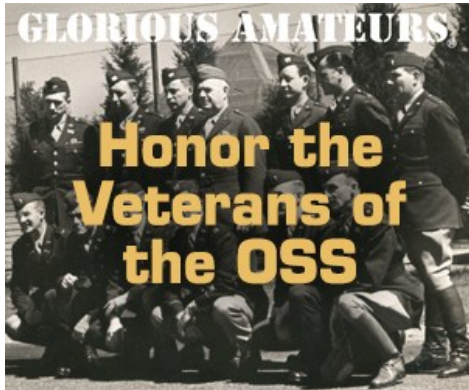


An F/A-18F Super Hornet assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 22, and an F/A-18C Hornet assigned to VFA-113 join a formation of aircraft from Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17 during a mission flown from the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) in 2012. Two generations of F/A-18s have been developed, supported, and sustained by NAVAIR. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class James R. Evans

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NAVAIR supports 22 fixed-wing aircraft programs, from the latest advanced strike fighters to small turboprop logistics support airplanes. These aircraft are managed across three Program Executive Offices (PEO) and nine program (PMA) offices. Reflecting the command itself, the airplanes are stationed at multiple locations across the continental United States and overseas.

The fixed-wing programs are divided by aircraft type, though in some cases

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multiple models of a specific type are managed. In other cases (trainers and specialized and proven aircraft), multiple aircraft types including rotary wing and unpowered are grouped together. The programs are broken down in the following descriptions with roles, background, and fleet details.

## F-35 LIGHTNING II

The Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program began in 1996, arising out of the early 1990s Common Affordable Lightweight Fighter and Joint Advanced Strike Technology projects. JSF called for the Navy, Marines, and Air Force to use a single, stealthy airframe capable of conventional, short takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL), and carrier-borne operations.



An F-35C piloted by Maj. John Dirk flies a test flight with external GBU-12 and AIM-9X ordnance from NAS Patuxent River, Maryland. Lockheed Martin photo by Flight Test Photographer Dane Wiedmann

After winnowing proposals from four contractors, a JSF competition in 2001 pitted Boeing's X-32 and Lockheed Martin's X-35 demonstrator aircraft against each other in a fly-off at several facilities including Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River, Maryland. The X-35 prevailed in large part thanks to its performance flexibility – able to take off in a short distance, go supersonic, and land vertically in one flight. A footnote is that two of the JSF demonstration aircraft, Boeing's X-32B and Lockheed's X-35C now reside at the Patuxent River Naval Air Museum.

Plans call for the acquisition of 2,443 Joint Strike Fighters in three variants – the Air Force's conventional takeoff F-35A, the Marines' STOVL F-35B, and the Navy carrier-capable F-35C. These are to perform a broad range of missions, from deep strike and close air support to air defense and possibly electronic attack, replacing the AV-8B, F/A-18C/D, and EA-6B as well as Air Force aircraft



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types.



Two F-35B Lightning II aircraft land on the flight deck aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6). America, with Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron 1 (VMX-1), Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211 (VMFA-211) and Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 23 (VX-23) embarked, was underway conducting operational testing and the third phase of developmental testing for the F-35B, evaluating the full spectrum of joint strike fighter measures of suitability and effectiveness in an at-sea environment. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Kyle Goldberg

However, the program has run into a variety of technical, weight, and cost difficulties partly arising from its concurrent development strategy.

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In 2010, the program was officially delayed a year. JSF was restructured, initial operational capability (IOC) dates delayed, and in 2011, the F-35B was placed on a two-year “probation,” which was ended one year later. Despite software delays, helmet, and ejection seat issues, the Marine Corps declared the F-35B operational in July 2015. The first operational squadron was VMFA-121. The Air Force plans to declare the F-35A operational in fall 2016, while the Navy has scheduled the F-35C to go operational in 2018.

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