When many of us think of production progress on the program we think of activity at Fort Worth, but this week I’m happy to report on significant progress at the Italian FACO. AL-1, the first F-35A built at the FACO in Cameri, Italy made history this week as it completed ATF (Acceptance Test Facility) where we ensure it meets government requirements for low observable, stealth performance. Completing ATF is one of the last hurdles before AL-1 takes to the skies for its first flight in the coming weeks. The team loaded the new 3iR5 software and is working through regression testing and mission systems checkout in preparation for Electromagnetic Compatibility (EMC) engine runs. The plan is for test pilot Bill “Gigs” Gigliotti to take to the northern Italy skies soon, making the very first international flight by an F-35A. I know it will be a special day for the program and our Italian industry partners. Italy also has its first maintainer starting training at Eglin this week.

Back in the states, CF-3 at Pax River completed the first Joint Precision Approach and Landing System (JPALS) approaches with an F-35. This mission is an important part of the shore-based workups the Pax ITF team is required to accomplish in preparation for the upcoming F-35C ship trials this fall. JPALS will primarily be used by pilots during night time and poor weather ship board landing operations.

In other flight test news, we continue to make great progress on gun testing. The Edwards team recently executed successful GAU-22 25mm gun fire tests, completing 90, 120 and 181 round gun bursts from a static ground test F-35A aircraft. (See video clip below) The tests used an inert PGU-23/U target practice round which fires from the 25mm four-barrel Gatling gun. In integrating a weapon into the F-35A, the gun must be kept hidden behind closed doors, reducing its radar cross section, until the trigger is engaged. The tests certified the gun spins up and down correctly. The GAU-22 system will be further tested with a line production F-35A next year for integration with the jet’s full avionics and mission systems capabilities. Click here to watch the video of the gun fire test event.
In preparation for reaching full rate in the coming years, teams are looking at all of our processes to see how we can improve. Recent improvements made in delivery operations are making a huge impact on our commitment to meet production cost and schedule. Previously, on average, it took delivery operations 25 days from receiving a jet to its final delivery. They recognized this needed to be shortened to prepare for full rate, when we deliver 17 jets a month. They streamlined their processes and have already cut that time down to an average of 15 days. There is still more work to be done in order to reach the full rate goal of seven days, but they are tracking to hit that number.

Some of the key aspects of making this improvement was looking at every process and simply asking, “Why?” They asked, can we do some processes simultaneously, and they found places where the answer was “yes” and saved time. They looked at the efficiency of teams following a jet throughout the delivery process, and found it would be better to have teams do the same thing on every jet, enabling them to become more efficient in completing those tasks. Thank you to all those on the delivery operations team – keep the ideas coming.

These are great examples of challenging the status quo and making small process improvements in order to be more efficient. I challenge you to look at the way your team is operating to see if you can improve the way you work. It doesn’t have to be big things, but when each of us make small improvements, it adds up to making a big difference.

Another team working very effectively and efficiently is the mate team, which is on track to close out LRIP 7 under budget! The last jet, AF-89, recently moved to final assembly. Great work team, and thank you for your commitment to helping meet production cost and schedule.

For many of you, this is the last week before the kids begin school and I know some students have already started. This past Saturday, the Lightning Squad teamed up to bring some much needed beautification to a local Fort Worth school, Hubbard Heights Elementary. I couldn’t be more proud of the more than 30 people who sacrificed their Saturday to make the school year a little bit brighter for those students. Education is extremely important and far too often some of the basic needs for a good education go unmet, so thank you to those who volunteered and those who are consistent supporters of STEM programs throughout the year.
While I was not able to join the Lightning Squad for this event, I look forward to upcoming events such as Connect and Engage Week and the USMC Toys for Tots bike parade later this year. I was in Australia this week and look forward to sharing results from this trip next week.

Have a great weekend!