By Rebekah Blowers

The US Navy Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) welcomed the Navy's first Joint Strike Fighter, the F-35C Lightning II, to the fleet in a ceremony on July 28 2009.

The F-35C is the Navy's first stealth fighter and enables the Navy to decrease the time from threat to response at sea. The aircraft possesses "uncompromised carrier suitability and low-maintenance stealth materials designed for long-term durability in the carrier environment."

Adm. Gary Roughead, CNO, said this aircraft adds tremendous capability to the fleet.

"Our sailors will never be in a fair fight because this airplane will top anything that comes its way. It will give our sailors and pilots the tactical and technical advantage in the skies and it will relieve our aircraft as they age out," Roughead said.

CNO said the pace of operations has not been easy on sailors, soldiers, airmen, and marines, nor on the ships and aircraft they rely on. He said the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is essential to addressing the Navy, and more importantly the United States', strike fighter needs.

"It is most exciting for me to think about the young men and women who look to this uniform, who look to naval aviation and see a fulfillment in their lives and an excitement in their lives that is unmatched in any other profession in the world," Roughead said. "I thank you for what you have done and thank you for what you are going to do. It is indeed a great honor to be here."

The F-35C is on schedule to meet the Navy's initial operational capability in 2015, and combines stealth with supersonic speed and high agility. The Lightning II employs the most powerful and comprehensive sensor package ever incorporated into a fighter.

Rebekah Blowers is a Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class (SW) with the US Chief of Naval Operations Public Affairs