

5. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q1. What criteria did COMACC use in making his decision to return some of the F-15s to flight, but not all?

A1. The decision was based on several factors. General Corley first received specific and very detailed information from scientific and engineering analysis of the health of the entire F-15 A-D fleet and from data collected during multiple inspections of F-15 A-Ds. He also evaluated the AIB results and, considering the advice and counsel of Air Force and industry engineering experts, assessed risk versus mission requirements before he released aircraft to fly. The Air Logistics Center at Warner Robins Air Force Base, in particular, has been a critical player during this entire process, from assisting with the investigation of the Nov. 2 mishap aircraft, to the development of more than 15 TCTOs and supplements. Inputs from senior ALC engineers were a key consideration in arriving at today's decision. Return to flight is conditioned upon successful completion of all TCTO inspections, to include meeting longeron specifications. Once we are satisfied that all our aircraft are airworthy and structurally sound, we'll move forward with getting the rest back in the air.

Q2. Is the return to flight of all F-15s imminent? Can you give us a date?

A2. We have not established a date when all F-15 A-Ds will return to flight. Once we are satisfied that our aircraft are airworthy and structurally sound, we'll move forward with getting them back in the air. We anticipate it will take at least another four weeks to further evaluate the remaining aircraft that require inspection or have not met longeron web thickness specifications.

Q3. If the AIB investigation is complete, can you release the report and share its findings?

A3. The AIB president forwarded his report to the Commander on Monday. COMACC received a briefing on the report today (Tuesday, 8 Jan 08). The report will next go to Headquarters Air Force and will be briefed to Air Force leadership as well as to Congressional staff. A public release is planned for this Thursday, 10 Jan, at which time we will share the full report and its findings.

Q4. Do you anticipate an SIB will next be convened?

A4. A decision has not yet been made on conducting an SIB. For background: Traditionally, an SIB is conducted first, followed by an AIB. An SIB is convened following what we call a "Class A" mishap to investigate the circumstances surrounding an event and make recommendations to prevent similar occurrences. Class A mishaps are those defined by one or more categories...in this case, the loss of an aircraft. However, the SIB is an internal investigation and an SIB report is a privileged document and is not releasable to the public. An AIB report, however, is releasable to the public. The purpose of an AIB is to provide a publicly releasable report of the facts and circumstances surrounding the accident, to include a statement of opinion on the cause or causes of the accident, and to gather and preserve evidence. In light of the importance of this investigation and the impact it has had on the F-15 fleet, COMACC decided to conduct the AIB first. He had confidence the AIB would be able to accurately

determine the cause of the mishap and wanted to make the investigation publicly releasable in a timely manner.

Q5. What do you mean by "selected F-15 aircraft?"

A5. The Warner Robins Air Logistics Center engineering team published an additional inspection criterion on Dec. 16, which directed a comprehensive inspection of both upper longerons in every F-15 A-D model. These inspections specified mapping of the longeron web thicknesses and checking for cracks or other defects in the longerons using ultrasonic measurement equipment and dye penetrate, non-destructive inspection techniques. Boeing and WR-ALC engineers are assessing each longeron in the fleet, aircraft by aircraft, for flightworthiness. If the longerons meet the required specs, then COMACC has decided that those particular aircraft, and only those particular aircraft, can be returned to flight. Those that fall outside manufacturer's specifications will require further engineering evaluation to determine if they are flight worthy.

Q6. Media reports and Air Force sources have previously indicated that "a thinning of the longeron" on the mishap aircraft is the root cause of the Missouri mishap. Is this true?

A6. A failure of the upper right longeron, a critical support structure in the F-15C mishap aircraft, was a significant finding in the AIB report and it was determined that the longeron did not meet manufacturing specifications. We will discuss these findings in greater detail at Thursday's media availability at the Pentagon, which is being held to not only share the AIB findings but to discuss the overall health of the F-15 fleet and future operational and maintenance mitigation steps.

Q7. If more than 40 percent of your F-15 A-D model aircraft have longerons that have not met specifications, is the Air Force considering retiring these aircraft or spending money to fix them?

A7. There are a number of options currently under review, from fixing longerons to retiring some aircraft that are beyond viability for a host of reasons. We will discuss these options in greater detail at the Thursday media availability.

Q8. How did the longerons not meet specifications?

A8. We'll discuss this in greater detail during the media availability on Thursday. However, in brief, the TCTO inspections revealed that the longerons on many F-15s were undercut. Approximately 40 percent of the F-15s A-Ds inspected have longerons have not met original specifications. At the time of the 2 Nov mishap, there were no specific requirements or procedures for inspecting the longerons. Inspection criteria for the forward fuselage were never developed because during initial fatigue testing on the aircraft, no fatigue failures or cracks were detected in the forward fuselage structures.

Q9. Do you anticipate a lawsuit or litigation?

A9. Any liability issues are premature at this time.

Q10. Now that a decision to return some of the F-15 A-Ds has been made, how will you bring your pilots back to currency since you have effectively not flown the aircraft since early November?

A10: In general, while we will target some F15 pilots for rapid re-currency and capability to fly limited missions, the ripple effects will continue for months. With today's return to fly, only a handful of pilots will, by week's end, be current and qualified to fly. At a minimum, we anticipate needing two to three months to get the majority of pilots back to the full-up status they enjoyed before the incident. Even after that, there will be training back-logs. For example, the F15 schoolhouse training at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., is facing a significant backlog which has begun to impact pilot training assignments. Even with additional efforts and resources, some of these impacts will be felt for well over six months.

Q11. With more than 40 percent of the F-15 A-D fleet still not ready for flight, what will be the impact on operations?

A11. There will continue to be an impact on the Air Force operationally. The stand-down of our F-15s, including the continued stand-down of aircraft that have not been cleared for flight, has and will continue to affect more than just the F15 fleet. F-16s re-tasked to perform the air sovereignty mission, for example, will continue to be heavily impacted. We are also using the F-22 Raptor and F-15E Strike Eagle to support air sovereignty alert missions previously assigned to F-15 units. Today's return to flight will help mitigate the impact on other aircraft and their pilots as we return F-15 aircraft to flight and bring pilots back into currency.

Q12. What impact are you currently forecasting for your air sovereignty alert mission since a significant portion of your fleet will still not be available to fly homeland defense sorties?

A12. We will continue to backfill air sovereignty alert and Operation Noble Eagle F-15 sorties with F-16, F-22, and F-15E aircraft. This will continue to involve significant support by Air National Guard and Air Reserve F-16 units as our primary backfill and we continue to keep in close contact with our Total Force units on long-term impact. Certainly, we are concerned about the loss of home station training and the impact on prep for air expeditionary force deployments and on further straining our already maximum tasked F-16 force. ACC is working and will continue to work ways to mitigate training and readiness impacts but there are no easy solutions.

Q13. Which aircraft have been discovered with longeron cracks?

A13. Nine aircraft, all C models, have been discovered with longeron cracks; 4 @ 173FW (Kingsley), 1 @ 325FW (Tyndall), 1 @ 131 FW (St Louis), 2 @ 18FW (Kadena) and 1 @ 104FW (Barnes).

Q14. The return-to-fly order and recommendation applies to which units?

A14. The order applies to all ACC F-15A/B/C/D aircraft and the recommendation applies to all ANG, PACAF, USAFE, AETC, and AFMC F-15A/B/C/D aircraft and includes all F-15A/B/C/D aircraft under the operational control, or OPCON, of Combatant Commands. F-15E model aircraft were previously cleared for flight on 11 Nov.