

Back in February, I attended the Armed Forces Communications & Electronics Association (AFCEA) WEST 2019 Expo at the San Diego Convention Center. While there, I was able to fly a F-35B Demonstrator Simulator. The following is a description I sent to a good friend of mine (a retired USMC Major General and Aviator) the day after my attendance.

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Yesterday at AFCEA WEST 2019, I flew the F-35B Demonstrator Simulator. The demonstrator has a three HD LED TV/monitor screens in front of the cockpit. The flight profile was set up for flight out of Nellis AFB which I'm quite familiar.

I climbed into the cockpit and was asked how much flying experience I possessed. I said, "Oh a few hours." I quickly noticed the cockpit was void of many traditional features. The Heads Up Display (HUD) was displayed onto the outside video screen for simplicity. The HUD appears on the helmet display in the real aircraft. On the panel were three Head In Displays (HID) which are operated by "touch screen." There was a traditional landing gear "knob" but I couldn't find the flap switch. I was told the aircraft doesn't have one. The aircraft computer will deploy the flaps automatically when needed. "What?"

The operator set me up on Rwy 3R. Holding the brakes, I ran the engines up to 80%, checked the TOT, released the brakes, pushed to full military power, then into burner. Passing through 110 kts I lifted the nose 5 degrees and lifted off passing through 130. Pulled the gear up, pulled back into military power and climbed up to 10K to feel out the airplane; very responsive and way too easy to fly.

I flew back to Nellis for a touch-n-go. Below 200 kts to extend the gear, and then I was shown that one button on the throttle will automatically stabilize the aircraft at 136 kts (based on computed weight), and I controlled my rate of descent by pitch! Ugh! The landing was no fun, No sense of accomplishment. It's not an airplane, but a video game.

After touchdown, I lit the burner again, lifted off, pulled up the gear, and perform a slow roll as the gear was cycling up. I hear the operator say "Whoa." Out of burner and back to 65%, I flew the pattern at 220 kts and performed a four-point-roll. I then slowed below 200 knots, dropped the gear abeam the tower, pressed the "landing button" and flew a very close in, short base to final landing, touching down just a hair past the numbers; again way too easy.

As I climbed out, the operator says, "You have more than just a few hours." I chuckled and then told him my time and experience. He flew 20 years USAF active in F-16s and now flies F-16s in the Guard.

I came to the realization that the airplane was purposely made to fly easily so the pilot can divert all his attention to operate the computerized systems inside the cockpit. The operator said, I'm right on with my observation.

How sad, our future aviators are going to lose their stick and rudder skills, especially at a time whereas they would need it the most.

Wayne