

Air Force Statement in Response to ABC's F-22 Coverage

The Air Force takes issue with ABC News' characterization of the U.S. Air Force's stewardship of the F-22 program as presented by Brian Ross on your 'World News with Diane Sawyer' and 'Nightline' programs which aired on May 2, 2012. The Air Force provided detailed information to ABC and other media explaining the capabilities of the F-22, the need for the aircraft, and the measures taken to address the challenges in the program. Specific problems with your story:

- The 14 unexplained physiological incidents before the May 2011 stand down and the 11 incidents after the September 2011 return to flight represent an incident rate below 0.1% whether considered in terms of sortie numbers or flight hours. The Air Force implemented additional safety measures such as the use of pulse oximeters, additional training and improvements to the aircraft's emergency oxygen system. ABC was provided a wealth of specific information on these topics but either omitted or glossed over these facts.
- The aircraft recently deployed for the second time to Southwest Asia to enhance regional partnerships and demonstrate U.S. long-term commitment to the region; it has been deployed in similar capacity to bases in the Pacific; and it has been used for homeland defense missions to protect the airspace over the United States. The F-22's stealth capabilities and range make it ideal for operating over territory where enemies have advanced air defenses. Our nation has interests in many regions where such a capability would be critical. Characterizing the aircraft's status as one in which they are "sitting on the tarmac" being used primarily for air shows ignores information that ABC producers received related to use of the aircraft.
- Three current F-22 pilots—in response to ABC's question about an "expert" opinion that pilots needed 30-40 hours per month to maintain proficiency—said that they had never had that many training hours per month in a comparable aircraft before they transitioned to flying the F-22. They also explained that because of the F-22's capability they needed fewer hours than other types of aircraft. This information was omitted from the story.
- ABC also was told that the 80% Mission Capable rate of the F-22s at Langley was comparable to similar fighter aircraft, specifically Block 50 F-16s.
- Notably, Brian Ross was invited to participate in Air Combat Command's April 30 media engagement at Langley AFB, yet chose not to attend.