



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## F-35A OUE EVENTS COMPLETED, SUCCESS HANDED TO AETC FOR REVIEW

**EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla.** -- A major step in the building the Air Force's F-35A Lightning II training program was accomplished when the 33rd Fighter Wing completed the training and flying portion of the service's operational utility evaluation on schedule Nov. 15.

Four pilots began training when the evaluation started Sept. 10, expecting it to last approximately 65 days. Six weeks of academic training and 24 sorties later, they are all fully-qualified F-35A pilots.

"We were able to conduct the flying portion in less than half the time than we planned for because things went so well with the flying, weather was good, maintainers were doing a great job getting jets out on the line and instructors were doing a good job of teaching these guys," said Col. Andrew Toth, 33rd Fighter Wing commander.

From no experience to fully qualified joint strike fighter pilot was the hallmark of the success according to wing leaders and instructor pilots.

Lt. Col. Eric Smith, 58th Fighter Squadron director of operations and first Air Force F-35 instructor pilot, recalled leading one of four OUE students, Maj. Joseph Scholtz, during an Instrument qualification course Nov. 9.

"Four weeks before the first pilot qualified, he was an A-10 pilot at Nellis Air Force Base (Nev.) and hadn't been involved much in the F-35 program other than what he read in the news about what was going on," said Smith. "The 33rd Fighter Wing testament to all of the hard work that has been going on here the last three and a half years of standing this place up, getting ready to train pilots, was when we took him out today and he pretty much flew a flawless F-35 mission. It's also a testament to Lockheed Martin partners involved in helping the Nomads, the men and women of 33rd, build a training system down here, develop it and go out and execute it."

During the flying portion, students demonstrated their ability to take off into restricted airspace, train flying in formation while airborne, conduct instrument approaches at a neighboring military base and clear the traffic pattern to land at Eglin. Their "check ride" was an hour-long flight culminating in full qualification to fly the F-35.

"Maintainers have done a fantastic job of generating sorties," Smith said.

The OUE provided the setting to test the 135 trained maintainers in generating up to six flights a day utilizing nine F-35As.

"Maintenance really stepped up to the plate," said Tech. Sgt. Matthew Burch. "They are learning the fifth generation way of maintenance quickly."

As they go along in their daily routine, maintainers find themselves rewriting joint technical data to pave the way for the future "play book" of maintaining F-35As alongside their contract logistics partners.



Staff Sgt. Travis Goll, a 58th Aircraft Maintenance Unit crew chief, begins communicating with the pilot of an F-35A Lightning II Nov. 14, 2012, at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The landing of the aircraft marked the last sortie to complete the 33rd Fighter Wing's flying and training portions of the Air Force Operational Utility Evaluation for the joint strike fighter. A Joint Operational Test Team will write its report of its evaluation here for Air Education and Training Command's review and approval, "Ready For Training," needed for the wing to begin formal F-35A training. (U.S. Air Force photo/Maj. Karen Roganov)

"Training conducted here at Eglin then enables the rest of the Air Force organizations to start standing up too, begin their training and test and evaluation piece - big steps in the F-35 program," said Toth.

Scholtz will give feedback, as others going through training do, before going back to his unit at Nellis, the 56th Test and Evaluation Squadron where the joint strike fighter will arrive next year.

The other qualified F-35A pilots trained during the OUE were Lt. Col. Brian O'Neill of Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., and Majors Cougar Wilson and Scout Johnston from the 33rd FW.

"A great part of all of this is the fantastic job of all the services. The OUE was a great couple of weeks flying, and we couldn't ask for any more," said Toth. "We are ready for the Joint Operational Test Team to write their report, provide us a quick-look out brief then formally brief our command on what they thought of the training system here. Once we receive the Air Education and Training Command's approval stating we are 'Ready For Training,' we can begin our first class."

Smith and his team of instructors are ready to train six pilots early next year as soon as they get that notice.

"We'll receive the training system for the block 1B operational flight program, the suite of software in the jets," he said. "It'll be our first class in this configuration. We are calling it a small group tryout, a contractual thing to make sure courseware developed is up to standards. It will take two months."

After its first year of training, the wing expects to see "normalcy" in its program.

"Concurrency of testing and training in the Air Force F-35 program means basic training of operational test pilots will happen first at Eglin in the near term," said Toth. "The pilots will then follow-on to Nellis or Edwards to conduct testing on new F-35 systems and capabilities before the wing adapts them in the training environment, resulting in the growth of the program becoming much more normalized. Meanwhile, the game plan for other military services and international partners will continue. Eventually there will be 2,100 maintenance students and 100 U.S. military F-35 pilots a year."