



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## TRAINING FOR JOINT, U.K. F-35 PROGRAMS HEAT UP

**EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla.,** – The largest fleet of F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighters ramped up to 28 aircraft June 25, bringing in new capability for the F-35 Integrated Training Center as the team trains to provide combat operations capability in the years ahead. The U.S. Navy's Strike Fighter Squadron-101 received a second F-35C from Lockheed Martin, Fort. Worth, Texas. The Navy's variant is designed to land on the decks of aircraft carriers.

"Receiving our jets is an almost indescribable milestone for us," said Navy Capt. John Enfield, commanding officer of VFA-101. "We're excited to be on the ground floor of introducing a generational step forward in combat lethality and battle space awareness for our worldwide deployed forces."

Flying in formation with the Navy F-35C was the final compliment of the third F-35B for the United Kingdom based here as part of an Initial Operational Test & Evaluation Implementing Arrangement. The U.K. trains with the U.S. Marine Corps Fighter Attack Training Squadron-501 and fly each other's jets interchangeably.

This latest United Kingdom F-35B has upgraded software, defined as Block 2A, making it the first such for the combined Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and United States Marine Corps assets at the VMFAT-501.

Having the enhanced software for both the Navy fighters here and now the VMFAT-501 means pilot training curriculum steadily grows as capabilities come on board. "An increased use of the digital aperture system, one of the key sensors of the joint strike fighter, marks one such step forward for F-35 training," said Col. Todd Canterbury, commander of the 33d Fighter Wing and overall spearhead for joint and international training here. The Air Force's 58th Fighter Squadron here also trains with the enhanced software, he said.

The fleet continues to grow toward 59 aircraft scheduled to fly at the F-35 Integrated Training Center, part of Eglin's 33rd Fighter Wing. By the end of this calendar year, the team is planning for 42 of those joint strike fighters to be here, he said. To date, the three services and the United Kingdom have seen 53 pilots and 857 maintainers qualified to fly and maintain the F-35 as the training progresses. All training is geared toward F-35 initial operating capabilities, according to Canterbury.

The Marines expect to declare F-35B IOC late in 2015. The Air Force's target date is by December 2016, and the U.S. Navy is looking at F-35C IOC in February 2019. While target dates may adjust, a constant for all partners is training for the challenges of working on the 21st century battlefield taking advantage of the unprecedented F-35 with its increased survivability, including advanced information-sharing capabilities setting it to dominate airpower for the next 50 years.



The second U.S. Navy F-35 C variant arrives at Eglin AFB for training of future U.S. Navy pilots. The 33rd Fighter Wing is a joint graduate flying and maintenance training wing that trains Air Force, Marine, Navy and international partner operators and maintainers of the F-35 Lightning II. (U.S. Air Force photo by Maj. Karen Roganov)



Marine Lt. Col. Roger Hardy, Defense Contract Management Agency F-35 Lightning II acceptance pilot, at DCMA office, Lockheed Martin Ft. Worth, Texas talks over another successful landing at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., with a team comprise of United Kingdom pilots and maintainers June 25, 2013. Hardy flew in the last of three F-35B variants owned by the United Kingdom and slated to be flown with the other joint strike fighters at the Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron-501 here. (U.S. photo/Maj. Karen Roganov)