



F-35 Lightning II Program

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HILL'S F-16S TAKE FIRST FLIGHTS ALONGSIDE F-35S

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4/24/2014 - EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- F-16 pilots from Hill's 419th and 388th Fighter Wings took to the skies here this morning for their first training missions alongside the F-35A Lightning II, the Air Force's newest fighter aircraft.

Hill's F-16s flew air-to-air combat training missions with F-35As assigned to Eglin's 33rd Fighter Wing.

"This was a great opportunity for our F-16s to operate with the F-35. This mission allowed us to train for seamless integration of the Air Force's fourth and fifth generation fighters and provided invaluable insight into the future of fighter operations at Hill AFB," said Lt. Col. David Castaneda, the 419 FW's 466th Fighter Squadron commander.

In December 2013, Hill was named the Air Force's first operational basing location for the F-35A. The active duty 388th FW and Air Force Reserve 419th FW will fly and maintain the aircraft in a Total Force partnership. While the wings already work together at home station, training as one element alongside Eglin's 33rd Fighter Wing mirrors their real-world mission.

"We are a Total Force Integration operation," said Maj. Jayson Rickard, assistant director of operations in the 466th FS. "Everything we do back home and when we deploy is side-by-side with our active-duty counterparts. This is very representative of what we would do in combat."

The F-35A combines advanced capabilities of stealth with fighter speed and agility, fully fused sensor information, network-enabled operations and advanced sustainment.

"I really enjoyed flying with the F-35s here and it was great to see its impressive set of capabilities up close," said Capt. Alex Turner, 388th FW pilot.

On Friday, F-16 maintainers from Hill will also take part in an F-35A immersion to include an in-depth overview of ALIS - the Autonomic Logistics Information System, which is a one-stop shop for a broad range of integrated high-tech capabilities including maintenance prognostics, supply chain management, and technical data for the aircraft.

The operational flying mission of the F-35A continues a long tradition of firsts for Hill's fighter wings. The 388th FW was the first operational unit to receive the F-16 in 1979, while the 419th FW was the first AF Reserve unit to receive the jet in 1983.

"The F-35 is going to be an important aircraft for the future of the Air Force," said Tech. Sgt. David Sudak, 419th FW crew chief. "It will provide flexibility both for maintenance and air crews. The new computer system seems to be more integrated. It's going to make our job a lot easier."

"I look forward to seeing what similarities there are on the two jets," said Senior Airman Kimber Kreamer, 388 FW crew chief. "I love working on the F-16, so I'm anxious to apply that knowledge to the F-35 at Hill."

Hill AFB is slated to receive its first operational F-35A in late 2015. Planning is currently underway for three operational F-35A squadrons at Hill and aircraft deliveries are expected to be phased in over a three-year period with full conversion anticipated by March 2019.



Hill's F-16 flies with the F-35 Lightning II, in a training mission at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., today. Hill sent 235 active and reserve personnel to train alongside the Air Force's newest fighter jet. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Christina Judd)