



F-35 Lightning II Program

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FUELS FLIGHT KEY TO F-35 MISSION SUCCESS

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. - When the Base Realignment and Closure Committee designated Eglin as the home of the first F-35 Lightning II, it gave the base more than aircraft.

Before the first plane arrived, millions of dollars went into upgrading an aging infrastructure on the 33rd Fighter Wing side of the base. From those upgrades came a \$19 million state-of-the-art foundation that houses the 96th Logistics Readiness Squadron's Fuels Flight.

The flight split its forces with most of its personnel moving to the west side of the base last August. A small percentage remain on the east side of base to manage test mission requirements.

Their mission runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. More than 130 Airmen support everything from aircraft to government vehicles for operations that stretch across Eglin's ranges, from Duke Field to Cape San Blas, more than 120 miles, and three hours, to the east. That translates into 20 million gallons of fuel issued to 92 aircraft, 2,000 vehicles and 800 buildings.

"Everything, except for the walls of the two fuel tanks, is brand new," said Fuels Superintendent Senior Master Sgt. Bill Burke. "The tanks were originally built in the '50s when the bombers were here."

Master Sgt. Matthew Renner, JSF Fuels Operations section chief, was in charge of the massive rebuild of the fuels system that not only included a new building, but a smart hydrant system that fuels and stores 2 million gallons of Jet-A, a commercial grade of JP-8, which was previously used. The type IV hydrant system provides constant flow to four direct fueling hot pit pantograph stations for 47 F-35s and can fill six refuelers simultaneously at a rate of 3,000 gallons per minute.

"There's three different customers within the 33rd sharing the hot pit refueling sites," Renner said, speaking of the Air Force, Navy and the Marines. "It's a new mindset, a joint environment."

Along with the new requirements came numerous "tweaks" that can only come with design changes on the F-35 versus legacy aircraft like the F-15 that previously occupied the 33rd FW flightline. Those lessons learned, such as variants in the amount of pressure controlling fuel flow, are now being passed on to other bases like Luke AFB, Arizona, and Hill AFB, Utah, as fuel specialists here become advisers to others in their career field who will refuel the jointstrike fighter in the future.

Chief Master Sgt. Jamie Harrington, fuels manager, said there are distinct advantages to the system, including increasing the storage capability by 33 percent and eliminating 10,000 miles of travel for the tankers that previously transported fuel to the west side of the base during the three-year period the system was under construction.

"The 33rd gets their fuel immediately, which is critical when you're running 35 to 40 sorties a day and need quick-turn capability," Harrington said. "Night flying began last month, so we now cover the day and night shift mission."

Eglin also hosts numerous exercises like the 53rd Wing's Combat Hammer and AF Special Operations Wing's Emerald Warrior, which brings an abundance of transient aircraft to the base, increasing the flight's workload.

"This spring's been busy," Renner said. "We've had three sets of A-10, 12 F-16s and 16 A-10s coming in Friday."

The fuels flight faces the same challenge of many units, juggling manning with constant deployments and voluntary separations. However, the Airmen working also know the importance of the work they do and the customers they serve.

"The success of the Joint Strike Fighter Mission at Eglin AFB can be directly tied to the efforts of Chief Harrington and the Fuels Flight professionals within the 96th Logistics Readiness Squadron. They have contributed immeasurably to the



Senior Airman Jordan Shope, 96th Fuels Flight, brings out the refueling arm for Staff Sgt. Mark Freeman, 33rd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, during an F-35A Lightning II hot pit session May 6 at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The fuels flight facilitates the four hot pit stations on the 33rd Fighter Wing flightline used by Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy F-35 Lightning II aircraft. The 131 Airmen and civilians of the fuels flight fall under the 96th Logistics Readiness Squadron and were recently named best fuels flight in Air Force Materiel Command. (U.S. Air Force photo/Samuel King Jr.)

success of the 4,500 sorties and 6,000 flight hours completed to date, supporting not only the Air Force, but also the Navy, Marines, United Kingdom and the Netherlands," said Brian Amos, technical director for the 33rd Maintenance Group. "Of particular note was their leadership bringing to fruition a state-of-the-art hot pit refueling capability that is an integral part of not only our joint operations, but something that will be emulated at future operational sites as well."