



F-35 Lightning II Program

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LUKE'S 56TH FIGHTER WING HAS NEW MISSION

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56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs*

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. (AFNS) -- Luke Air Force Base's 56th Fighter Wing conducted a change of mission ceremony May 21, formally including the F-35 Lightning II as part of the wing's new mission statement.

The ceremony included the military tradition of unveiling the 56th FW commander, Brig. Gen. Scott Pleus' name on the flagship F-35, signifying the mission change.

Thereafter, Pleus began his remarks to a hangar full of Airmen and community leaders by looking back at Luke's history.

"If you go back to February of 1941 the city of Phoenix authorized the War Department, as it was called back then, the ability to build a training base out in the west side of Phoenix," Pleus said. "The state of Arizona saw the ability to bring the military into the Arizona community, just like they do today. Their unbelievably generous opportunity resulted in leasing this land to the United States Air Force for \$1 a year and that still holds true today."

Luke AFB currently has 23 F-35s and by 2024, Luke is scheduled to have six fighter squadrons and 144 F-35s. In the next few years, 10 other countries are planning to conduct F-35 training at Luke, including Norway, Italy, Turkey, Netherlands, Denmark, Canada, Israel, Japan and South Korea. Australia has already arrived and is flying with the 61st Fighter Squadron.

"Today we take another step forward for the U.S. Air Force and our partner nations by formally updating our mission statement. Beginning today the mission of Luke Air Force Base is simple - train the world's greatest F-35 and F-16 fighter pilots."

Pleus then welcomed Lorraine Martin, the executive vice president and general manager of the F-35 Lightning II program with Lockheed Martin, to the stage.

"I want you to know that Lockheed Martin and our entire team are proud to stand beside you in every step of your journey," Martin said. "We have every expectation that Team Luke will set the standard for F-35 training, as you have done with the F-16, the most successful fourth generation pilots the world has ever known."

Martin closed by thanking the surrounding community, Air Force partners and allies, and thanked them for their service.

The change in the mission statement is historical for Luke because the base has been an F-16 Fighting Falcon installation for 19 years. The 56th FW last changed its mission 25 years ago.

The 56th FW is one of the most highly decorated aviation units in history and has a legacy tracing back to 1941. Since then, the 56th FW has moved a number of times and has undergone a few name changes before arriving at Luke AFB April 1, 1994, flying F-16s and F-15E Strike Eagles. A year later the F-15E training mission moved to Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina. Since then, the wing's core mission has been to train the world's greatest F-16 pilots. It wasn't until March 10, 2014, when the wing received its first F-35A aircraft that changes began to appear.

Some of the recent changes include the opening of the F-35 Academic Training Center October 9, 2014. On Jan. 23, Pleus flew his last sortie in an F-16, representing a step toward the future for Airmen at Luke. Additionally, the wing successfully completed a first ever, large-scale training deployment of 10 F-35s to Nellis AFB, Nevada, showcasing the aircrafts abilities. Recently, a Australian air force pilot flew the base's first partner F-35 sortie May 14 at Luke.

Pleus wrapped up his comments by talking about the relationship between the base and the local community.

"The state of Arizona and particularly the West Valley has always welcomed us with open arms and we deeply appreciate all the efforts you had to bring the F-35 to Luke," Pleus said. "We would not be where we are today if we didn't have the support of some great people that have put us to where we are."