



F-35 Lightning II Program

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F-35s Test Combat Readiness

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, Idaho -- Seven F-35A Lightning IIs and 160 personnel from Hill AFB deployed here, June 3-17. The airmen stressed the limits of both aircraft and personnel to ensure they could operate effectively in a deployed environment.

The F-35A is the Air Force's latest multi-role fighter designed to work alongside current aircraft such as the F-22 Raptor and the A-10 Thunderbolt II.

"[The] F-35 is a huge leap in technology," said Maj. Luke Harris, 388th Operation Support Squadron F-35A instructor pilot. "The F-35 is a totally new platform built from the ground up; it has stealth capabilities as well as the avionics capability to be able to see the enemy and kill the enemy well before they even see us or know we're there."



The F-35A is the Air Force's latest multi-role fighter designed to work alongside current aircraft such as the F-22 Raptor and the A-10 Thunderbolt II.

Four months prior, F-35As from Edwards AFB, California, a test squadron, arrived at Mountain Home Air Force Base with the intent to seek out potential weaknesses with the aircraft and how to best correct any logistical problems that may arise.

"The visit in February was utilized to test the overall logistics required in moving an F-35 squadron into a deployed location," said Capt. David Bown, 389th Fighter Squadron F-15E Strike Eagle pilot. "This included preparing the location and facility, so that when the airplanes arrived it would be a seamless transition into regular flying operations."

This time around, the F-35As training at Mountain Home AFB were combat-coded, which means these are the aircraft that will see combat once testing is complete.

"This most recent visit was more focused on building tactics and integration between 4th and 5th [generation] fighters so [that] we can operate in unison together someday in the [area of responsibility]," Bown said.

The F-35A's advanced sensor package is designed to gather, fuse and distribute more information than any fighter in history, which is anticipated by military officials to give operators an advantage in any contested environment.

"The F-35 brings newer and more advanced sensors to the fight, allowing the kill chain to happen even faster," said Bown. "Integrating with them allows us to pass information back and forth between platforms increasing everyone's overall situational awareness."

In order to declare these jets combat-ready, they must first demonstrate capability in a range of mission types.

"This deployment to Mountain Home, to a non F-35 base, has proven we can set up the computer network system that runs the jet's maintenance and operations as well as maintain aircraft and launch sorties," Harris said.

Finishing up their training here, the F-35 squadron flew nearly 90 sorties, more than 140 hours flown and nearly a 100 percent hit rate with dropped weapons. Zero F-35s were "shot down" by 4th generation aircraft such as the F-15E and the A-10.

"The F-35 obtaining [combat readiness] is just another step in the process to get these fighters ready to do the job they were built for downrange," said Bown. "Knowing what the F-35 will be able to bring to the fight will enhance the Air Force's capabilities to not only fight today's war, but future wars as well."