



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## VMFA-121 brings F-35B to Red Flag 16-3 for first time

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, NV -- Six F-35B Lightning IIs with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 participated in Red Flag 16-3, making it the first time in history that the fifth generation fighter has taken part in the three-week long exercise at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.

According to Lt. Col. J.T. Bardo, commanding officer of VMFA-121, this is the first exercise of this magnitude that the F-35 has participated in and serves as a valuable training opportunity for the squadron.

During the training, VMFA-121 conducted defensive and offensive counter air exercises, strategic attacks, targeting, and combat search and rescue training.

"We're really working on showcasing our surface-to-air capabilities," said Maj. Brendan Walsh, an F-35 pilot with VMFA-121. "The F-35 is integrating by doing various roles in air-to-air and air-to-ground training."

The F-35 is equipped with an integrated sensor package more powerful than any fighter aircraft, also combining radar-evading stealth with speed and fighter agility.

"With the stealth capability, the biggest thing that this aircraft brings that the others do not is situational awareness," said Walsh. "The sensor sweep capability that the F-35 brings to the fight, not only builds those pictures for me, but for the other platforms as well. We're able to share our knowledge of the battle space with the rest of the participants in order to make everyone more effective."

Red Flag 16-3 has roughly 3,500 service members involved for the entire exercise. The training scenarios require all the branches to come together, which is extremely common in real-life battle scenarios.

"These opportunities to operate in a joint environment with our partner services are rare," said Bardo. "We're excited to be here, to bring the F-35 to the exercise and capitalize on all its strengths and integrate with the other players out there."



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