



F-35 Lightning II Program

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by Joel Fortner
Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. (AFNS) -- The Air Force took another step forward with its newest fighter jet when an advanced F-35 Lightning II landed at the service's lead training base, home to the largest fleet of F-35s worldwide.

The new stealth fighter kicks off a major training effort at the F-35 schoolhouse on an aircraft with unmatched capabilities.

The F-35 is the military's newest stealth fighter jet. Students from all military branches who are learning to fly the plane go through the schoolhouse at Eglin, including some from international services.

In addition to a few design improvements, the major difference between the new aircraft and others is sensors and software.

For example, pilots for the first time will begin training on a capability that gives them a 360-degree view around the jet.

Sensors that act like highly sophisticated cameras that can detect heat and other information are embedded in the front, sides and back of the F-35.

When in use, the pilot basically can see everything around them near and far, a capability not found in any current military fighter, said F-35 instructor pilot, Major Jay Spohn.

The system was designed to see other aircraft, people on the ground, missile launches, and more, and share that information with other aircraft and command centers on the ground.

Other new capabilities include a weather tracker and an enhancement of a system known as ALIS, or autonomic logistic information system, which transmits aircraft health and maintenance information and makes use of a portable computer planeside for the maintainer.

"This system is a game changer," said Senior Master Sgt. Eric Wheeler, production superintendent, 33rd Aircraft Maintenance Unit. "It combines real-time data collection and trouble shooting in one system, eliminating the need for carting out stacks of binders and paper forms to the jet, as well as having to dual annotate once on paper and again later in the office on a computer."

The latest system software, which has a better user interface and enhanced capability to download, is another step along the track in fixing problems in less time, which can be critical in time of conflict, Wheeler said.



F-35 LIGHTNING II
Advanced version lands at Eglin

An advanced F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter taxis on Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. arriving to the Air Education Training Command F-35 schoolhouse, May 6, 2013. The F-35's arrival will be a major training effort at the schoolhouse, and allow all military branches to train on the newest platform. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Nicholas Egebrecht)



Maj. Matthew Johnston, (left) 58th Fighter Squadron, instructor pilot, shakes hands with Col. Stephen Jost, 33rd Operations Group commander upon arriving at Eglin Air Force base, Fla. with the advanced F-35 Lightning I joint strike fighter, May 6, 2013. The advanced F-35 will be utilized by all military branches at the Air Education Training Command F-35 schoolhouse to train on new systems and software on the platform. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Nicholas Egebrecht)

The new F-35A will share the skies over Eglin's training ranges with the Navy VFA-101 flying squadron here, which is slated to get their first two F-35C aircraft later this month along with another United Kingdom F-35B assigned to the Marine Corps VMFAT-501 flying squadron, scheduled to arrive here in about a month.



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