



F-35 Lightning II Program

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EGLIN'S F-35S TO BEGIN NIGHT FLYING OPERATIONS

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FLA. - The 33rd Fighter Wing will advance its F-35 Lightning II training program Monday evening (March 24) as its F-35s start flying training missions at night.

Recent software upgrades and hardware modifications permit F-35 pilots to now fly both at night and in Instrument Meteorological Conditions.

"This is another important step forward for the F-35 training enterprise," said Col. Todd Canterbury, the 33rd Fighter Wing commander. "It's exciting for us to now be training our pilots on this critical mission set."

The lessons learned through the F-35's concurrency model by the test and development community provided the feedback necessary to introduce night and IMC flying into the F-35 training syllabus.

"The airspace that we use for night flying training is no different than what we use during the day," said Lt. Col. Eric Smith, 33rd Operations Squadron commander. "We fly at much higher altitudes than other aircraft, though. For the F-35 training, that is typically outside of earshot."

Smith said that the night flying must be conducted to meet the required training objectives for the program.

The missions conducted at night will be similar to day missions. The pilots will focus on pattern work to master take-offs and landings at night. The majority of pattern work will be conducted at more remote air fields such as Duke Field and Choctaw Naval Outlying Field.

The pilots will train both with and without night-vision aids. They will also conduct simulated weapons deployment using air-to-air and air-to-ground targeting. Smith explained acquiring a target at night is different than how a target is acquired during the day.

Conducting training missions at night also gives the 33rd Fighter Wing pilots a chance to expand the use of the Distributed Aperture System, one of the unique capabilities of the F-35. The distributed aperture system provides the pilots 360-degree infrared video imagery shown directly in the F-35 helmet's display.

"We're a stealthy airplane, but even stealthy airplanes can utilize the cover of darkness," said Smith.

He also stressed that night missions are essential to every pilot's skillset.

"We're a 24-hour Air Force," said Smith. "The enemy doesn't let us choose when we want to fly."