



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2014 05 02

AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE MAKES HOME AT LUKE

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. - The buildup of F-35 operations at Luke Air Force Base has begun, and the Royal Australian air force will soon be Luke's first international partner to train here on the F-35A Lightning II. The 61st Fighter Squadron and 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit will house the RAAF personnel. The goal is to build a cohesive, working understanding of the F-35A program with Luke's international partners for increased success in joint operations.

"It's one more step in the long road to making this aircraft combat capable," said Capt. Dan Langan, 61st AMU officer in-charge. "The idea is in future conflicts nobody is going to be going at it alone. We'll have our allies with us. The idea behind this aircraft was to make it easier to operate with our multinational partners, understand the same tactics, operate with the same logistics base, and figuring out how to do that starts right here. We are laying the foundation and it's pretty exciting to be on the ground floor of that effort."

Luke will act as ground zero for international partners to build their expertise in F-35A operations. The RAAF is the first partner to start their spin-up operations and are expecting their first aircraft by the end of this year. "We are really pleased to come in and be the first partner to stand up operations here," said squadron leader Maj. Nathan Draper, 61st AMU participant maintenance liaison officer and RAAF senior officer. "We are pretty lucky to get to come here first."

The RAAF plans to eventually have 14 aircraft at Luke, with their goal to have a complete working picture of U.S. Air Force F-35 operations, then return to the home base they are setting up for the F-35. "One of the biggest things I hope to achieve is the successful transition of our aircraft from the production line to the Luke training environment and the commencement of training operations alongside our Air Force colleagues," Draper said. "If we can do that in a safe and efficient streamlined manner, leveraging the Air Force processes and systems, it will be a pretty good day."

The RAAF expects their first pilot to arrive at Luke the beginning of next year. Draper is part of an acquisition project called Joint Strike Fighter Division, and he now considers himself a team member of the 61st AMU. "We have a really good, close working relationship with our colleges in the Air Force, and we are looking forward to the next few years of joint operations here," he said.

Luke's relationship with the RAAF goes back a long way. Air Marshal Mark Binskin, soon to be the top Australian Defence Force officer, was stationed at Luke in the late 80s. Follow-on squadrons, to include the 62nd, are scheduled to bring in additional partner countries including Italy, Norway, Canada, Turkey and the Netherlands.