



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2015 04 08

NOMADS LOCK AND LOAD IN FIRST F-35A WEAPONS LOAD COMPETITION

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EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- The 33rd Fighter Wing held its first weapons load competition here, April 3, since the 2009 draw down of the F-15C Eagle mission, to determine the best F-35A Lightning II weapons load crew.

Earning the title of the best load crew in the 33 FW was Staff Sgt. Timothy Gaulden, Crew Six load crew chief and his team; Airmen 1st Class John St. Cyr and Jake Wiedmeyer, load crew members.

“It’s a big deal,” said Col. Ron Huzzard, 33rd Maintenance Group commander. “This is another small step in normalizing F-35 operations where we’ve been flying the aircraft for three years and have finally matured to a point where we can have weapons load competitions.”

During weapons load competitions, crews are evaluated on how well they load munitions safely, efficiently and in a timely manner as a team.

“We standardize the process,” said Staff Sgt. Nicholas Egebrecht, 33rd Maintenance Group weapons standardization squadron lead crew chief. “We want everyone to load the same – as fast and efficiently as possible and follow what we set in place here at the 33 FW.”

A uniform inspection, a written test and a quality assurance inspection of the teams’ tool kits is also considered in the score for each crew during the competition.

“Right now, we’re competing within the squadron,” said Egebrecht. “Our next goal, once our process for weapons loads is streamlined, is to compete against squadrons who are already established, like the 96th Test Wing.”

To date, the 33 FW has trained 1,787 F-35 Lightning II maintainers, including 27 weapons load crew members. Similar to U.S. Navy and Marine Corps F-35 Lightning II personnel, Airmen trained here often feed out to other F-35A test, training and operational units across the country.

“We are laying a foundation for initial operational capability,” said Huzzard, “Our weapons personnel are working through the joint technical data that weapons personnel at every F-35 base downstream from us will utilize to load munitions and troubleshoot munition systems on the aircraft.”

The Marine Corps will declare IOC with the F-35B this summer; U.S. Air Force leadership projects the F-35A to reach IOC late 2016, followed by the Navy in 2018 with the F-35C.



Staff Sgt. Timothy Gaulden, 58th Aircraft Maintenance Unit crew one load crew chief, guides a GBU-31 Joint Direct Attack Munition on to an F-35A Lightning II during a weapons load competition on Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, April 3, 2015. Gaulden and his team, Airmen 1st Class John St. Cyr and Jake Wiedmeyer, load crew members, earned the title as best load crew in the 33 FW. (U.S. Air Force Photo/Staff Sgt. Marleah Robertson)