



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## LUKE 1 BRINGS HOME FLAGSHIP

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**LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, AZ** -- The 56th Fighter Wing flagship F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter arrived at Luke Air Force Base Tuesday. That aircraft is the base's 22nd F-35.

Flying the aircraft from Lockheed Martin's Forth Worth, Texas, plant to Arizona was Brig. Gen. Scott Pleus, 56th FW commander. The tail number for the aircraft is 5056 and the last two numbers represent the 56th FW.

"The flagship's arrival is significant for Luke because it serves as a sign of our identity in who we are and what we're here to do," Pleus said. "Next month we'll officially change our mission to training the world's best F-35 and F-16 pilots while deploying mission-ready warfighters. This jet represents the fact that we prepare Airmen to defend our country around the world wherever we're called."

The flagship's arrival coincides with the beginning of the first class of F-35 students that will begin in May. Pleus served as the wing's first official student so he could help refine and validate the training program for future students.

Luke will receive 144 F-35s comprising six squadrons by 2024. The Glendale, Arizona, base now has 20 U.S. F-35s and two from the Royal Australian air force. All 22 aircraft are part of the 61st Fighter Squadron.

The 62nd Fighter Squadron will be the base's second F-35 squadron. It is scheduled to stand up in June and begin flying in September. That unit will host pilots from Norway and Italy. Overall, 11 countries will train at Luke on the Lightning II.

"It's a busy time for Luke, but I couldn't be prouder of the work our Airmen are doing in setting the Air Force up for success," Pleus said. "The arrival of our flagship is another sign the 56th will be looked upon to train the best F-35 pilots for the U.S. and our allies for decades to come, as we've done in the F-16 since 1982.



Brig. Gen. Scott Pleus, 56th Fighter Wing commander, speaks with U.K. and Arizona-based media outlets after landing the flagship F-35 Lightning II at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, April 28, 2015. The flagship's arrival coincides with the start of Luke F-35 student pilot training, which begins in May. Luke now has 20 U.S. F-35s and two from the Royal Australian Air Force. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Devante Williams)