



F-35 Lightning II Program

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F-35S TAKE ON GREEN FLAG 2015

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NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. - F-35A Lightning IIs from the 31st Test and Evaluation Squadron played the U.S. Army's primary close air support platform during the latest iteration of the Green Flag exercise, GF 15-08, as the Air Force's program works toward its goal of declaring initial operational capability by the end of this year. The exercise, conducted ten times annually on the 1,200 square-mile ranges of the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, pits more than 5,000 Army soldiers against simulated enemy forces in a two-week-long pre-deployment trial by fire.

"Green Flag trains us to never become victims of our terrain," said U.S. Army Maj. Ian Lauer, NTC Operations Group operations officer. "It's about understanding the context in which we'll fight and using that understanding to build an aggressive advantage." Working alongside soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, Fort Bliss, Texas, were joint terminal attack controllers assigned to the 7th Air Support Operations Squadron who were tasked with creating and maintaining that vital link between units on the ground and airpower soaring above.

Intelligent adversaries operating on the ground as well as the air, space, and cyberspace realms are constructed to test the soldiers and Airmen on their ability to persist and fight back in joint, multifaceted attacks. During iteration 15-08, two F-35s took on a primary exercise role as the close air support providers, penetrating a contested and degraded battlespace, awaiting calls for fire from ground commanders below.

Developments in the F-35 program remain a high priority for Department of Defense and Air Force leadership alike, as pressure mounts to realize the system's full capabilities. It's a positive that for JTACs and air liaison officers calling shots from the sand, the sleek looking gray triangle darting through the clouds was doing its job effectively - just like those that came before it. "We're working for mass inter-agency effects here," said U.S. Army Col. Matthew Moore, NTC Operations Group deputy commander. "We're glad to have the support of the F-35s here and that it was able to play its role in what is a full team effort." The roles played by the two operational test fighters seem relatively modest when examined within the immense scale of a National Training Center rotation. Fourteen days of maneuvering against adversaries in vast desert mountain ranges makes Green Flag a test of the mind and body alike. But when help from the air was called upon, F-35 pilots from the 31st TES communicated and used their systems with precision.

They created strategic effects that left troops on the ground largely unaware and unconcerned of what airframe they might be using – seamless integration at its finest.