



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2015 09 03

FIRST OPERATIONAL F-35AS ARRIVE AT HILL AFB

The Air Force ushered in a new era of combat air power Sept. 2, 2015, as Hill Air Force Base received the service's first two operational F-35As.

Hill's active-duty 388th Fighter Wing and Reserve 419th Fighter Wing will be the first combat-coded units to fly and maintain the Air Force's newest fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

"Make no mistake, we're built for this. We will deliver the combat capability that our nation so desperately needs to meet tomorrow's threats," 388th Fighter Wing commander, Col. David B. Lyons, told the crowd of Airmen and community members.

Lyons, who flew one of the F-35s to Hill from Lockheed Martin's production facility in Fort Worth, Texas, highlighted the jets' stealth ability, advanced technology, avionics and sensor fusion, which allow pilots the flexibility to operate in "contested environments" and strike "tough to reach" targets.

Hill has been called the "ideal home" for the F-35 because of its proximity to the Utah Test and Training Range and Hill's Ogden Air Logistics Complex, which performs F-35 depot maintenance and modifications. The integration of the active-duty and Reserve fighter wings provides increased flexibility and combat surge capability.

"This is a great day in the history of Hill Air Force Base. We have to have these aircraft to achieve air dominance in the future for the United States," said Col. Bryan Radliff, 419th Fighter Wing commander. "We are extremely proud to be a part of this association."

Since the basing announcement in 2013, Hill has spent more than \$120 million and completed numerous renovation and construction projects to prepare for F-35 operations.

"The reason we're here today is because of our Airmen, civilians, contractors and outstanding community who stood behind us 100 percent," said Col. Ron Jolly, 75th Air Base Wing commander. "We know the capabilities of this aircraft. We are on the cutting edge and we're very proud to be a part of that cutting edge."

The 388th and 419th Fighter wings were also the first units in the Air Force to fly combat-coded F-16s when they entered the fleet.

The wings will receive one to two F-35s per month until 72 aircraft have been delivered.

Airmen at Hill are eager to get their hands on the new jet said Lt. Col. Darrin Dronoff, chief of the F-35 program integration office for the 388th FW.

Both the 388th and 419th have trained F-35 pilots ready to begin flying the new jets, and there are more pilots and maintainers currently in training.

The wings will take a week to familiarize themselves with the aircraft, receive parts and begin tracking the aircraft in a maintenance database.

"The plan is to start flying after Labor Day. We'll start by flying twice a week, but that will slowly progress as we receive more aircraft and training progresses," said Dronoff.

While flying won't start for a week, training for maintainers starts immediately - including the Airmen who will be towing the first aircraft from the ramp to the hangar, Dronoff said.



The first two operational F-35A Lightning II aircraft arrive at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, Sept. 2, 2015. The jets were piloted by Col. David Lyons, 388th Fighter Wing commander, and Lt. Col. Yosef Morris, 34th Fighter Squadron director of operations. Hill will receive up to 70 additional combat-coded F-35s on a staggered basis through 2019. The jets will be flown and maintained by Hill Airmen assigned to the active-duty 388th Fighter Wing and its Reserve component 419th Fighter Wing. (U.S. Air Force photo/Alex R. Lloyd)

"Everyone touching the aircraft is a formally trained F-35 Airman -- hand-selected crews from pilots to maintainers to back-shop people," said Dronoff. "But, we're also training Airmen brand new to the F-35. We're taking advantage of every training opportunity because this is the first time many of them have had their hands on an F-35."

The base will hold a formal ceremony to commemorate the arrival of the F-35 in mid-October.