



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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05 November -- LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Arizona -- Two Italian pilots completed their initial training flight in the F-35 Lightning II Nov. 5 at Luke Air Force Base marking the first F-35 flights under control of an Italian pilot.

Today marks another significant step forward for the F-35 program as today's missions showcased the full partnership aspect of F-35 operations here. One Italian flew his mission in an Australian F-35 with an Air Force Reserve ground instructor on the headset. In addition, the maintenance team was comprised of Lockheed Martin contractors and an Australian maintenance liaison officer.

Two U.S. instructor pilots from the 61st Fighter Squadron flew alongside the Italians, guiding them through their first flight.

"This has been a big day for the 61st, for Luke AFB, and for the F-35 program," said Lt Col Michael Gette, 61st Fighter Squadron commander.

"Every aspect of today's operation was a multinational effort. It was a great example of how all the partner nations are cooperating to make this program a reality and shows how Luke AFB is becoming the international training hub for the F-35."

The international partnerships were on further display as two U.S. student pilots took their first flight as well, one guided by a U.S. instructor pilot and the other by an Australian.

"It is great from an Australian partner perspective to be contributing to the outcome of training F-35 aircrew," said Squadron Leader Nathan Draper, Australian Participant Maintenance Liaison Officer. "To see a USAF IP alongside an Aussie jet with an Italian partner getting his first flight is seeing the vision for the program come to fruition. It is a great day for the F-35 and a big milestone for our team."

The pilots began the academic training phase on Sept. 21, which involved approximately 90 days of classroom and simulator instruction under the supervision of the 56th Training Squadron prior to them stepping to the jet.

"New pilots will be trained in an environment where they learn how to work seamlessly with other nations both from a practical standpoint and a tactical basis," an Italian pilot said. "Future students coming through the course will be able to fly on many different tails, so it is a perfect integration."

When the Italian pilots return home they will be equipped to help develop the training programs of their own air forces and will help pioneer the next generation of global F-35 pilots.



An Italian F-35 Lightning II pilot is met by a 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit Airman November 5, 2015, at Luke Air Force Base after the pilot flew the first Italian F-35 training mission. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Ridge Shan)