



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## LUKE F-35 TEAM COMPETES FOR FIRST TIME IN LOAD CREW COMPETITION

A Luke Air Force Base F-35 Lightning II crew competed for the first time in a load crew competition Dec. 18 against legacy F-16 Fighting Falcon crews. Quarterly load crew competitions showcase the combat readiness and effectiveness of load crew teams to safely and properly arm an aircraft within time constraints to meet mission challenges.

Three-man crews from the 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit, 309th AMU, 310th AMU, and the 425th AMU went head to head to earn the fourth quarter win. The competition provided an opportunity for the crews to demonstrate their ammo-loading skills on both the F-35 and F-16.

"The weapons load competition is a healthy rivalry amongst the aircraft maintenance units to seek out the best of the best within the AMUs," said Master Sgt. James Byers, 61st AMU F-35 weapons section chief. For the 61st AMU team, loading the F-35 is a skill they have been developing since the arrival of the jet, but their skills had not yet been tested against F-16 crews, many of whom have been working on their airframes for years.

"Today, the F-35 load team raised the ante by showing off their skills," Byers said. "It shows how we, as an Air Force, can evolve from the legacy F-16 program to the advanced F-35 program without missing a beat." The competition proved that both airframes at Luke, the F-35 and F-16, have capable crewmembers.

"Every day I watch the F-35 program moving further and further ahead," Byers said. "Being featured in this competition is one more step forward to show the community the F-35 is a technological marvel."

Involvement in this contest was significant for the F-35 program at Luke. "It was great to see the F-35 included in a Luke AFB weapons load competition for the first time," said Lt. Col. Mike Gette, 61st Fighter Squadron commander. "The 61st AMU has put in a lot of hard work and overcome many obstacles to get to this point, and it was awesome to see them in action."

The winning teams from each of the previous quarters will compete on January 22. The winning crew will represent Luke and take on the load crew team from the 49th Maintenance Group at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico. Only one team can take the title and be crowned champions as Weapons Load Crew of the year.

The final competition will be held January 29, 2016 against Holloman. The hard work of the F-35 weapons load crews will be seen during their first weapons drop scheduled to occur early 2016.

"We hope to be dropping weapons here at the Barry M. Goldwater Range a few months from now," Gette said. "Having the F-35 in this competition means we are getting close to achieving that goal. It is also a critical milestone as we help push the F-35 toward Air Force initial operational capability and train pilots for the first operational squadron."



Weapons load crew members from the 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit load an F-35A Lightning II during a load crew competition Dec. 18, 2015, at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. For the first time, the F-35 was used in the competition against the F-16 Fighting Falcon at Luke AFB. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Staci Miller)