



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2016 03 01

RANGERS EXERCISE CAS WITH F-35A

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – Although the U.S. Air Force separated from the U.S. Army on September 18, 1947, the two forces have a long history of working together to dominate the sky and ground in combat.

This tradition continues today with the 3rd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment's recent visit to Eglin to conduct close air support exercises with the F-35A Lightning II. The team members of the 3rd Ranger Battalion are fire support specialists responsible for the intelligence activities of the U.S. Army's field artillery team.

Two F-35A's teamed up with the 3rd Battalion to provide air support against simulated hostile targets in close proximity to the Rangers. One of the capabilities of the F-35 is to provide support to ground forces, to include Joint Terminal Attack Controllers and Joint Fire Observers.



An Army Ranger from the 3rd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment signals an aircraft to his team's position at Hurlburt Field, Fla., Feb. 11, 2016. During this exercise, Rangers radioed coordinates to F-35A Lightning II pilots to simulate close air support. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Andrea Posey)

"[This] was the first time these guys have worked with the F-35A," said Maj. Christopher Collins, a pilot in the 33rd Operations Support Squadron. "It was a great opportunity to share tactics and showcase some of the unique capabilities we have with this jet."

In a CAS mission, Rangers are responsible for setting up and operating communications systems to encode and decode messages, assist in the preparation of fire support plans with target coordinates, operate laser range finders and target devices and determine target locations using computers or manual calculations.

For the Rangers, this exercise allowed them to familiarize themselves with the F-35A and how it can support ground troops in a deployed environment in the future.

"It's important for a special operations task force to understand the capabilities of assets available and how they can be employed prior to arriving in theater," said a 3rd Ranger Battalion soldier. "This [exercise] will maximize the effectiveness of the aircraft and our task force when it goes into active service. Additionally it allows us to provide intelligent feedback to senior leadership on what will make the plane more effective in CAS mission set."

After the exercise, Collins reiterated the importance of training in a joint environment to maximize the capabilities of the joint force.

"It really shouldn't matter which aircraft [or] branch of service is acting as the controlling party," said Collins. "The common guidelines of the joint doctrine allow us to operate seamlessly across a broad spectrum of different scenarios in the safest, most efficient manner."

The soldiers said the exercise was successful because it allowed them to test the capabilities and limitations of the jet as a part of their mission set.

"The F-35 was designed to fight in a different environment, specifically an environment we could face if hostilities broke out in another portion of the world. Assuming we would be among the first there, this would be critical information," said a U.S. Army Ranger. "Along with that, we learned what other assets and capabilities we would need to augment the F-35 on our current missions to meet our commander's intent."

As the F-35 progresses to initial operational capabilities, the aircraft and its Airmen continue train to execute suppression and destruction of enemy air defenses, air interdiction missions and basic close air support.