



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2016 03 16

LUKE F-35S DROP FIRST WEAPONS

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Arizona --

The F-35A Lightning II program took another step toward initial operational capability yesterday when two aircraft assigned to the 62nd Fighter Squadron successfully employed four laser-guided bombs on the Barry M. Goldwater Range.

This marked the first weapons release by F-35s assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing at Luke Air Force Base.

"Yesterday we were able to execute one of the primary missions of this multi-role fighter and successfully employ air to ground weapons," said Lt. Col. Gregory Frana, 62nd Fighter Squadron commander. "As we execute the mission of training the world's greatest F-35 pilots it is critical we make our training as realistic as possible."

Maj. Matthew Strongin, 62nd Fighter Squadron weapons chief, was one of two pilots who employed the GBU-12s at the range.

"The training focus at Luke has shifted," Strongin said. "The previous years centered on building instructor pilot cadre. We are now focused on producing combat capable warfighters for the front-line fighter squadrons in the Air Force and our partner nations. Dropping full-scale munitions are a significant step forward for Luke's instructors and students."

This new capacity gives all of Luke's F-35 instructor and student pilots an opportunity to experience realistic training.

"All of our instructor pilots will have the opportunity in the coming weeks to experience weapons employment from the aircraft," Strongin said. "Also, every graduate will experience dropping a 500 pound bomb before leaving here."

Luke celebrated the two year anniversary of receiving the F-35 one day before the weapon's drop.

"Two short years ago we hadn't flown a single F-35 sortie here," Frana said. "Now we've flown more than 4,000 sorties, trained pilots from the U.S., Australia, Italy, and Norway and are executing training for the software that will provide the IOC for the U.S."

This mission follows the Feb. 25 employment of laser-guided bombs by combat-coded F-35As from the 388th Fighter Wing at Hill AFB, Utah, and the March 3 employment from the 33rd Fighter Wing at Eglin AFB, Florida.

The 56th FW serves as the primary training facility for the F-35A, training USAF pilots as well as pilots from our partner nations.



Weapons load crew members from the 62nd Aircraft Maintenance Unit load laser-guided bombs onto an F-35 Lightning II March 11, 2016 at Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. The F-35A Lightning II program took another step toward initial operational capability yesterday when two aircraft assigned to the 62nd Fighter Squadron successfully employed four laser guided bombs on the Barry M. Goldwater Range. The maintenance load crew team was comprised of Lockheed Martin contractors. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Senior Airman Devante Williams)