



F-35 Lightning II Program

Public Affairs Release – 2016 07 01

Luke begins F-35 MRA course

Luke Air Force Base, Arizona -- Five Airmen are a little closer to becoming F-35A Lightning II crew chiefs as Luke began its first F-35 Lightning II Mission-Ready Airmen training class June 30.

"It's exciting to be the first F-35 MRA class at Luke," said Airman Kyle George, Detachment 12 F-35 MRA student. "It's a unique experience to be on the cutting edge."

This course is the final step following months of training. After completing Basic Military Training, the students headed to Sheppard AFB, Texas, for aircraft fundamentals with the 362nd Training Squadron. Then it was on to Eglin, for F-35-specific training with the 359th Training Squadron. Now, they are at Luke under the 372nd Training Squadron, Det. 12, to test their ability to apply their training in an operational environment.



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"We're here to give them actual hands on F-35 training, take them out to the flightline and show them the ins-and-outs of how to maintain this aircraft," said Master Sgt. Gabriel Sistrunk, Det. 12 chief. "Out of 34 days, two or three will be in the classroom and the rest of the time is going to be out working at the 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit."

Staff Sgt. Arthur Verchot, Det. 12 F-35 MRA instructor, spent time at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., teaching the F-35 MRA students there and brings his experience to the Luke team.

"We will see a vast change in the Airmen as the course progresses," Verchot said. "This will be the first time they've seen the F-35 up close. It's normal for them to be nervous or timid at first, but we get to see them change and evolve into great maintainers. When they leave here, they will be launching, recovering and servicing F-35s. They'll be in the center of the Air Force mission."

Maintenance training for the F-35 is as advanced as the aircraft itself.

"Compared to other airframes, the maintenance time for the F-35 is cut in half," Verchot said. "We're able to hook a computer to the jet, and it lets us know what's going on and what we need to repair it."

The Airmen will eventually be tasked with keeping F-35s in the air, but for now, their mission is to learn as much as possible.

"It's really great to finally get to put my hands on the jet, launch them out and see them actually fly," George said. "The F-35 is the biggest, baddest, newest thing we have in the Air Force. It's pretty special to be part of the program."

Luke is currently only housing one F-35 MRA class but is scheduled to run six classes at a time and graduate 200 to 300 students a year.