



F-35 Lightning II Program

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Luke activates 3rd F-35 Squadron

Luke Air Force Base, Arizona -- Lt. Col. Matthew Vedder, previously 62nd Fighter Squadron director of operations, officially assumed command of the 63rd FS in a ceremony conducted on the flightline Aug. 1, 2016, at Luke Air Force Base.

The 63rd FS will train F-35 Lightning II fighter pilots as a joint international effort between Turkey and the United States. Turkish and American pilots will fly both Turkish and American F-35s under the guidance of American instructor pilots.

“This partnership for Turkey and the United States to train together exists because we fight together,” Vedder said. “This cooperation improves both of our capabilities and allows us to produce a stronger joint multinational coalition force whenever and wherever called upon.”

Vedder is an experienced F-35 and A-10 fighter pilot with over 2,000 flight hours including combat deployments to both Afghanistan and Iraq. He assumes command of the 63rd FS after having served more than a year as the DO of the 62nd FS, for which he was responsible for planning, executing and supervising every aspect of flight and ground training operations.

“Lt. Col. Vedder is a combat-proven warrior and is one of the best fighter pilots and instructors in the world,” said Col. Benjamin Bishop, 56th Operations Group commander. “He is an outstanding officer who has already made strategic impacts on the Air Force. He is the perfect leader for the 63rd FS.”

Like the 63rd, the 62nd and 61st fighter squadrons train an international cadre of F-35 pilots from partner nations like Norway, Italy and Australia. With its activation, the 63rd joins the 62nd and 61st as one of three dedicated F-35 training squadrons at Luke.

“The 63rd has a distinct heritage that has been a proud part of the 56th Fighter Wing since World War II,” said Bishop. “At Luke, we serve a vital role in the F-35 enterprise. We train the world’s greatest F-35 pilots, both from America and from our coalition partners. Building the future of airpower is right in line with the types of accomplishments the 63rd has seen in the past. Today simply marks another moment in the heritage of our Airmen.”

Three more squadrons are slated to join the fighter wing by 2022 as Luke’s F-35 fleet expands towards its goal of 144 jets. After its transition is complete, Luke will maintain its status as the largest F-35 training base in the world.



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