



F-35 Lightning II Program

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33rd FW completes record number of sorties with F-35A

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. -- Members of the 33rd Fighter Wing set a new record of 111 sorties over three days during a sortie surge Aug. 1-3 here.

The purpose of a sortie surge is to test the readiness of maintainers, pilots and aircraft to meet the needs of high-tempo operations.

"Thanks to the Nomads for their tremendous work this week," Col. Lance Pilch, 33rd FW commander said. "This surge not only provided numerous training flights in a short amount of time but also exercised rapid sortie generation, which is critical in certain combat scenarios."

To complete the surge maintainers from the 33rd Maintenance Squadron and 58th Aircraft Maintenance Unit worked extra hours in the Florida heat and rain to make sure safe and reliable jets were ready for 33rd FW pilots to complete their mission.



"For this particular event we expanded our shifts to 12 hours in an effort to put maximum coverage on each shift," Master Sgt. Christopher Bennett, 58th AMU lead production superintendent said. "During a surge you are going to put the throttle down and people are going to put in more hours and they are going to work harder. The end result is that you produce a massive number of sorties at the end of the day.

"What we have learned from this week is that the maintainers and pilots stepped up and they were ready."

The surge took place the same week that the F-35A was declared ready for combat by Gen. Hawk Carlisle, commander of Air Combat Command, Aug. 2.

"How the aircraft responds to an increased tempo will really give you a feel for where the jet is as far as readiness," Bennet said. "What we are doing today and the success we have had over the past three days solidifies the (initial operating capability) announcement."

The 33rd FW has supported the training of more than 3,000 F-35 maintainers, trained more than 250 pilots, flown more than 11,300 hours and completed more than 7,600 sorties that have contributed to the F-35A moving to IOC.

"As current threats evolve and new threats emerge, this aircraft will become more and more important to our national security," Pilch said. "(33rd FW members) played a vital role in getting us to IOC, and will continue to play a vital role as we move forward."