



F-35 Lightning II Program

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Luke receives Air Force's 100th F-35 on heels of IOC announcement, unit activation

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. (AFNS) -- The F-35 Lightning II program took another huge step forward Aug. 26 when the Air Force's 100th F-35, designated AF-100, arrived here following the recent announcement of the fifth-generation jet fighter's initial operational capability.

"This marks a milestone and shows the fact that the F-35 program has continued to grow, progress and support initial operational capability," said Brig. Gen. Brook Leonard, the 56th Fighter Wing commander. "It is also a 'scare factor' for our enemies that we are able to produce such an incredible platform at such a high production rate and that it's getting out in the field in larger and larger numbers."



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Luke Air Force Base received its first F-35 in March 2014 and developed the training and tactics for the program. The fleet has since grown to more than 40 F-35s at the base, including those of partner nations such as Australia and Norway. The base also recently activated its third F-35 unit -- the 63rd Fighter Squadron.

"A lot of people put the blood, sweat and tears into making sure we could have an agreement with the community that would allow us to train and continue to produce the future of airpower," Leonard said. "Standing up the third squadron marks the halfway point as we grow up to six squadrons. It also comes with the heritage of the 63rd, which is incredible, and to be able to see that take new form in the shape of a Lightning aircraft is phenomenal."

From the first training sortie on May 5, 2014, to the arrival of the first partner-nation F-35 on Dec. 18, 2014, and more recently beginning its first-ever F-35 mission-ready Airmen training class for maintainers, Luke AFB is no stranger to F-35 milestones.

"Last year we began U.S. Air Force and partner pilot training at Luke AFB in Arizona, where a blend of U.S. and partner instructor pilots are helping to train U.S. Air Force and other partner pilots," Lt. Gen. Christopher Bogdan, F-35 Joint Program Executive Officer, said during an April 26 hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee.

As Luke AFB continues to perfect F-35 training, the Air Force has moved beyond training with the Aug. 2 announcement of the fighter's IOC accomplishment.

"The Air Force is now receiving F-35As at Hill AFB in Utah," Bogdan said.

With the reception of the 100th F-35, Luke AFB is quickly transitioning to the only active-duty Air Force F-35 training base, providing the world's greatest F-35 fighter pilots to the new operational squadrons and eventually to combat.

"The F-35 is going to be the backbone of the fighter fleet in the United States Air Force and for our partner nations," Leonard said. "There are going to be more F-35s than any other fighter platform, and all that training starts right here at Luke AFB."