



F-35 Lightning II Program

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Luke F-35 pilots enhance capabilities at Mountain Home AFB

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE -- Seven Luke F-35s are at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, September 10 through 24, 2016, for pilot training. While this is not the first time Mountain Home AFB has supported F-35s, it is the first time the base has supported Air Education and Training Command pilot training.

“The main objective of this training deployment was to increase our instructor pilots' proficiency in finding and destroying surface-to-air threats, which is a bread-and-butter mission for the F-35,” said Lt. Col. Michael Gette, 61st Fighter Squadron commander. “Mountain Home AFB provides a unique opportunity for this training due to their outstanding range complex, which includes several surface-to-air threats we can ‘fight’ in increasingly complex scenarios.”



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The success of the Mountain Home AFB training deployment was dependent on many Airmen. There were approximately 100 personnel participating in the exercise, including 80 maintainers and 15 pilots as well as seven contractors who helped with mission planning and security, according to Gette.

In addition to sharpening the pilots' warfighting skills, aircrew had the opportunity to practice a deployment-style scenario with a partner nation.

“This was the first F-35 training deployment to include partner pilots,” Gette said. “Being able to deploy and train with our Royal Australian Air Force partners was an important step for the squadron and for the program as we continue to stand-up partner training at Luke AFB.”

While the RAAF has had F-35s at Luke AFB since December 2014, this mission was an important joint experience.

“The Mountain Home deployment provided an opportunity to improve F-35 operator knowledge and skills while working hand in hand with our U.S. Air Force colleagues,” said Squadron Leader Andrew Jackson, 61st FS RAAF Senior National Representative. “Opportunities such as these provide invaluable stepping stones in building a solid fifth generation, warfighting capability for the RAAF. As the first partner nation to arrive and train at Luke AFB, the opportunity to deploy to Mountain Home AFB with AETC is an exceptional training opportunity as we work toward our own IOC in 2020.”

The trip to Mountain Home AFB ultimately met the goals they set out to achieve.

“The Mountain Home Range Complex gave us a really unique opportunity to train against multiple surface-to-air threats,” Gette said. “We appreciate Mountain Home AFB and the support from the community for their very warm welcome. We got everything we needed and the training deployment went very well.”