461st FLTS tests U.K. weapons for F-35B

The 461st Flight Test Squadron recently conducted weapon delivery accuracy tests with two United Kingdom weapons. The weapons were released from a U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II, short takeoff/vertical landing variant, which will also be used by Great Britain’s Royal Air Force.

The U.K. weapons used for the test were the AIM-132 ASRAAM (Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile) and Paveway IV guided bomb.

The 461st FLTS is responsible for the execution of all mission systems developmental testing for U.K. F-35Bs.

According to the Royal Air Force, the ASRAAM is a short-range, infrared-guided missile capable of flying at Mach 3 and is also carried by the RAF’s Eurofighter Typhoons and Panavia Tornado GR4s.

The Paveway IV replaces the U.K.-built Paveway II and is an advanced and highly accurate, state-of-the-art precision guided bomb. It’s an all-weather bomb with inertial navigation and GPS-guided bombing capabilities that is used by RAF and Royal Navy fighters.

Collin O’Fallon, F-35 weapon integration engineer, said two tests have been conducted with the Paveway IV. The first test was executed at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake and was a laser-mode employment of the guided bomb against a tank on the ground. The second test was conducted over Edwards Air Force Base’s Precision Impact Range Area to test the bomb’s GPS/inertial navigation employment against a tank.

“The two Paveway IV live-fires represent full end-to-end weapon-aircraft integration tests for these two significant use cases of this weapon’s employment modes,” said O’Fallon.

On Feb. 24, one U.K. AIM-132 ASRAAM was fired at an unmanned drone over the Point Mugu, California, Sea Range.

“The purpose of the test was to verify that the F-35 system could be used to target and engage an air target with an ASRAAM,” said Max Heald, 461st FLTS, F-35 weapon integration engineer. “The test also verified that the F-35 properly communicated to the missile and gave it everything it needed to prosecute a target.”

Heald added the data collected in the test provided evidence to the weapon supplier they could use to certify AIM-132 ASRAAM carriage on the F-35B.

The 461st FLTS and Joint Strike Fighter Integrated Test Force conducts developmental testing and evaluation for all three variants of the F-35 Lightning II.