



F-35 Lightning II Program

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First Operational F-35A Squadron Receives Final Aircraft

By Donovan K. Potter, 388th Fighter Wing

HILL AIR FORCE BASE, Utah -- The 388th Fighter Wing accepted its 23rd and 24th combat-coded F-35A Lightning IIs last week.

June 21st's addition means the 34th Fighter Squadron and 34th Aircraft Maintenance Unit have their full component of operational jets.

"Gaining the 24th F-35A here is another outstanding milestone for the 388th and 419th wings," said Col Jason Rueschhoff, 388th Operations Group commander. "This allows both operations and maintenance to fine-tune our tactics, techniques, and procedures with a focus on maximizing our combat lethality."

This is a pivotal point for combat-capability development said Col. Michael Miles, 388th Maintenance Group commander.

"Having the full number of aircraft in one FS/AMU means we'll soon receive our full personnel and equipment," Miles said. "This allows us to meet all potential combat tasking's."

The 388th Fighter Wing received its first F-35A in Nov. 2015.

Since that time, the unit has been developing the best tactics, techniques and procedures – shaping how the F-35A operates in the Air Force, said Capt. Christina Merritt, 34th AMU officer in charge.

Merritt said receiving the 24th aircraft will help push the threshold and help them further test the limits of the F-35A.

A total of 78 jets will be delivered to two additional F-35A squadrons in the 388th Fighter Wing through the end of 2019.

The 4th FS and the 4th AMU are expected to receive the next F-35A this summer.

Staff Sgt. Zachary Kasperek, 34th AMU crew chief, said he is proud to be part of the Air Force's newest platform.

I know this jet is going to be around for a long time and it's pretty special to be a member of the unit that is leading the way with the F-35A's success, Kasperek said.



A U.S. Air Force F-35A fighter pilot flies over the Atlantic Ocean for the aircraft's first transatlantic flight June 30, 2016. The F-35A is a part of the Air Combat Command Air Force Heritage Flight Team, which flew to Fairford, England, for the Royal International Air Tattoo. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Natasha Stannard)



Wing receives 24th Jet

Master Sgt. Rawleigh Smith and Airman 1st Class Matthew Clark, both with the 34th Aircraft Maintenance Unit; stretch the engine cover across the 388th Fighter Wing's 24th aircraft assigned to the 34th Fighter Squadron / 34th AMU Wednesday. The 24th aircraft is significant because it completes the first full F-35A squadron at an operational unit. (U.S. Air Force photo/Donovan K Potter)