



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## External pylon training increases F-35A weapons payload capability

*By Donovan K. Potter, 388th Fighter Wing*

**HILL AIR FORCE BASE, Utah** -- Active duty and Reserve Airmen here recently initiated certification training to load external pylons on F-35A Lightning IIs assigned to the 388th Fighter Wing.

The removable pylons are used to secure external munitions under the aircraft's wings, greatly enhancing its combat capability.

As a multi-role stealth fighter, the F-35A can be configured to suit a variety of missions. The jet is designed to carry up to 18,000 pounds of munitions on 11 internal and external weapons stations depending on mission requirements.

Until now, maintainers and pilots have been training operationally here with internally-loaded munitions. Mounting the external pylons for the first time operationally is another important milestone in completing our combat capability blueprint, said Col. Michael Miles, 388th Maintenance Group commander.

"Increased weapons payload capability helps the F-35A become the weapons delivery platform of choice for combatant commanders," Miles said. "It places the Air Force's only combat capable F-35A unit at the forefront of planning for future combat operations."

The jets won't employ weapons from the pylons until the "Block 3F" aircraft software upgrade is fielded later this year.

"This training is vital to identifying technical issues with installation procedures that may not have (already) been identified," said Master Sgt. Christopher Hilliard, 388th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

This training provided F-35A maintainers the opportunity to change the jet's configuration before they're required to do it in combat or an environment with a high-operations tempo and will provide insight for future operational units across the Air Force, Hilliard said.

The 388th FW at Hill AFB currently has 24 F-35A Lightning IIs. A total of 78 jets will be delivered to the wing through 2019.



Weapons load crews from the 388th Fighter Wing's 34th Aircraft Maintenance Unit initiated certification training at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, July 7, 2017, to load external pylons on F-35As. The removable pylons are used to secure external munitions under the aircraft's wings enhancing its combat capability. The jet is designed to carry up to 18,000 pounds of munitions on 11 internal and external weapons stations depending on mission requirements. (U.S. Air Force photo/Donovan K. Potter).