



F-35 Lightning II Program

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Australia's Defense Chief visits Luke Air Force Base

Air Chief Marshal visits RAAF personnel there for training, reminisces flying alongside US pilots in Middle East



Australia's first two F-35A aircraft were delivered to the international F-35A Pilot Training Centre at Luke AFB in December 2014 for pilot and maintainer training.

LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz. -- The Chief of the Defence Force took a trip down memory lane in September when he visited Royal Australian Air Force personnel training on the F-35A Lightning II aircraft at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona.

Air Chief Marshal, ACM Mark Binskin, who flew F-16C aircraft at Luke AFB while on exchange with the U.S. Air Force in the 1980s, met with the team of maintainers and pilots working hard in the lead-up to the arrival of the first two aircraft in Australia in December 2018.

ACM Binskin said training alongside U.S. personnel reinforced his belief that Australia and the U.S. had shared values and could "rely on each other as true friends".

"Training together over the decades has built close bonds, beyond just mutual understanding," ACM Binskin said.

"The benefits of our relationship were obvious during my three Middle East deployments and having flown alongside U.S. forces on operations.

"Even today, 65 years after our friendship was formalised with an Alliance, our relationship continues to adapt to contemporary security challenges, like the cooperation between our respective nations as we work together to introduce the fifth-generation F-35 aircraft."

The Australians training at Luke AFB are fully embedded with 61st Fighter Squadron. While visiting the base, ACM Binskin also took the opportunity to meet with the U.S. command team hosting the Australians, including the Commanding Officer of 61st Fighter Squadron, Lt. Col. Rhett Hierlmeier, and the Commander of 56th Fighter Wing, Brig. Gen. Brook Leonard.

The Senior National Representative at Luke AFB, Wing Commander Darren Clare, said CDF's visit was well received by both Australian and U.S. personnel.

"It was great that CDF took time out from his busy schedule to meet with RAAF personnel and their families during his visit to the U.S.," WGCDR Clare said.

“We showed the Chief the facilities at the 61st Fighter Squadron and the simulators at the Aircrew Training Centre. Together, these two units perform a similar role to our planned No. 2 Operational Conversion Unit, currently being built at RAAF Base Williamtown for F-35A training.

“He also got a close-up look at the 61st Aircraft Maintenance Unit where our maintainers work side-by-side with the Americans.”

The Australian Government has approved the purchase of 72 F-35A aircraft, along with the associated weapons, enabling systems, support equipment and infrastructure.

Australia’s first two F-35A aircraft were delivered to the international F-35A Pilot Training Centre at Luke AFB in December 2014 for pilot and maintainer training. So far, six Australian pilots are qualified on the F-35A, while the first cadre of 25 maintainers has been training in the U.S. since February 2017.

Australia’s next eight aircraft will be delivered in 2018. Six of these will operate as part of the pool of aircraft at the PTC, and two will be ferried to Australia late next year for permanent basing at Williamtown and for commencement of Australia’s F-35A verification and validation program in early 2019.

Australia remains on schedule to achieve F-35A Initial Operating Capability in late 2020.

F-35A - THE WORLD'S ONLY 5TH GENERATION MULTIROLE FIGHTER

THE MOST CAPABLE & EFFECTIVE

- Advanced Stealth
- Exceptional Maneuverability
- State-of-the-Art Multi-Spectral Sensor Suite
- Advanced Closed Loop Sensor Data Fusion
- Counters 21st-Century Threats

The F-35 can Securely Share Information:

- To the Ground
- In the Air
- At Sea

THE F-35 BRINGS TO AUSTRALIA

- High-Tech Manufacturing Jobs
- \$550+ Million in Contracts
- 15 Australian Companies Actively Building

DID YOU KNOW?

- Some 72 F-35A's will transition into the RAAF in the next few years
- Australia's first two F-35A's, AU-1 and AU-2 delivered in 2014 and are now training pilots at Luke AFB
- The F-35 program will sustain high-technology manufacturing jobs across the country for decades to come

Graphic courtesy of Lockheed Martin

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