



F-35 Lightning II Program

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California Air Force Pilot Becomes First Woman to Complete F-35 Test Mission

By Lauren Kent, CNN

When Maj. Rachael Winiacki's fighter jet took off from California's Edwards Air Force Base in December, it was a routine flight. But by the time she landed, she had made history.

Winiacki became the first female pilot to complete an F-35 test mission.

"I am grateful for the women who have broken barriers previously, they built the path," Winiacki said in a statement. "I look forward to the day when sorties like this are a regular occurrence."

Winiacki said aviation tends to be a male-dominated field, but the number of women who do flight tests is increasing.

"I may be the first female developmental test pilot (in the F-35), but (pilots) are just one small part of the test enterprise," said Winiacki, adding that her California squadron also has female test directors, engineers and maintenance workers.



Maj. Rachael Winiacki, left, and crew chief Airman 1st Class Heather Rice after the test flight.

There was also a female crew chief for the historic flight, Airman 1st Class Heather Rice.

Making test flight history is just the latest of Winiacki's accomplishments. She previously flew A-10 jets with deployments in Southwest Asia, Eastern Europe and the Pacific. More recently, she graduated from the US Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base and test-piloted F-16 aircrafts.

"Maj. Winiacki's accomplishments are exactly why we continue to be at the center of the aerospace testing universe," said Brig. Gen. E. John Teichert, commander of the 412th Test Wing, which conducts all aircraft and weapons systems testing for the Air Force. "Breaking barriers is what we do."