

## F-35 Lightning II Arrives at Luke AFB

Luke Air Force Base is located just west of Phoenix, Arizona, not too far from the Milwaukee Brewers baseball Spring Training site. It is the air base at which Wisconsin's Major Richard I. Bong earned his pilot's wings in 1941 before going on to become the all time leading U.S. fighter ace. Luke has been training fighter pilots since World War II and recently received its first F-35A *Lightning II*, Joint Strike Fighter, to continue its mission of training fighter pilots and maintenance technicians. The primary aircraft at Luke for the past 30 years has been the F-16 and it is expected that the F-35 will be around for at least that long.

The first of 144 planned F-35s for Luke AFB arrived on March 10, 2014. This F-35 has been assigned to the 61<sup>st</sup> Fighter Squadron, which was reactivated in October 2013 for its new F-35 training mission. Nicknamed "Top Dogs," the 61<sup>st</sup> not only traces its history back to World War 2 when it served in Europe but also to its service as a Cold War fighter interceptor squadron based at Madison's Truax Field from 1957 to 1960. The 61<sup>st</sup> then flew the supersonic F-102 *Delta Dagger*.

To celebrate the arrival of the first F-35A and the continuation of the base's training mission, Luke's 56<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing hosted a formal F-35 unveiling ceremony on March 14. It was attended by about 500 civilian and military personnel, including local civic leaders and supporters of the base – as well as the guest of honor: Luke's new F-35A, tail number 11-5030.

Speakers at this ceremony included Undersecretary of the Air Force, Eric Fanning; Arizona Governor Jan Brewer; Arizona Congressman Trent Franks; General Robin Rand, Commander, Air Education and Training Command; Brig. General Michael Rothstein, Commander, 56<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing; and Lorraine Martin, Lockheed-Martin Aeronautics F-35 Program Vice President and General Manager.

The unveiling ceremony on Friday was followed by a weekend open house and air show at which the U. S. Air Force Thunderbirds put on their first official air show demonstration of the 2014 season. Also flying for the air show attendees was the Lockheed-Martin F-35A *Lightning II*, accompanied by its World War 2 namesake, a vintage Lockheed P-38 *Lightning*.

The weekend open house attracted an estimated 360,000 people. Many undoubtedly came to see the F-35 and the beginning of a new chapter at Luke AFB.



*F-16C, Thunderbird 3, piloted by Major Caroline Jensen of River Falls, Wisconsin, returns to its parking space after Saturday's air show demonstration. Major Jensen flies the right wing position in the diamond formation.*



*The first F-35A for Luke AFB's 56<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, Unveiling Celebration, March 14, 2014.*

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