



# PRESS RELEASE

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### **Luke AFB selected for F-35A pilot training**

**LUKE AIR FORCE BASE, Ariz.** – It's official, the F-35 is coming to Luke.

Air Force Secretary Michael Donley announced today that Luke AFB has been chosen as the location of the Air Force's F-35A Lightning II pilot training center. The base will receive 72 aircraft for a total of three fighter squadrons.

"This is a great day for Luke," said Brig. Gen. JD Harris, 56th Fighter Wing commander. "Our selection for F-35 training ensures the long-term viability of our mission of training the world's greatest fighter pilots, which we've been doing at Luke for seven decades."

The F-35, manufactured by Lockheed Martin, is a fifth-generation fighter aircraft intended to be the Air Force's premier strike aircraft through the first half of the 21st Century. It is a multirole fighter that is expected to eventually phase out the service's F-16s and A-10s.

Aircraft will begin to arrive at Luke between late 2013 to mid-2014, although exact timing will depend on production schedules. Construction on base to prepare for the aircraft, however, is expected to start almost immediately.

The Record of Decision cited several reasons why Luke was the service's top choice, including facility and ramp capacity, range access, weather, as well as capacity for future growth.

“We’re the envy of the Air Force when it comes to community support,” said Rusty Mitchell, director of Luke’s Community Initiatives Team. “While there has been development that’s grown out toward Luke, the community has made every effort to ensure that the growth has been compatible with our mission. We cannot thank our West Valley neighbors enough for letting us be part of the community, not just in the community.”

In addition to training U.S. pilots, Luke will also serve as an F-35A International Partner Training site.

“The Air Force is committed to training our U.S. and partner nation pilots on this fifth-generation fighter aircraft,” said Gen. Norton Schwartz, Air Force Chief of Staff. “Collaborative training on aircraft designed with stealth, maneuverability and integrated avionics will better prepare our combined forces to assume multi-role missions for the future of tactical aviation.”

The decision culminates a nearly three-year process that included an extensive Environmental Impact Statement that examined impacts on air quality, noise, land use and socioeconomic issues. The analysis was required in order to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and to help decision makers understand items of interest to the public and other federal and state agencies.

“The Air Force was very diligent in this process,” Mitchell said. “It was a very open, transparent and repeatable process that was done the same at all the candidate bases.”

Even as Team Luke prepares to open a new chapter, Harris said, the 56th Fighter Wing remains focused on its current mission: Training the world’s greatest F-16 fighter pilots and maintainers while deploying mission-ready warfighters.