



F-35 Lightning II Program

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FIRST OPERATIONAL F-35 PILOTS, MAINTAINERS ATTEND TRANSITION TRAINING

By: Ensign Lisa Lill

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla. – The first two operational Marine fighter pilots from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 (VMFA 121) attended F-35 transition training at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., from September 17 through November 20.

Lt Col Jeffrey Scott, VMFA 121 commanding officer, and Capt Robert Guyette, VMFA 121 training officer, were selected to the F-35 program through a rigorous application process. They have extensive flight experience in the AV-8B Harrier II and F/A -18 Hornet respectively.

The transition training is comprised of instructor led and hands-on training on F-35 systems, safety and software. The training systems at Eglin blend traditional courseware with electronic classrooms, simulators, flight events and event-based maintenance training.

Prior to their first flight both pilots completed simulator training and safety inspections. The simulators contain actual F-35 software to provide students the most realistic experience possible. Once the pilots successfully completed these events they transitioned to flying the aircraft.

“The unique aspect of the flight training is that the F/A-18 Hornet and AV-8B Harrier II have two-seater models for training. The F-35 only has single seat aircraft so you’re alone in the aircraft with the instructor as your wingman,” said Guyette.

In addition to pilot training, several maintainers from VMFA-121 are attending training at the Academic Training Center and Field Training Detachment at Eglin. Upon successful completion of this training, the maintainers will receive their F-35 military occupational specialty (MOS). The MOS allows maintainers to perform maintenance on the aircraft.



Yuma's second F-35B, BF-20, flown by Maj. Aric Liberman, a pilot with the new squadron, arrives at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma's flight line following the re-designation ceremony for Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, Nov. 20. The Green Knights, formerly an F/A-18 Hornet squadron, is the Marine Corps' first operational F-35 squadron. This ceremony marks an important milestone for the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense as the F-35 progresses from a testing and training aircraft towards full-scale tactical aviation operations.

First Marine Operational F-35 Pilots, Maintainers Attend Transition Training

“VMFA- 121 is the first organic F-35 squadron that will maintain the aircraft with Marines,” said Scott.

Upon completion of the schools at Eglin, pilots and maintainers will remain in a continuous learning environment with access to all training courseware, applications and deployable training devices.

The next block of pilot training is scheduled to begin November 3 at Eglin. Maintenance training is ongoing.