

Air Force F-35As Fly to Nellis for Red Flag

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Airmen prepare an F-35A for launch at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The 33rd Fighter Wing sent 7 F-35As and more than 120 personnel to Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., for Exercise Red Flag 17-3, which will also be attended by US Marine Corps F-35Bs (USAF photo)

EGLIN AFB, FL. - Seven F-35A Lightning II and more than 120 personnel from the 33rd Fighter Wing departed from Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., for Red Flag 17-3 July 6, 2017.

Red Flag is the Air Force's premier international air-to-air combat training exercise that provides a realistic environment to train participants in a variety of domains: air, ground, space and cyberspace. This U.S.-only iteration will have 10 units participating between the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.

As an Air Education and Training Command unit responsible for training F-35 pilots, the 33rd FW is approaching the exercise as an opportunity to improve upon their tactics, techniques and procedures, while sharing information with sister service units.

"This is going to make our instructors better so they can train the next generation of F-35 pilots," said Col. Ryan Suttlemyre, 33rd Operations Group commander and Red Flag Air Expeditionary Wing vice commander.

The exercise will mark the first time Air Force F-35s will integrate with the Marine Corps' F-35Bs during a combat exercise. This interaction ensures the services are flying with standardized F-35 tactics across the fleet and share best-practices.

"The Air Force, Navy and Marines are all flying the same aircraft," Suttlemyre said. "Because of our interaction at Red Flag, when we start presenting forces and deploying F-35s, planners will understand how to employ these aircraft, regardless of which command they are a part of."

Likewise, aircrews from other platforms will have the opportunity to refine their operations alongside the F-35. This provides combatant commanders with combat-ready pilots who are better prepared to operate in a joint environment.

"We are going to make the rest of the combat air forces better," Suttlemyre said. "[Y]oung aircrews from other platforms that have never operated beside F-35s will have the chance to learn the aircraft's capabilities, which will help them to understand how they will integrate with the jet in the future."