



– News Release –

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TODAY'S ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE TO ASSIGN THREE ADDITIONAL F-35 SQUADRONS AT LUKE AFB IS GREAT NEWS FOR THE WEST VALLEY, STATE

GLENDALE, Ariz. – Officials from West Valley cities and community groups as well as state and federal leaders are thrilled with today's announcement by the Department of Defense that Luke Air Force Base will receive three additional squadrons of the Air Force's new F-35A Lightning II fighter jet.

With today's announcement, Luke AFB will now have more F-35A's assigned to its base in Glendale than any other installation in the Air Force. The announcement also paves the way for Luke to have a total of six squadrons totaling 144 F-35A jets when the base fully transitions to an F-35A training center over the next several years. The Air Force plans to phase out and eventually replace its aging fleet of F-16s with the new, more technology advanced F-35A.

"The West Valley communities remained unified and worked so hard together over the past several years to help bring the F-35 to Luke, so we are ecstatic about today's news," said Glendale Mayor Jerry Weiers.

"Allocating these additional squadrons of Joint Strike Fighters to Luke more than a year before the Air Force was scheduled to make this decision validates that Luke is the premier site to train our nation's top pilots and crew members on our next generation fighter."

The first three F-35A squadrons are scheduled to begin arriving at Luke AFB next year.

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The Department of Defense's announcement comes almost one year after Luke was selected as the new training center for the F-35A, which is the Air Force's version of the military's new stealth fighter that will also be used by the Navy and Marines.

After completing a lengthy environmental study last summer, Air Force officials decided to initially assign only three F-35A squadrons at Luke even though the study indicated the base could accommodate six squadrons. At that time, the plan was for the Air Force to have until December 2014 to decide where to add three more F-35 training squadrons. One squadron is made up of 24 aircraft and several hundred support personnel.

Fighter Country Partnership Chairman David Scholl believes today's announcement was based on the widespread community support generated by a nearly three-year-long *Luke Forward* campaign.

"*Luke Forward* clearly elevated Arizona from other states where the Air Force was also considering placing these additional squadrons," Scholl said. "To have 21,000 citizens from throughout our state come together to register their support for the F-35 and have nearly 10,000 residents attend public hearings, send emails or call Air Force representatives in support of an air base's new training mission is unheard of in other parts of the country."

The *Luke Forward* campaign was developed by the West Valley Partners in collaboration with Fighter Country Partnership to generate awareness and support of the positive impacts the Air Force's next generation strike fighter will bring to the state. The partners include the cities of Avondale, Buckeye, El Mirage, Gila Bend, Glendale, Goodyear, Litchfield Park, Peoria, Phoenix, Surprise, Tolleson, Wickenburg and Youngtown, as well as Maricopa County.

Two brand new training facilities are currently being constructed at Luke in preparation of receiving the F-35A fighter jets. An operations building will open later this year, while the 145,000-square-foot academic center is planned to open in mid to late 2014.

F-35A instructor pilots are currently being trained at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida. In addition to training U.S. pilots, Luke will train pilots from seven other partner countries that are also investing in the new aircraft.

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Luke personnel will continue maintaining and training several F-16 training squadrons during the transition to the F-35A. The F-16 aircraft will reduce in numbers as the Glendale base receives more F-35A jets over the next several years. In total, Luke will operate 170 aircraft; 144 will be the F-35A while 26 F-16s will remain for foreign military training.

Arizona's federal delegation, as well as Governor Jan Brewer, was also thrilled with today's announcement. The following are quotes from U.S. Senator John McCain, U.S. Representative Trent Franks, U.S. Senator Jeff Flake and Governor Jan Brewer.

Sen. John McCain: "Today's announcement is great news for the West Valley of Phoenix, the state of Arizona and the U.S. Air Force. This announcement means that Luke Air Force Base will continue to serve as the premier pilot training facility in the world – not just because of the weather and proximity to the Barry M. Goldwater Range, but because of the remarkable community support provided by the people of the West Valley and the state of Arizona."

Rep. Trent Franks: "I am pleased the Department of Defense announced today it assigned squadrons four, five, and six of the F-35 Lightning II to Luke Air Force Base. With this decision, the Air Force affirmed Luke is best positioned to execute the Air Force's important active duty F-35 training mission. The F-35 is the largest acquisition program in the history of the DoD, and I couldn't be more grateful that the F-35 training mission will be coming home to Luke."

Sen. Jeff Flake: "This is great news for Arizona. I am glad to see the Air Force taking advantage of the unique attributes our state has to offer, making good use of the climate and environment to better enhance the defense of the nation. I welcome the squadrons' personnel and their families to Arizona."

Gov. Jan Brewer: "This announcement is fantastic news for Arizona. Receipt of these squadrons is further validation of Luke's well-earned status as a first-rate training base. Equally important, it is a true testament to the unmatched natural, geographic and human resources that make Arizona an ideal site for these critical missions. I applaud the Department of Defense for recognizing Luke Air Force Base and the state of Arizona as key leaders in our nation's security and defense."

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