

Dept. of Military Affairs: Airmen lead the way in F-35 transition for 115th Fighter Wing

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BURLINGTON AIR NATIONAL GUARD BASE, Vt. — The 115th Fighter Wing's drive to accelerate, change or lose couldn't be more pronounced as they continue their transition from the F-16 Fighting Falcon to the F-35 Lightning II.

In preparation for the arrival of the F-35 in spring of 2023, approximately 25 Wisconsin Air National Guardsmen have volunteered to be the first Airmen to receive advanced training at U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard facilities.

Out of five installations across the U.S. where Wisconsin Guardsmen are training, the 158th Fighter Wing of the Vermont Air National Guard provides a truly unique experience compared to the other units.

"As the first Air National Guard unit to receive the F-35 we didn't have the kind of luxury training your Airmen are receiving," said Chief Master Sgt. Mark Winger, the 158th Maintenance Group superintendent, Burlington Air National Guard Base, Vermont. "It's truly a unique feature that as Guardsmen you get to learn what it's like to operate this 5th generation fighter as a Guard unit and take that experience home."

For Staff Sgt. Marcel Emond, a crew chief with the 115th Fighter Wing who's been training with the 158th Fighter Wing for just over a year, that couldn't be more true.

"I'm excited to come back and spread the wealth of knowledge we've gained here with all the other maintainers that went to active-duty units," Emond said. "Once we get home the plan is for all the maintainers to sit down together and hash out

what we saw differently at all the locations to determine the best practices for the 115th.”

As Madison’s first F-35 Lightning II is slated to arrive in just under a year, it’s up to these volunteer Wisconsin Air National Guardsmen to ensure that the wing is trained and fully prepared for the arrival of the 5th Generation fighter.

“The more we can get people out here to figure out what you guys are doing and learn the capabilities of this jet first-hand, the more beneficial it will be to the unit,” said Col. Bart Van Roo, 115th Fighter Wing commander.

With such a vast group of volunteer Airmen spread out across the country, the 115th Fighter Wing will benefit from each of the five units’ unique training capabilities allowing the Airmen to determine what works, what doesn’t and what will be the overall best for the wing.

After all, it will be the job of these volunteer Airmen to train their wingmen once they return home.

“Volunteering to be the first ones training on the F-35 shows our Airmen’s willingness to accelerate change and adapt to new things,” said Chief Master Sgt. Brian Carroll, the 115th Fighter Wing command chief. “There’s no doubt that these Airmen will become the next leaders of the wing.”