

F-22A Raptor goes Operational

Contributed by 1st Lt. Jeff Roberson
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LANGLEY Air

Force BASE, Va. - The F-22A Raptor -- Air Force's most advanced weapon system -- is ready for combat, Air Force officials announced here today.

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In reaching initial operational capability, the Raptor is certified ready for operational use.

The first combat-ready Raptors are flying with the 27th Fighter Squadron of the 1st Fighter Wing here. The squadron's deployment capability is a 12-ship package designed to execute air-to-air and air-to-ground missions.

"If we go to war tomorrow, the Raptor will go with us," said Gen. Ronald E. Keys, commander of Air Combat Command.

Declaring the transformational stealth fighter "IOC" means the Raptor's proven capabilities are available for combat and supported by a properly trained and equipped force.

It also means the aircraft is qualified to fly homeland defense missions.

"F-22A IOC means our warfighters now have an unprecedented lethal mix of air-to-air and air-to-ground capabilities at their disposal," General Keys said. "The Raptor's cutting edge technology brings us continued joint air dominance despite advancing enemy threats."

Reaching the IOC milestone culminates a collaborative 25-year effort between various Air Force organizations and industry partners. The road to the IOC included was a step-by-step process. The F-22A System Program Office first turned Air Force requirements into a successful acquisition program. Then there was developmental flight test and evaluation, simulation and ground testing at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., and Eglin AFB, Fla. There was engine testing at Arnold AFB, Tenn., and missile testing at Holloman AFB, N.M., and over the Pacific Test Range. Also, there was tactics development at Nellis AFB, Nev., pilot and maintenance training at Tyndall AFB, Fla., and deployability here.

"The F-22A fulfills a long quest to bring fifth-generation capabilities of stealth, supercruise and precision to the warfighter today and 30 years from today," General Keys said. "Now that we have met our first promised milestone of a fully capable, multi-mission platform ready for combat, we are already focused on furthering our integrated tactics development, refining our deployability, growing and training our force."

The general said, "To add to what we learned on our successful first operational deployment to the Utah Test and Training Range to drop JDAMs (joint direct attack munition), fly against double-digit SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) at Nellis and work (close air support) with F-16 FAC-As, we will conduct our first routine peacetime exercise deployment by taking 12 Raptors to Alaska in June for Northern Edge."

Designed to ensure America's air dominance for years to come, the F-22A will ensure U.S. joint forces' freedom from attack and freedom to attack, even as adversaries continue to advance their weapons and technologies, officials said.

"As I told (Air Force Chief of Staff) Gen. (T. Michael) Moseley, he and I have spent our lifetime executing, instructing and providing air dominance for the joint force. Lamentably, we have never been privileged to hold a weapon like this in our hands.

"After reviewing our test results -- seeing our operational deployment performance and talking to the pilots that will go to war with it -- I am confident the F-22A joins the combat force at a far more mature and capable level than any of our previous great aircraft, and will take its rightful place in a long line of U.S. Air Force legends of the air," General Keys said.