

# Education or Operational: F-35 Demo Team showcases combat capabilities

By Capt. Kip Sumner, F-35 Demonstration Team Public Affairs / Published February 16, 2021

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**Hill Air Force Base, Utah** -- For most, seeing the F-35 demonstration team at an air show is the closest that they'll come to seeing the Air Force's newest 5th-generation stealth fighter, both in the air and on the ground.

Many people may see military performances at air shows primarily as entertainment, and think of the Air Force's own Thunderbirds or the Navy's Blue Angels; however, single-ship jet teams like the F-35 Demo Team have another primary mission.

To showcase the operational mission of some of the Air Force's premiere combat aircraft.

"Our jets come straight off the flight line from the combat-ready squadrons at the 388th Fighter Wing," said Capt. Kristin "BEO" Wolfe, the F-35 Demonstration Team commander and pilot. "If we had to go to war, we wouldn't have to modify the jet at all. The aircraft we bring to air shows could either have been to or just recently come back from an operation overseas."

This is the second year that the F-35 Demo Team has operated as part of the 388th Fighter Wing at Hill Air Force Base, Utah. After moving from Air Education and Training Command to Air Combat Command, the demonstration team is now made up of operational Airmen and F-35As from the wing. The Fighter Wing currently has an inventory of 78 F-35s, with the team bringing two of those aircraft to each show they perform at.

The team's goal while performing at air shows is to educate the public on the F-35A and the Air Force's combat capabilities.

"We designed the routine specifically to showcase the maximum maneuvering capabilities of the F-35," Wolfe said. "We showcase a lot of

maneuvers that we would potentially use in a combat situation, replicating things we might do in a dogfight or 'basic fighter maneuvers'."

When not flying at air shows across the world or practicing at their home-base, the team's mission is the same as many of the Airmen in the 388th, to be ready to deploy at a moment's notice. The maintainers on the team are responsible for performing maintenance and routine inspections on operational aircraft while Capt. Wolfe flies as an F-35 instructor pilot for the 34th Fighter Squadron.

"When we're not practicing the demonstration, we're doing very similar things to what we would normally do on an operational flight line," she said. "As an instructor pilot, my job is to mentor new pilots that have just come out of training, teaching them the latest tactics and procedures they need to be considered 'combat-ready'."

And when she's not busy training new pilots, Capt. Wolfe is also making sure she stays combat-capable by flying training missions with her home squadron.

"When I'm flying the demonstration, I'm trying to show people just a small example of what the jet is capable of doing," Wolfe said. "But when I'm flying with the Fighter Wing, I'm doing a variety of different missions; including basic surface attack, dropping inert or simulated weapons, practicing strafing runs, etc. I'm really training to do a lot of different combat capabilities that we obviously can't showcase at an air show."

The F-35A is the Air Force's newest stealth fighter but that doesn't mean it hasn't been tried and tested. The 388th Fighter Wing is the Air Force's first combat-ready F-35 wing, declaring full war-fighting capability in January of 2020. As of January 2021, each of the wing's three operational squadrons has completed a deployment overseas.

"We're trying to show people that this isn't just an experimental concept, that this is a real aircraft that we are taking to war," Wolfe said. "So to have the demonstration team as part of the first combat F-35 wing and Air Combat Command just makes sense."

U.S. Air Force Capt. Kristin "BEO" Wolfe, F-35 Lightning II Demonstration Team commander and pilot, performs the "dedication pass" maneuver at the 2020 Fort Lauderdale Air Show Nov. 22, 2020, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. During this maneuver, the jet flies at approximately .95 mach, which is just below the speed of sound, and is designed to give the audience the best profile-view of the jet. (U.S. Air Force photo by Capt. Kip Sumner)

