

# Lightning IIs streak to Europe

## F-35s on extended deployment



On 23 May 2019, a squadron of F-35A Lightning II fighters landed at the Aviano Air Base in Italy, the start of deployment to Europe that will last through the summer. The F-35s of 421 Fighter Squadron, based at Hill AFB in Utah, first took part in exercise *Astral Knight* which also involved coalition forces from Croatia, Italy and Slovenia, flying defensive counter-air missions, protecting the coast line from aircraft and cruise missile threats. After the exercise, they were transferred to Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany, as part of a European Deterrence Initiative theatre security package, intended to reassure allies of US support, and to deter potential adversaries on a rotational basis. It was the 421 Squadron's first extended deployment to Germany, the F-35s previously deployed to RAF Lakenheath in the United Kingdom and to Okinawa Air Base in Japan.

421 Fighter Squadron is the latest unit operating with F-35 aircraft which they received in multiple phases starting in November 2018 and since then, two to three aircraft per month are being added. The squadron is deployed to Germany together with other active duty and reserve squadrons with personnel of the 466 Fighter Squadron and the 388 Maintenance Group.

As Lt. Col. Richard Orzechowski, commander of 421 Fighter Squadron stated, "The entire 421 Ops and Maintenance team are extremely excited for this deployment. As the final 388 Fighter Squadron to transition to the F-35A, we've been able to leverage experiences of the 4 Fighter Squadron and 34 Fighter Squadron and take this squadron on the road in just six months after getting our first jets. The deployment consists of over 300 people, including 26 pilots and 12 aircraft. The deployment will help identify potential problems, particularly with communication, that might arise while working with other US and partner-nation aircraft, so that real-world operations are as seamless as possible."

