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NORWEGIAN F-35 PILOT: 'WE ARE ON TRACK'

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He was the first Royal Norwegian Air Force pilot to fly the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II in November 2015. Since then, he flew the jet for 170 hours, all of those at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona, where he now serves as an instructor pilot. Right now, he and his Royal Norwegian Air Force colleagues begin preparations to ferry three F-35s to Norway later this year. It will be the first outing for the jet in the cold Nordic region. So, plenty of reasons for a chat with Morten 'Dolby' Hanche, who says fighting an F-16 in an F-35 is an 'uneven fight' – in favor of the new jet.

AHF: *Hi! Can you describe your previous flight experience for us?*

Hanche: "Most of my previous flight experience was in the F-16, which I flew for more than 2200 hours. I am a graduate from the a US Navy Test Pilot School In Patuxent River. After having flown the F-35 for 170 hours, I can now say I am starting to feel "at home" in the airplane. Combined, the number of flight hours by Norwegian F-35 pilots now stands at 800 hours."



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AHF: *So you guys will bring the F-35 to Norway later this year. How are you preparing for the ferry flight and subsequent operations in Norway?*

Hanche: "We are on track, in terms of both educating technicians and pilots and preparing for the first aircraft arrival. The Norwegian Air Force prepares to bring its first three F-35s to Norwegian soil on November 2017. As usual, we will buy tanker support for the transit leg across the Atlantic."



Morten 'Dolby' Hanche. (Image © Forsvaret)



(Image © Forsvaret)

AHF: Once in Norway, what does the plan look like?

Hanche: "Once in Norway, we will follow a crawl-walk-run approach as we start to familiarize ourselves with the F-35A in the "high North", in adverse weather conditions. No one will have operated F-35s under quite the same circumstances at that point in time. Our only option therefore is to take it slow, and gradually increase the complexity of our training and testing.

The Norwegian Operational Testing (OT) will not focus on testing which has already been done in the US by the Joint Operational Test Team. Instead, we will focus on what's unique for the Norwegian Armed Forces. That includes operating from icy runways and using the drag chute. That system is a unique factor: **our F-35s will be fitted with a drag chute**, which is designed to help slow the airplane during an aborted takeoff, or during landings on slippery runways.

Initial Operating Capability (IOC) is planned for 2019, which means that the time beforehand will be used both to train air- and ground-crew, and to support operational testing."

AHF: In what way will the Norwegian public be introduced to the F-35?

Hanche: "There will be a reception ceremony at Ørland Main Air Station in south-central Norway, near Trondheim, in November. The planning is however still in the initial phase so we will release more details later."

AHF: In what way is the F-35's Autonomous Logistics Information System (ALIS) be able to support operations in Norway? ALIS is plagued by **development delays.**

Hanche: "Some call ALIS the heart of the F 35, while others call it the brain of the F 35. ALIS is an information technology infrastructure that captures and analyzes aircraft condition data from the F-35, supporting fleet operations, maintenance, fault-prediction and supply chain management. ALIS will be delivered in time for the first aircraft arrival."

AHF: What kind of weapon's capability will the Norwegian F35s have?

Hanche: "At the time of IOC, the Norwegian F-35As will be equipped with the 25 mm cannon and the 25 mm APEX round, the AIM-9X block II, the AIM-120C7, GBU-12, GBU-31 and GBU-39. A little down the road, our F-35s will also carry several other air-to-air and air-to-ground stores, including the Joint Strike Missile (JSM). The JSM is in its final development phase, and our aim is to have the missile integrated on the F-35 and ready for service with the Norwegian Armed Forces by 2025."



(Image © Forsvaret)

AHF: In the future, what will training look like for a Norwegian F-35 pilot, starting with initial training?

Hanche: "In the future, Norwegian F-35 training will be very similar to what we are currently doing with the F-16. We will send our young cadets through an initial screening program back home, in order to find out if they are able to absorb the training they will receive once in the USA. Following that, and an initial session at the Norwegian Air Force Academy for basic officer's training, our students will complete basic training on the T-6 Texan II and the T-38 Talon at Sheppard Air Force Base. Following that, our students will be sent to Luke for a longer and more involved basic course."

AHF: What can you tell us about the syllabus for Norwegian F-35 pilots?

Hanche: "The syllabus at Luke is tailored to the individual student but is now generally a transition

syllabus for pilots coming from different airframes. This syllabus is shortened compared to the basic course syllabus which is designed to accommodate a young and inexperienced pilot, straight from undergraduate pilot training.

In general, the syllabus involves classroom academics, self-study, simulator practice and lastly flying the airplane. The students go through many weeks of ground training and simulator practice before it is time to strap into the jet. The initial training focuses on the basics: How to start up, take off and land. There is also significant emphasis on emergency procedures, in order to prepare the student for a myriad of “what if”-scenarios.

After learning the basics of how to operate the airplane in a pure administrative setting, the syllabus rapidly moves on with tactical employment. We start simple, and gradually build up in intensity and complexity.”

AHF: In what way does training in Luke prepare pilots for the Norwegian theater? What adaptations are needed?

Hanche: “The basic course at Luke will prepare our Norwegian students for the role as a wingman – a pilot who is qualified to fly the entire width of the tactical spectrum in the F-35. However, we will have to add on some aspects when we get our young pilots back home to Norway. One perspective is that the perpetual summer conditions found here in Arizona do not lay the foundation for solid instrument flying procedures. Therefore, we will put significant emphasis on brushing up this basic skill, combined with flying in adverse weather conditions. We do not foresee a checkout requirement for the drag chute, but it still has to be done. Lastly, we will focus on training our young pilots on more specific procedures, like executing NATO Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) missions.”



(Image © US Air Force / Staff Sgt. Marcy Copeland)

AHF: Luke is an international F-35 training school. What is the interaction between various nations like? Do Norwegian pilots fly with Australians colleagues for example?

Hanche: "The partnership at Luke is very valuable for a small nation like Norway. We train and fly together here, using the same standards and tactics. We mix and match with aircrew and airplanes, so that one day you might find a four-ship of F-35As composed of a Norwegian flight-lead in an Italian F-35, a US wingman in a Norwegian F-35, an Italian element lead in a US F-35 and an Australian pilot in another Norwegian jet. The interaction across nationality is important for several reasons. First of all we build trust in each other, so that when we one day meet in a coalition setting, we know that we can work well together. Another perspective is that the standardization in how we do business makes it not only realistic, but easy to integrate a future coalition fleet of F-35s. Another perspective comes from the fact that the instructor cadre at Luke right now is composed of pilots with very different backgrounds. We have pilots here who flew everything from F-15Cs, F-15Es, A-10s, AMXs, F-22, Tornado, Eurofighter, F-18 and the F-16. Therefore, there's a lot of varied and good knowledge gathered here to tap into, and it makes for an interesting and good learning environment."

AHF: Is any testing being done by Norwegian pilots right now?

Hanche: "There is no dedicated operational testing going on at Luke. However, lessons are learned here at Luke from time to time, which might benefit the entire F-35 community. All the partner nations work closely with the F-35 Joint Program Office and Lockheed Martin, in order correct any deficiencies – deficiencies that are inevitable given such an advanced airplane."

AHF: What has been your most memorable F-35 experience so far?

Hanche: "It is difficult to pick out one specific situation. However, the first flight in the F-35A was an obvious highlight. Several things immediately struck me on that first flight. For one how well the F-35A handles, both on the ground and in the air. It is a well-behaved airplane. Another early impression was how powerful the F-35A is. The Lightning has an impressive acceleration and rate of climb, and the airspeed can easily "run away" from you if you do not pay attention. Another more specific highlight would be the first time I fought F-16s. It was impressive to see just how uneven that fight is, in favor of the F-35."

AHF: The Norwegians have trusted the F-16 with defending their country for close to four decades. What will happen to these F-16s?

Hanche: "As we receive the first Norwegian F-35, we will gradually phase out the aging F-16 by 2021. It has not been decided yet what then will happen to them."

Many thanks to Morten 'Dolby' Hanche and Norwegian MoD for making this possible.



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