



F-35 Lightning II Program

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17 (RESERVE) SQUADRON BEGIN UK F-35 TESTING

Story by UK Ministry of Defence

17 (Reserve) Squadron has begun operational testing of the UK's first F-35B, 100 years after the unit was first established.

The squadron, which was first formed in 1915, will be responsible for all the test and evaluation of the UK's first F-35 Lightning II.

The aircraft, known as BK-1, is stationed at Edwards Air Force Base in California and will be operated under UK regulations. Personnel from 17 (R) Sqn, which is made up of engineers and pilots from the RAF and Royal Navy, will fly and maintain the jets independently from their US colleagues - an important step towards the UK developing its Joint Strike Fighter capability.

A parade and flypast to mark the centenary and their new role with the F-35 Lightning II will be held at Edwards AFB today. Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Andrew Pulford will attend, along with representatives from some of the UK companies involved in the manufacturing of the F-35.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Andrew Pulford, said:

"Today is an important day for both the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. The start of UK operational testing on the Lightning II aircraft is a significant milestone for us; although our relationship with the United States as partners on the Joint Strike Fighter Programme remains as strong as ever. Our collaboration with the US Armed Forces on the world's largest and most advanced defence project is a clear demonstration of our enduring close military partnership with the United States.

"I am delighted to be here at Edwards Air Force Base today to celebrate the centenary of Number 17 (R) Squadron. Their new role in developing and testing the UK's fifth generation fighter aircraft will be an exciting new chapter in the Squadron's rich and proud history."

Over the last 100 years, 17 (R) Sqn has seen action in Egypt, Burma and Japan and the Squadron has previously flown Hurricanes, Spitfires and Tornados. Now the Squadron is flying the F-35 Lightning II, a multi-role stealth aircraft capable of undertaking a wide range of operations from land and sea. Equipped with an array of advanced sensors, highly integrated mission systems and air to air and air to ground weapons, the aircraft will provide the RAF and Royal Navy with fifth generation capability from 2018.

Commanding Officer of 17 (R) Squadron, Wing Commander James Beck, said:

"For a pilot, it's a dream come true to fly from Edwards Air Force Base. It's where Chuck Yeager flew from and now we're the first nation outside of America to fly the F35 independently under our own regulations."

Petty Officer Gary Lister has served for 28 years in the Royal Navy, and is responsible for maintaining the ejection seats and crew escape system, as well as managing the weapons on the aircraft. Petty Officer Lister commented:

"The F-35 has a myriad of sensors and technologies which means every aspect of the aircraft is constantly being tested. This means when snags are found, they aren't just fixed, but analysed and scrutinised to help future fault diagnosis and streamline the maintenance effort; it's a hugely complex aircraft which will give both the navy and the RAF a superb capability"



The arrival of the UK'S first F35 Lightning II Stealth Fighter Aircraft at Edward's AFB America on the 13th Jan 2015. The 17 (Reserve) Squadron has begun operational testing of the UK's first F-35B, 100 years after the unit was first established.

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While testing and evaluation of BK-1 is underway at Edwards Air Force Base, over 2000 miles away at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort in South Carolina, the first aircraft that will be used operationally – BK-3 – has just arrived. Working alongside US Marine Corps colleagues, UK personnel will fly BK-3, which will form part of the UK's first front-line Lightning II unit, 617 Squadron, operating from RAF Marham and then Royal Navy's new Queen Elizabeth Class Carriers from 2018.