



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## **The Royal Air Force completes F-35B Tanker Trials a Week Early**

ROME ITALY -- During a seven week detachment to Naval Air Station Patuxent River, a Royal Air Force (RAF) A330 Voyager tanker conducted 18 air-to-air refueling (AAR) test trials with an F-35B Lightning II Short Takeoff and Vertical Landing (STOVL) aircraft from the F-35 Pax River Integrated Test Force (ITF).

According to the ITF, the testing campaign carried out by joint RAF – Pax River ITF test team was completed one week early, demonstrating the team's efficiency by accomplishing its test plan in 18 flights rather than the scheduled 20 flights.

The trials included day, twilight, and evening plugs between the F-35's IFR (In-Flight Refueling) probe and the tanker's hose (indeed RAF's A330 Voyager tankers are only equipped with the U.S. Navy's standard "hose and drogue" system).

The test trials generated data for the assessment of the wing pods and the fuselage refueling unit in anticipation of a flight clearance that will support the U.K.'s F-35B Lightning II Initial Operating Capability (IOC) in 2018.

The U.K. has 19 RAF and Royal Navy personnel embedded within the F-35 Pax River ITF. Many of these British military participate in the shipboard developmental test (DT) phases for both the F-35B and F-35C.

U.K. personnel supported the first two phases of F-35B testing aboard USS Wasp (LHD 1) and the first two phases of F-35C testing aboard USS Nimitz (CVN 68) and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69), respectively. They are set to embark on the third and final phases of testing at sea for the two F-35 variants, ahead of the U.K.'s own F-35B Ship Integration trials scheduled to take place aboard UK's new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier in 2018.

HMS Queen Elizabeth will use a ski-jump ramp to help the launching plane take off with an upward flight path and a BAE Systems Test Pilot launched the F-35B from a land-based ski-jump for the very first time at Pax River in June last year.



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