



# F-35 Lightning II Program

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## F-35B Jets Join Forces With British Aircraft Carrier To Make History

By HMS Queen Elizabeth Public Affairs

ATLANTIC OCEAN (NNS) -- This week the first F-35 Lightning fighter jets landed on the deck of the United Kingdom's new aircraft carrier making history and marking the beginning of more than half-a-century of 'Carrier Strike' operations. The strikes, carried out by F-35Bs assigned to the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, occurred Thursday morning against a fixed target "in support of ground clearance operations," and were deemed a success by the ground force commander, according to a statement put out by U.S. Naval Forces Central Command on Thursday afternoon.

Royal Navy Cmdr. Nathan Gray and Royal Air Force Sq. Ldr. Andy Edgell, both test pilots at the F-35 Integrated Test Force at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md., were the first pilots to land the stealth F-35 Lightning fighter jets on board the carrier, demonstrating the formidable force HMS Queen Elizabeth and her fleet of jets will be.

The first landings and take-offs from HMS Queen Elizabeth are the culmination of a British endeavor lasting more than a decade to bring an aircraft carrier back to the UK's arsenal. Able to embark up to 24 of the supersonic jets, the Queen Elizabeth Class carrier provides the Royal Navy with a capability possessed by few others.

U.K. Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson said: "The largest warship in British history is joining forces with the most advanced fighter jets on the planet. This marks a rebirth of our power to strike decisively from the seas anywhere in the world.

"The historic first landing on the deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth is a monumental moment in our country's proud military history. It is also a statement of Britain's determination to promote peace and prevent war."

The landings mark the start of the first of two First of Class Flight Trials (Fixed Wing) phases, held back-to-back this fall, where the ITF team plans to perform a variety of flight maneuvers and deck operations to develop the F-35B operating envelope for QEC carriers. They will evaluate jet performance on over 200 test points during different weather

and sea conditions as well as the aircraft's integration with the ship. A third FOCFT (FW) phase followed by operational testing is scheduled for 2019.



An F-35B aboard the HMS Queen Elizabeth (R08)

The return of 'Carrier Strike' to the UK comes eight years after a fighter jet last landed on a British carrier.

Commanding Officer, Royal Navy Capt. Jerry Kyd, who was also the captain of HMS Ark Royal when the last Harrier took off from a carrier, said: "I am quite emotional to be here in HMS Queen Elizabeth seeing the return of fixed wing aviation, having been the captain of the aircraft carrier which launched the last Harrier at sea nearly eight years ago.

"The regeneration of big deck carriers able to operate globally, as we are proving here on this deployment, is a major step forward for the United Kingdom's defense and our ability to match the increasing pace of our adversaries. The first touch-downs of these impressive stealth jets shows how the United Kingdom will continue to be world leaders at sea for generations to come."

Commander UK Carrier Strike Group, Cdr. Andrew Betton added: "The Queen Elizabeth Class carriers have been specifically designed and built to operate the F-35 Lightning, offering an immensely flexible and potent combination to deliver military effect around the world. Conducting these trials is a critical and exciting step on this journey and I applaud the many thousands of civilian and military personnel who have played a part in bringing the strategic ambition to reality."

While the HMS Queen Elizabeth Class carriers will be able to project British military power across the globe for the next half-century, they can also provide humanitarian relief, deepen defense relationships with key allies and provide critical support to our forces as they are deployed across the world.

In recent operations, US aircraft carriers like the USS George HW Bush and USS Harry S. Truman have played a central role in the Gulf and the Mediterranean, conducting strikes against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

This week's historic flight trials come more than 100 years after the UK's HMS Argus became the world's first carrier capable of safely launching and recovering naval aircraft.

The ship will go on to continue her program off the US east coast. The flight trials are expected to take around 11 weeks, during which time the ship is also expected to call into New York.

HMS Queen Elizabeth remains set to be deployed on global operations from 2021. Britain now has sixteen of a planned 138 F-35 Lightning jets as part of its world-leading fleet of military aircraft.

Although the Marine Corps is the first U.S. service to fly its joint strike fighters in combat, the aircraft has been used by the Israeli air force to strike targets. In May, Israel Defense Forces officials confirmed that the country's F-35 "Adir" fighters had seen combat in two airstrikes somewhere in the Middle East.

The Marine Corps declared the F-35B operational in 2015, becoming the first service to integrate the joint strike fighter into its fleet. The Air Force followed by declaring initial operational capability for the F-35A conventional variant in 2016, while the Navy plans to declare IOC on the F-35C carrier variant in February 2019.

The joint strike fighter is the most expensive program in the Pentagon's history, projected to cost about \$1 trillion to develop, produce, field and sustain over its lifetime, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The F-35B is the short takeoff, vertical landing variant of the aircraft, allowing the pilot to hover and land vertically like a helicopter — a necessity for the Marines, which typically operate from amphibious ships with smaller decks than aircraft carriers.

The Marine Corps reported its first loss of an F-35 earlier this year, after damage from a fire two years ago led the service to scrap that plane from its inventory.