

F 35s flying off HMS *Queen Elizabeth*

Fighter jets join forces with British aircraft carrier to make history

The first F-35 Lightning fighter jets have 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 the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike operations.

On 25 September Commander Nathan Gray, RN, and RAF Squadron Leader Andy Edgell were the first pilots to land their stealth F-35 Lightning fighter jets on board the carrier, demonstrating the potential formidable force HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and her fleet of jets.

The first landings and take-offs from HMS *Queen Elizabeth* are the culmination of a national endeavour lasting more than a decade to bring an aircraft carrier back to the UK's arsenal. Able to embark up to 36 of the supersonic jets, the carrier provides the Royal Navy with a capability possessed by few others.

Defence 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 more than 500 take-offs and touch-downs set to take place from the mammoth warship during the next eleven weeks, with the jets being put through their paces in a range of weather.

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

CO of *Queen Elizabeth*, Captain Jerry Kyd, who was also commanded 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 defence 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, Commodore 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 defence relationships with key allies and provide critical support to our forces as they are deployed across the world.

In recent operations, US aircraft carriers such as 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.

Last week's historic flight trials came 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 warship will go on to continue her programme off the US East Coast. The flight trials are expected to take around eleven weeks, during which time the ship is also expected to call at New York. More than 1,400 sailors, flight crew and Royal Marines are working on board the carrier during her deployment

Queen Elizabeth remains set to be deployed on global operations from 2021. Britain now has 16 of a planned 138 F-35 Lightning jets as part of its world-leading fleet of military aircraft.

HMS *Queen Elizabeth* left her home port of Portsmouth in August, transiting the Atlantic to conduct these trials.

Picture captions see next sheet

Picture captions

Pic F35 QE 1

Two F-35B Lightning II fighter jets have successfully landed on HMS Queen Elizabeth for the first time, laying the foundations for the next 50 years of fixed wing aviation in support of the UK's Carrier Strike Capability.

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Pic F35 QE 2

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Commander Nathan Gray RN, made history by being the first to land on, carefully manoeuvring his stealth jet onto the thermal coated deck. He was followed by Squadron Leader Andy Edgell, RAF, both of whom are test pilots, operating with the Integrated Test Force (ITF) based at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland.

Shortly afterwards, once a deck inspection was conducted and the all-clear given, Cdr Gray became the first pilot to take off using the ship's ski-ramp.

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