

F-35s Join Forces with British Aircraft Carrier to Make History

LONDON – 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 "Carrier Strike" operations, the U.K. Ministry of Defence in a Sept. 28 release.

Royal Navy Commodore Nathan Gray and Royal Air Force Squadron Leader Andy Edgell were the first pilots to land their F-35s on board the carrier, demonstrating the formidable force HMS Queen Elizabeth and its fleet of jets will be.

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

"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," said Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson. "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 takeoffs and touch-downs set to take place from the mammoth warship during the next 11 weeks, with the jets being put through their paces in a range of weather conditions.

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

"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," said the ship's commanding officer, Capt. Jerry Kyd, who was also the captain of HMS Ark Royal when the last Harrier took off from a carrier. "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."

"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," said Cmdr. Andrew Betton, commander U.K. Carrier Strike Group. "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.