

News story: RAF's Legendary Dambusters squadron reforms to fly F-35 jets

Gavin Williamson announced the new 617 Squadron after an event in Washington DC to mark the centenary of the RAF, which was attended by Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier.

The naming of the new 617 Squadron follows the 75th anniversary of the original formation of the squadron, commonly referred to as the 'Dambusters'. Originally set up for the highly-specialised mission to knock out dams and disrupt industrial production in the Ruhr Valley of Germany, the new 617 Squadron will be the first to fly the UK's brand new, state-of-the-art F-35 fighter jets – the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in the RAF's 100-year history.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The 617 Squadron name was made famous by 'The Dambusters', who played such a vital role in the Second World War. So it is fitting that by flying the world's most advanced fighter jets, our new squadron will be ensuring that the legend of world-leading air power lives on.

The F-35B Lightning will defend our nation and ensure that Britain remains a pioneer in innovation, with a unique ability to adapt to this increasingly dangerous world.

The UK is currently flying the F-35B Lightning, a multi-role fighter jet capable of a wide range of operations. It is the world's first jet to combine radar evading stealth technology with supersonic speeds and short take-off and landing capability.

Lightning Force Commander Air Commodore David Bradshaw said:

This is a most momentous day for the UK Lightning Force as we celebrate the reformation of 617 Squadron. Manned by highly capable Royal Air Force and Royal Navy personnel and equipped with the truly remarkable F-35B Lightning, 617 Squadron will once again provide potent, flexible Air Power for the nation.

In a simple yet highly significant ceremony held in the heart of Washington DC amongst friends and colleagues as part of celebrations for RAF100, the famous Dambusters marked the start of another exciting chapter in their Squadron's proud history. I very much look forward to welcoming 617 Squadron home to RAF Marham this summer as they prepare for operational service from land and sea.

The Dambusters

Wing Commander Guy Gibson hand-picked his bomber crews for the original 617-squadron, who then went on to deploy the iconic 'bouncing bomb' which had to be dropped above the water at an exact height of 60 feet and a speed of 220mph. The crews successfully managed to breach the Mohne and Eder dams.

Today's 617 Squadron

Today's 617 Squadron, currently training with the UK's 15 F-35B Lightning jets in America, will move to the UK with a number of aircraft to their new home at RAF Marham this Summer. Like their predecessors they will be operating at the forefront of aircraft technology.

The aircraft will be jointly operated by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy and have the ability to operate from land and sea, forming an integral part of Carrier Strike operating from the Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carriers.