

17 TES EDWARDS AFB



PROSPECTUS

January 2026

Foreword

Thank you for taking the time to look through this prospectus and considering a post on 17 TES, the UK F-35 Test & Evaluation Squadron. If successful, you will be joining a team that is at the forefront of capability, directly influencing the development of a step change in Combat Air which will serve the RN and RAF well into the future. As a member of TES you will work in a multi-national environment and represent the United Kingdom's Armed Forces on an international stage.

Edwards Air Force Base is ideally located to sample all that California and the wider USA has to offer. However, whilst this may be a significant factor in your decision making, it is vitally important that you consider all the implications of a tour in the USA. The aim of this prospectus is to provide the information you and your family need to make an informed decision – please read it carefully. Whilst the lifestyle is undoubtedly rewarding, it is expected that you will make an invaluable contribution to the ongoing development of the United Kingdom's future Combat Air capability.

I trust that the information contained herein will assist your family to make the decision that is right for you. If you do volunteer and are successful in your application, I look forward to personally welcoming you to 17 TES in the future.

OC 17 TES
Edwards AFB

INTRODUCTION

1. If you are reading this prospectus, you have expressed an interest in joining the Air & Space Warfare Centre TES based at Edwards Air Force Base in California. Regardless of rank or personal circumstances, this prospectus aims to inform applicants and their families of pertinent information needed to help make an informed decision when applying for a post on the TES.
2. Moving to the USA is not a simple undertaking and initial settling in periods can be turbulent and very expensive, but rest assured there is a wealth of support provided by the ASWC Pers Support staff, the British Defence Staff United States (BDSUS) in Washington D.C. and also 17 TES upon arrival and in preparation to relocate overseas. That said, it is vital to fully understand what military life in the USA entails prior to considering the move.
3. This prospectus will provide an overview of the role of 17 TES and detail the initial set up in the USA. Some of the areas discussed will be generic issues for the USA as a whole and others may be location specific which will be highlighted for clarity.

17 TES MISSION STATEMENT

4. The underlying purpose of the TES is to conduct Operational Test to understand and improve the F-35B Lightning, weapons carried and all related elements needed for successful employment by the Combat Air Force.

TOUR OVERVIEW

5. A standard tour length is 3 years. Personnel will have the option to be posted either accompanied or unaccompanied. The tour for Technicians will comprise of 2 phases:
 - a. **Phase One – RAF Marham (if non Ltng SQEP).** Initially, expect to be posted unaccompanied to RAF Marham to commence the relevant F-35 trade training at the Integrated Training Centre which should last up to five months. On successful completion of training, Sqn members and families will transfer to Edwards AFB.
 - b. **Phase Two – Edwards AFB.** Separate to relocation leave, there are two weeks allocated to settle prior to commencing work on 17 TES at Edwards AFB.

LOCATION

6. Edwards AFB and the surrounding areas of Lancaster & Palmdale are situated in the Antelope Valley region of Southern California, at the edge of the Mojave Desert. Often called the High Desert due to being elevated 2500 ft AMSL, temperatures reach 45 Celsius in the summer and below freezing at night in the winter. The area itself appears quite isolated, but is well placed to explore the whole of the west coast of America. The beaches of Los Angeles are within two hours drive, whilst the attractions of San Diego and Las Vegas are just 3-4 hours away. Additionally, three of the country's most popular national parks; Yosemite, Joshua Tree and Sequoia are all within driving distance. For those who enjoy winter sports there are a number of ski resorts in the area, the closest of these is about an hour's drive away. For more information on Edwards AFB and the surrounding area go to www.edwards.af.mil
7. Having received an assignment order personnel will be contacted by the TES J1 and the ASWC FS Personal Support.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8. Before volunteering for a tour to the USA, it is important the financial implications of the decision are fully understood. Whilst impossible to cover every circumstance, the following is intended to give you an idea of some of the key factors that may affect family income:

a. **Allowances.** Provided the eligibility criteria is met, personnel may be entitled to claim the following allowances upon assignment to the USA. A [calculator](#) is available to estimate your allowances.

(1) **Local Overseas Allowance (LOA).** This is a non-taxable allowance paid to UK military personnel serving overseas whose expenditure on items of day-to-day living is assessed to be necessarily higher than the UK. It is assessed separately for each overseas country and specific rates are set for each area to reflect local costs and conditions. The amounts received by personnel vary according to accompanied status¹. Please remember that LOA can go down as well as up so do not use the allowance to budget family income.

(2) **Home to Duty.** As per the UK but with revised mileage rates to reflect vehicle/fuel costs in country. The drive from Palmdale to Edwards AFB is approximately 35 miles and takes 45 minutes.

(3) **Disturbance Allowance.** This allowance is more than a UK move. Current rates and regs can be found in JSP 752 Ch12 Sect 1.

(4) **Get You Home (Overseas).** Service personnel and each family member are entitled to a contribution to one return flight to the UK within each calendar year from commencement of assignment².

(5) **Respite Provision.** Service personnel and each eligible family member are entitled to 4 days respite allowance. The allowance contributes towards travel and accommodation costs to achieve overnight respite from their duty station. Current rates and regs can be found in JSP 752 Ch9 Sect 5.

(6) **Overseas Vehicle Provision.** The aim of OPVP is to assist SP permanently assigned to or from an overseas location with access to a private motor vehicle. Current rates and regs can be found in JSP 752 Ch9 Sect 4.

(7) **US based Grants.** A grant for small electrical goods, and for soft furnishings will be issued upon arrival. The current rates can be found on the BDSUS website [BDSUS](#): enter 'SEG' into the search box, open the Form 950 and scroll down.

b. **Initial Vehicle Expenditure.** The cost incurred when setting up home at Edwards AFB will be very much dependent on personal choice; however, there will be a number of purchases that will be unavoidable. Without doubt, the single largest purchase will be a vehicle, which is a necessity due to distances between normal services such as schools, shops, banks and the duty location. There is no publicly funded route for transporting a UK vehicle to the USA. Public transport is not as widespread as in the UK and it is not possible to rely on it as a day-to-day means of getting around. It should also be noted that most families

¹ Current LOA rates for the USA are available from SP PoL P&M (Allces).

² Current rates for GYH(O) can be found in JSP 752.

purchase a second vehicle, especially if school runs are required. There are different vehicle purchase routes available and include new, second hand and lease. However, please note that lease often incurs fixed annual mileages and a fixed period – 3 years. Due to a lack of credit history in the USA, credit options will be limited and where offered will likely involve high interest rates. Most personnel on arrival, without any prior credit history in the USA are unable to obtain a vehicle through leasing. Sales tax is also due on new, and second hand vehicle purchases. Insurance rates are also significantly higher than the UK, most personnel are paying approximately \$1500-\$2000 for 6 months auto insurance and purchasing 2 cars can cost £20,000. It is advised to purchase a reliable car with a warranty as many roads can be remote and significant distances are often covered, and to obtain roadside protection.

c. **Initial Home Expenditure.** Food shopping can cost 3x more than in the UK. It is advised to do research of the local shops within the AV area to gain an idea of costs and what is available. Given the voltage difference between countries it is highly likely that you will need to buy a number of electrical goods such as a television, toaster, kettle etc.³ A full furniture pack will be supplied by the British Embassy so there is no need to bring any furniture and shipping allowances will not cover this volume.

d. **Advance of Pay.** In order to help with setting up life in the USA, up to 4 months advance of pay can be claimed. It should be noted that the advance will be repaid during the first 24 months in post as 24 fixed monthly payments taken directly from your pay. As a result, during the repayment period, monthly income will be reduced. Whilst LOA may offset this somewhat, careful consideration should be given to the amount of advance taken to ensure that monthly income is sufficient to cope with the increased cost of living, especially in the early months. LOA payments should not be relied to offset this deduction from monthly salary. Advances over £10,000 may be subject to income tax. The BDSUS portal has further information on this matter (select military, allowances, advance of pay).

e. **Spouse Employment.** Spouse employment or volunteer work requires formal authorization by the US government, a process which can take up to 3 months after arrival to complete. Once authorization is granted an EAD and Social Security number are awarded, which gives authority for the spouse to be employed in the USA. Finding employment can be a complex process; the spouse must take the initiative and early research from the UK is advised. Professional jobs require State Certification and/or registration, often UK qualifications require verification which can take time and be expensive. Any re-training or certification for dependents required for employment is met at personal expense. US companies typically offer much lower annual leave, often as low as 10 days per year. Historically Spouses have found it difficult to find employment in the local area. Los Angeles has more opportunities but in peak traffic can take up to 2hrs each way.

f. **Exchange Rates.** LOA is updated semi-annually to reflect changes in prices relative to the UK. As pay and allowances are paid in GBP, monthly salary payments in USD will vary due to changing General Accounting Rate [Exchange Rates and Foreign Currencies](#). As both the GAR and the level of LOA awarded can change, they must not be relied upon for absolute budgeting.

ACCOMMODATION

9. At Edwards AFB the accommodation entitlement is charged per current SLA/SFA rates, subject to rank, status and location. Accn can either be on base or locally rented housing. Regardless, deductions from pay will be as per published rates⁴ with a Fuel and Light charge in lieu of paying utility bills, however overseas pers do not pay CILOCT. The standard of housing

³ A small grant is provided for electrical purchases.

⁴ JSP 754 refers.

is likely to be better than the UK equivalent. Personnel, in line with local policy, must be located within 45 min (no traffic) and 50 miles from Bldg 1830A, Edwards AFB.

- a. **Edwards AFB.** Whilst on-base accommodation for families is an option, availability is limited and cannot be guaranteed; therefore, it is recommended to submit an application upon receipt of an assignment order (12 weeks' notice min). There is no single living accommodation available on base. Please also note, if choosing to live on-base and wishing to have visitors, they have to be booked onto base through the US Security and families have experienced difficulties with this historically.
- b. **Antelope Valley.** The majority of UK personnel are accommodated off-base and live in either Palmdale or Lancaster which are approximately 45 minutes drive from Edwards AFB. Both locations are comparable to a reasonably large UK town and have a wide selection of dining and retail facilities.

EDUCATION

10. For those personnel with children of school age, the quality of education and potential impact on the attainment of key qualifications may be a critical factor when considering applying for a post on 17 TES. It is essential to fully understand how children's education might be affected by a move to the USA. Those personnel whose children aged between 14 and 18, should note that the transition back into the UK education system will be difficult as the majority of students in the US graduate at age 18. The US do not have GCSE style qualifications at age 16 or A Level equivalents but complete the four year High School Diploma. Whilst action can be taken to mitigate the impact such as the use of UK boarding schools through CEA or studying for UK qualifications on-line, these options may not suit all circumstances. Prior to seeking educational clearance, it is strongly advised to seek further advice from the MOD's Overseas Education Supportability Team (OEST) which is part of Defence Children Services (DCS). Personnel with children who have special needs should also contact OEST for advice on the level of support that can be provided. RC-DCS-HQ-OES@mod.gov.uk

11. An assessment by the Education Policy Team for the British Embassy concluded that a large number of State schools in the local area did not meet the minimum standards set for a suitable education. As a consequence, Edwards based personnel can receive 100% funding of private school fees. Whilst there is the option to attend private school, unlike in the UK, attendance at a private school does not necessarily mean a better standard of education. It should also be noted that the ability to align the transfer from UK to Edwards with school term periods cannot be guaranteed, hence children may join their Californian school mid-term. Another consideration is that the private schools used within the area are heavily Christian religion based. Parents are advised to research the curriculum and values of their chosen school carefully before accepting an accompanied assignment.

NURSERY & CHILDCARE

12. Childcare fees are typically similar to the UK. The DIN [2025DIN01-081](#) details the policy on financial support towards childcare and further information can be found on the BDSUS website [BDSUS Nursery](#). The BDSUS website can currently only be accessed by personal devices. The Primary School Aged Childcare Overseas (PSACO) scheme provides an alternative to wraparound childcare (WAC) in all overseas locations where the WAC Allowance eligibility criteria cannot be met due to local rules or regulations, or because Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) accounts are not available. DIN [2025DIN01-122](#) details the policy

MEDICAL & DENTAL

13. All routine medical issues will be handled on base under a NATO Status of Forces Agreement with the US Department of Defence and there is no requirement to purchase additional medical insurance. For any referrals off-base for medical treatment such as an operation or specialist treatment, prior authorisation must be sought from the British Embassy. For SP, dental care will be administered on base but dependent care is provided under private arrangements. Dependents will be provided with the same level of free dental work that would be delivered under the NHS. The medical and dental facilities at Edwards AFB compare favorably with those expected to be received in the UK. Due to the USA using private healthcare, approvals are required for anything off-base and require claiming back fees to ensure in line with UK policy. This can be a difficult process when initially using the system due to the UK having NHS funded medical and is a completely new system to navigate that many find frustrating.

14. Any long standing or complex medical issues, including pregnancies, should be discussed with the British Embassy Healthcare Team before progressing your application.

FOOD STANDARDS

15. Food regulations in the UK are much stricter compared to the US, including warning labels for certain ingredients, artificial dyes, and source of produce must be clearly displayed in British packaging. Also, take into consideration that many American foods have a lot of salt and sugar within them to improve flavour. There are a wide variety of food outlets available and healthier options can be found but note that you do have to get used to a new system.

CULTURE

16. California is a multi-cultural State. English is the main language but there are still differences between US and UK culture. It is advised for personnel to watch You Tube clips on Palmdale, Lancaster, Edwards AFB to gain a visual understanding of the local.

DUTY TIME

17. A tour on 17 TES will require day and night working. The working routine will be similar to that of a normal UK Combat Air Sqn including the possible requirement of weekend working. There is also compulsory block leave for 20 days of the year, currently 4th July week, Thanksgiving week and two weeks at Christmas. Whilst based at Edwards AFB, the Sqn will follow USA Federal Holidays, due to base closures on these dates. ILA balances are increased to reflect additional Federal Holidays compared to UK Bank Holidays.

18. Whilst frontline experience is highly desirable, any particular previous role or experience is mandated on any particular aircraft type in order to qualify for a position on 17 TES. Rather than an exhaustive list of competencies, selection will be based on an individuals ability to complete the required training. Irrespective of background, 17 TES is looking for highly motivated personnel who want to work in a dynamic, multi-national environment on state of the art equipment.

19. All personnel will have their annual appraisals carried out iaw single Service policy.

20. Personnel will remain competitive for promotion whilst employed in the USA. However, whilst promotion in post may be possible, it will be subject to the needs of the Service at that time and it should be assumed that a return to the UK early is required if promoted in order to fill a position in the new rank or defer promotion. Pers who expect promotion in the near future, should discuss the matter with Career Management before progressing an application.

Returning to the UK after a short time in the USA can be an extremely costly experience.

21. The nature of work on TES requires that some personnel hold a Developed Vetting clearance. For those not already holding this clearance it can be a very personal process where finances, criminal history and relationships are scrutinised. Those who feel that this scrutiny may be an issue should seek advice from the Stn Police Fit/DV clerk. 17 TES has a number of posts that require DV and we will not accept personnel into these roles who are not DV cleared, however these are mostly limited to J3/5 roles.

22. A current UK driving license is essential for Service personnel. Because of the distances involved at Edwards AFB it is not possible to travel to and from Edwards AFB without a driving license. It is highly recommended that spouses are in possession of a UK driving license and are required to take the California driving test within 6 months of arrival (Service personnel are exempt) to be able to drive legally in California. Those without a UK driving license can also drive in the USA once they have passed the California driving test which is comparatively easy to the UK.

PETS

23. Transporting of pets is at personal cost and can be extremely expensive, with the return to the UK often costing higher. It is advised personnel research this prior to applying. Once in location, all dogs over 4 months old must be licensed with the local jurisdiction. Further details can be found at [LA County Animal Care - Licensing](#)

SUMMARY

24. This prospectus should provide the required information needed to make an informed decision on whether to apply for a post on 17 TES. The aim of this prospectus is to ensure that all facts are communicated so that personnel can arrive into the USA fully aware of what to expect. The initial settling period can be demanding but the opportunities to travel and explore a different culture should not be underestimated. Edwards is close to coastal regions and enjoys dry weather rarely seen in the UK.

NEXT STEPS

25. If having read this prospectus and would like to be considered for a post on 17 TES, interest should be registered with Career Management. Further advice can also be sought from Families Federations [RAF Families Federation](#) [RN Families Federation](#)