

# F-35B Loss is the Fourth for the Marine Corps



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ARLINGTON, Va. – The pilot of a Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II strike fighter ejected safely near Charleston, South Carolina, on September 17, but search-and-recovery efforts for the aircraft are ongoing, a Marine Corps official said.

“The search-and-recovery efforts for the aircraft are ongoing, and we are thankful to the agencies assisting in this effort,” said Major Kevin Stephensen, a Marine Corps spokesperson in the Communication Directorate of Headquarters, Marine Corps, in a Sept. 18 update. “The mishap is currently under investigation. The Department of the Navy has a well-defined process for investigating aircraft mishaps. We are unable to provide additional details to preserve the integrity of the investigatory process.”

The pilot and aircraft were assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 (VMFAT-501) at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. The squadron is the East Coast fleet replacement squadron for the F-35B pilots and maintenance personnel.

The loss of the F-35B is the third for VMFAT-501. On Oct. 16, 2016, one of its F-35Bs caught fire and landed safely, but the aircraft was a write-off. On Sept. 2, 2018, the squadron lost an aircraft because of an engine failure.

On Sept. 29, 2020, an F-35B from another squadron collided with a KC-130J and crashed in southern California.

Another F-35B crashed on Dec. 15, 2022, at Naval Air Station-Joint Reservation Base Fort Worth, Texas, but the aircraft had not yet been delivered to the Marine Corps and was flown at the time by an Air Force pilot.

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## **USS Canberra Commissioning Touched Hearts**

USS CANBERRA LCS 30  
Keel Laid 10 March 2020  
Christened 5 June 2021  
Commissioned 22 July 2023  
Sydney, Australia



Honorary Plank Owner  
Ron Spence





Welcome to the  
USS Canberra  
Commissioning  
Ceremony





***The rare commissioning abroad brought people together from across the globe.***

It's always a special occasion when a new ship is commissioned and brought to life with crew, family, and friends, but the [recent commissioning of the USS Canberra](#) (LCS 30) was particularly meaningful. [Seapower](#) recently got the scuttlebutt from Ron Spence, Commissioning Committee Gift Coordinator and learned a little more about how this particular commissioning was celebrated.

While nearly every commissioning involves recognition of those [designated as plank owners](#), the individuals honored with that title for the *Canberra* received something extra special. "The plank owners' plaques were made by a gentleman names Joseph Nolin, a native citizen from Australia who now lives in Portland, Oregon," said Spence. "His company, Lumberjack Wood Products, custom made these plaques from authentic Australian

Beech wood that Mr. Nolin brought from Australia.”

Spence said, “I felt having them made from Australian wood, by a native from Australia in the shape of the continent of Australia was very special and a great way to honor the commissioning.”

“I have seen many plank owners’ plaques, but nothing as unique as this one,” he said.

The Commissioning Committee also hosted a watch party in San Diego, attended by friends, families, and supporters of the of the new LCS, including many members of the [United States Navy League](#), which has a long history of supporting and ship commissionings. “It was a wonderful experience,” said Spence, “especially when we heard family members say, ‘there is my daddy on TV.’”

“All of the events and gifts were put together by the women and men of the Commissioning Committee,” said Spence. Many of the members responsible had never met in person, “but they came together from across the globe to help make this a most memorable event,” he said.

“Something such as this had never been done before, but it was done, and done right,” Spence said.

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## **Marine Corps Looking at Stealthy Autonomous Vessels for Logistics**



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ARLINGTON, Va.—The U.S. Marine Corps is exploring a concept to enhance its ability to supply its forces inside a contested environment: low-profile vessels used by drug-running cartels.

The Corps, however, is looking at autonomous low-profile vessels (LPVs), said Lieutenant General Karsten Heckl, deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration, speaking Sept. 6 at the Defense News Conference in Arlington, who advocated the use of autonomous unmanned systems wherever possible.

Drug runners have built and used manned LPVs frequently over the last two decade to carry loads of illegal drugs from Latin America to the United States. The LPVs, called semisubmersibles, are fabricated in secret locations and, with a small crew, carry their payload along the transit lanes,

trying to avoid visual and radar detection with their very low profiles.

“We just copy the drug lords down south running drugs,” Heckl said. “They are hard to find, so now we figure, hey, it works, right?”

The Marine Corps has recently focused on logistics in a contested environment as part of its Force Design 2030 to address the challenge of supplying its forces inside the enemy’s weapons engagement zone – inside the first island chain off China, for example.

Heckl addressed the concept pairing it with uncrewed autonomy, noting the lower cost of unmanned systems without having to accommodate humans and the supplies and safety systems needed to sustain them.

The required scale of autonomous LPVs is so far undetermined, but Heckl pointed to the success of an unmanned expeditionary fast ship (T-EPF) in autonomous operations. Austal built the Military Sealift Command’s 13th T-EPF, USNS Apalachicola – a fast catamaran logistics ship—with autonomous control systems to demonstrate the potential of autonomous operations of a ship of its size.

“T-EPF 13 went out and did 1,500 nautical miles completely autonomously,” Heckl said. “They had human beings on board as back-ups, but what an amazing capability, a ship that can go 45 knots in Sea State 3 that can operate autonomously. Autonomous—from a logistics perspective—absolutely.

“I want autonomous everything, if we can get there,” he said.

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# Marine Aviator Killed in F./A-18D Hornet Crash



EL CENTRO, Calif. (Sept. 28, 2020) Marines with Marine All Weather Attack Squadron 224 (VMFA 224), Marine Aircraft Group 31, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, prepare F/A-18s for flight operations aboard Naval Air Facility El Centro, Calif. on Sept. 28, 2020. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Nicholas Buss)

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ARLINGTON, Va. – A Marine Corps aviator was killed in the crash of his F/A-18D Hornet strike fighter on Aug. 24.

The two-seat Hornet, with only the pilot on board, crashed near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California, at 11:54 PST, according to a release from the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing. The name of the pilot will not be released until the next of kin has been notified. The mishap is under investigation.

The aircraft was assigned to Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA (AW)) 224, based at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina. The squadron is one of only two VMFA(AW) squadrons remaining in the Marine Corps, the other being VMFA(AW)-533. The Marine Corps is in transition from the F/A-18 Hornet to the F-35B/C Lightning II strike fighter.

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## Romania Seeks Former Marine Corps Assault Amphibious Vehicles



CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. (June 30, 2021) U.S. Marines with Co. A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (1st MARDIV), and Co. B, 3d Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st MARDIV, prepare to evacuate a P7/A1 assault amphibious vehicle

(AAV) during a surf qualification at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, June 30, 2021.

[Release from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency](#)

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## Romania Seeks Former Marine Corps Assault Amphibious Vehicles

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. –The U.S. State Department has approved a possible sale of AAV7 assault amphibious vehicles to the Government of Romania, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a July 2 release.

Romania has requested the sale of 21 AAV-7s, including 16 AAVP-A1 personnel carrier versions, three AAVC-7A1 command vehicles, and two AAVR-7A1 recovery versions. The sale also would include armament, thermal sights, spare parts, manuals, data package, engineering support, and other support. The total cost of the sale would be an estimated \$120.5 million.

The AAV-7 family of vehicles, built by BAE Systems, is being replaced in the U.S. Marine Corps by the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) family, also built by BAE Systems. The AAV-7 entered Marine Corps service in 1972.

A contract to deliver the vehicles and support to Romania in the event the sale is finalized has not yet been identified.

Romania, a member of NATO that borders the Black Sea, has increasingly joined in military ties and exercises with the United States.

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# Fleet Forces Commander Caudle: Navy Is Flexing Proficiency in Operational Level of War



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ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy’s ability to plan and execute war at the operational level in a joint environment is one factor being tested in an upcoming large-scale exercise, with fleet commander staffs and their fleets set to be stressed in various scenarios. The Navy is leveraging the operational planning expertise of the Marine Corps officers integrated in its staffs.

Admiral Daryl Caudle, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, speaking July 24 to reporters during a briefing on the

upcoming Large-Scale Exercise 2023, was asked by Seapower to address the Navy's proficiency in the operational level of war, the lack of which was years ago a noted weakness.

"Our ships are fantastically engineered and built, they've got all the kit," Caudle said. "We embark on those, lean forward, and can sustain in operations ... so the ability for the Navy to think about how we actually plan and utilize those forces was somewhat dampened maybe by the fact that our ability to conduct warfare with those ships was so good. So, we found ourselves in a place where we needed to improve our ability to plan.

"We are – in a very prescribed and repeated manner – sending more of our Navy leaders to planning school," the admiral said. "We're building naval planners. We're getting them in position of fleet command staffs, combatant command staffs, to actually exercise that level of Navy planning required to conduct this global warfare more effectively.

"We integrate with the Marine Corps who are excellent at this, and we bring our Marine partners into our planning cells," he said. "Our future planning cells at all of our MOCs [Maritime Operations Centers] is part of that. Our future operations – where talk about that three-to-six-month time frame – where Marine Corps officers really bring a lot of knowledge and capability to Navy staffs. We're completely integrated there. Our targeting cells are completely integrated. The things that the Marines have a lot of expertise in this that the Navy is still learning how to do at that level. It's been a great success story."

Over the last two decades the Navy has established Maritime Operations Centers to support fleet staffs and other commanders in planning and executing operations.

Caudle described the MOCs as "really a maritime operational concept ... that informs the commander's decision cycle. When

you hear the word 'MOC,' what should really come to your mind is a battle rhythm. We can scale that level of battle rhythm to the conflict that it needs to scale to. So, we're going to test the different echelons of scale during Large-Scale Exercise 23 to enable a global battle rhythm between three fleet commanders, exercising that decision cycle... So, that's part of this as well, testing out how that operational concept works."

Large-Scale Exercise 2023, scheduled for Aug. 9 through Aug. 18, is a global exercise that will involve 22 time zones, six combatant commanders, seven fleets, nine MOCs, six carrier strike groups (four virtually in Live Virtual Constructive (LVC)), three amphibious ready groups (two in LVC), 25 ships and submarines (plus another 50+ LVC), and 25,000 Sailors and Marines.

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**FUTURE USS CANBERRA (LCS 30)  
RECEIVES NATIONAL, GRASS-  
ROOTS SUPPORT FROM  
COMMISSIONING COMMITTEE**



230419-N-NT811-1004 SAN DIEGO (April 19, 2023) The Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Canberra (LCS 30) departs San Diego Harbor for a routine underway off the California Coast. Littoral Combat Ships are fast, optimally manned, mission-tailored surface combatants that operate in near-shore and open-ocean environments, winning against 21st-century coastal threats. LCS integrates with joint, combined, manned and unmanned teams to support forward presence, maritime security, sea control and deterrence missions around the globe. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Mark D. Faram)

SYDNEY – The Navy’s Independence-variant Littoral Combat Ship, the future USS Canberra (LCS 30), will be commissioned, July 22 at the Royal Australian Naval Base Garden Island, in Sydney Harbor – a rare commissioning abroad for the U.S. Navy. Behind the scenes, an all-civilian committee of Navy League members have worked for months to support the ship and its crew ahead of this historic event that both celebrates and exemplifies the strong relationship between the two nations. “We have begun another important in the relationship between these two

great nations. The new USS Canberra (LCS 30) demonstrates the strong alliance between the United States and Australia,” said Ward Cook, Commissioning Committee Chairman in Kansas City.

Quoting Alfred Thayer Mahan who said, “navies are instruments of international relations,” Commissioning Committee member Patricia Du Mont in Fort Lauderdale, Florida underscored the importance of the relationship, stating, “As the first U.S. Navy international ship commissioning, the commissioning of USS Canberra (LCS 30) in Sydney, Australia, exemplifies people-to-people diplomacy.”

The [Navy League of the United States](#), a nonprofit organization headquartered in Arlington, Virginia whose mission is to advocate, educate, and support the sea services, is routinely involved in the commissioning process of U.S. Navy ships. President and CEO of the Hampton Roads, Virginia Navy League Council, Maryellen Baldwin explained that her council has commissioned 28 ships to date and stated, “Navy League-provided ship enhancements add character and context to a warship, which exerts its presence through port visits and other peacetime pursuits [while also] improving quality of life for those aboard.”

The USS Canberra Commissioning Committee, made up of eleven individuals from across the United States, have extensive experience bringing new ships to life. With more than 50 combined ship commissioning between them, these individuals came together 20 weeks ago to support the crew and families of the future USS Canberra (LCS 30).

When the Navy receives delivery of a ship from the contractor, the ship is only given the bare essentials to conduct business at sea. The civilian Commissioning Committee raises funds to support the crew’s additional needs while on board the ship. There are important morale items that need to be purchased for the crew to use during their down time on board, such as media like books and TVs, and gym equipment This critical support

for the ship and her crew are an important part of any ship commissioning effort, but this unique international commissioning this some both challenges and great opportunities.

“Working with on the commissioning of the USS Canberra has been the most challenging yet rewarding experience. Dealing with the women and men from around the globe to not only make all the events leading up to the commissioning happen, but being able to support the crew and their families in many ways will always make this a memorable experience for me,” said Commissioning Committee member Ronald Spence in the Rocky Mountain region, who has worked on multiple commissioning committees.

It will be up to the ship’s crew, its sponsor, the commissioning committee, and the City of Canberra to strengthen the relationship between the ship and its namesake for the life of the ship. The ship’s sponsor is Australian Senator, the Honourable Marise Payne, the former Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The commissioning ceremony will be highlighted by a time-honored Navy tradition when Ms. Payne will give the first order to “man our ship and bring her to life!”

Built by [Austal USA](#), LCS 30 will be the twenty sixth littoral combat ship to enter the fleet and the fifteenth of the Independence variant. Former Austal employee and Commissioning Committee member Jenny Beam Klein of Mobile, Alabama said, “it was an honor to witness the construction of future USS Canberra (LCS 30) for the past five years here in Mobile, Alabama.” She discussed the importance of the relationship with Austal, stating, “It has been a privilege to be part of the LCS 30 Commissioning Committee under the leadership of Mr. Ward Cook and Mr. Ernie Conner and we are thrilled to watch her join the U.S. Navy fleet this weekend on the other side of the world. This ship and ceremony are creating stronger ties between our Gulf Coast shipbuilding community, the Navy and

Australia. Congratulations to the Officers and the Crew!"

Austal is also hosting watch party for the event at their facility in San Diego to, "keep the families involved," said Commissioning Committee member CW04 David Miller, USN (Ret.) of Kansas City, Missouri. "What an honor to be part of this challenging, but highly rewarding event, planning and conducting the commissioning of a ship in Sydney," he said.

This will be the first US Navy ship in an allied port, and the second US Navy Combat ship named after Australian's capitol city. Independence-variant LCS pride themselves on being fast, optimally manned, mission-tailored surface combatants that operate in near-shore and open-ocean environments, winning against 21st-century coastal threats. LCS integrates with joint, combined, manned and unmanned teams to support forward-presence, maritime security, sea control, and deterrence missions around the globe.

USS CANBERRA (LCS 30) will be homeported in San Diego, California. The ceremony will be live streamed at: <http://www.dvidshub.net/webcast/32033>. The link will become active approximately five minutes prior to the event (Friday, July 21<sup>st</sup> 8:55 p.m. EST). Please contact Editor-in-Chief of [Seapower](#) magazine, Ann Tropea with questions: [atropea@navyleague.org](mailto:atropea@navyleague.org)

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## Navy Retires Its Last Special

# Operations Squadron

# Helicopter



SAN DIEGO, California (June 30, 2023) MH-60S Seahawks assigned to the “Firehawks” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 85 fly near San Diego during the squadron’s final flight prior to its deactivation ceremony. Navy Reserve squadron HSC-85 is the Navy’s last helicopter squadron dedicated to Naval Special Warfare (NSW) and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan LeCompte)

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ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s only helicopter squadron dedicated to support of special operations forces has made its final flight.

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 85 (HSC-85), a reserve squadron based at Naval Air Station North Island, California, made its final flight on June 30, 2023, prior to its deactivation

ceremony, according to a release from Commander, Naval Air Force Reserve.

HSC-85 was equipped with MH-60S Seahawk helicopters to support “Naval Special Warfare forces and other special operations forces training and readiness,” according to the Department of the Navy’s 2023 budget highlights book. The Navy proposed retirement of the squadron with the service’s 2023 budget request. The Navy estimates the program savings would amount to \$312.5 million over the Future Years Defense Plan.

HSC-85 originally was established as Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 85 (HS-85) in 1970 at NAS Alameda, California, and equipped with the SH-3A Sea King helicopter, later upgrading to the SH-3D and SH-3H versions. The squadron moved to NAS North Island in 1993 and in October 1994 was redesignated Helicopter Combat Support Squadron 85 (HC-85), shifting to the roles of search and rescue, logistics and range support.

The squadron was redesignated HSC-85 in February 2006 and equipped with MH-60S helicopters. In 2011, special operations support became its primary role, and it was equipped with an older version of the Seahawk, the HH-60H. The Navy planned in 2016 to deactivate HSC-85 and its East Coast counterpart, HSC-84, but HSC-85 survived. The squadron in 2018 upgraded to the Block III version of the MH-60S.

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## **Navy’s I-Boss Aeschbach: Fleet Sees Greater Need for**

# Information Warriors



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ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s operational climate is generating a growing need for the Navy Information Forces, challenging the capacity of the forces to meet that need.

The Navy’s information warfare forces include personnel specializing in intelligence, electronic warfare, cyber warfare, oceanography, nuclear command and control, and information warfare.

Vice Admiral Kelly Aeschbach, commander Naval Information Forces—known informally as the “I-Boss” – speaking July 18 with retired Rear Admiral Frank Thorp IV in the U.S. Naval Memorial’s SITREP series, said the Navy’s intelligence and cryptologic specialists were not as busy in the maritime environment during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as they

have now become with the great power competition with China and Russia.

“We were really not challenged in the maritime, and our global competitive environment has changed substantially, and we are now facing a near-peer competition – in some areas, we are being outpaced by our competitors – that I think demands now that you need information warriors to deliver our capability full-time,” Aeschbach said.

The admiral cited the Navy’s submarine force as an example where what is now information warfare was a collateral duty for a submarine officer, but now, with the increased demands of high-end warfare, the capabilities of information warfare specialists are needed to handle the flood of information and allow the other personnel to concentrate on the areas in which they excel.

“We’re a better team for it, if we’re there bringing the detailed information warfare capability,” she said.

With the increasing demands on information warfare forces, the Navy is challenged to prevent burn-out of the force, which—unlike ship or aircraft crews—does not have a routine sustainment cycle.

“We are operating all the time, and so one of the challenges we have as a type commander is: how do you do the care and feeding and re-generation of a force that is always in demand,” Aeschbach said. “So that has challenged us in terms of how we maintain an appropriate operational tempo for our personnel, effectively train them, and afford them enough time to re-charge and be most effective and most ready for the missions for the missions they’re supporting.”

Aeschbach is working to develop and use live virtual constructive technology to provide realistic training for information warfare forces, which, because of the nature of their capabilities, are more difficult to exercise

realistically in a peacetime environment.

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## Canada Requests Up to 16 P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft



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ARLINGTON, Va. – The government of Canada has requested the sale of up to 16 Boeing P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and support equipment under the Foreign Military Sales program at an estimated cost of \$5.9 billion, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a June 27 release.

“The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale,” the DSCA said, noting that the agency had delivered the certification to Congress.

Once finalized, the sale would make Canada the seventh nation to procure the P-8A, the others being the United States,

Australia, United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand, South Korea, and Germany. India procured a modified version, the P-8I.

In addition to the aircraft, the proposed procurement includes mission systems and “aircraft spares; spare engines; support equipment; operational support systems; training; training devices; maintenance trainer/classrooms; engineering technical assistance (ETA); logistics technical assistance (LTA); Country Liaison Officer (CLO) support; Contractor Engineering Technical Services (CETS); Contractor Logistics Support (CLS); repair and return; transportation; aircraft ferry; other associated training and support; and other related elements of logistics and program support,” the DSCA said.

The major sensor and defensive systems included in the proposal are:

- APY-10 Radar
- AAQ-2 Acoustic System
- ALQ-240 Electronic Support Measures
- MX-20HD Electro-Optical/Infrared system
- ALE-47 Countermeasures Dispenser Systems
- NexGen Missile Warning Sensors
- AAQ-24(V)N Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures System

The Canadian Air Force currently flies the Lockheed CP-140 Aurora – a version of the P-3 Orion – first delivered in the 1980s.