

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



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.