



F-35 Lightning II Program

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F - 35 JET RETURNS TO FLYING AT EDWARDS AFB FEB. 3

AF-1, a F-35 Lightning II, resumed flying Friday, Feb. 3, at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., after the Integrated Test Force Team there received and installed the first properly packed parachute head box assembly for its ejection seat from the Martin Baker Aircraft Corporation. The F-35 head box assembly was installed in AF-1 early Friday morning and the aircraft flew later that day. Three more head box assemblies containing properly packed parachutes are expected to be received and installed during the weekend allowing additional aircraft to return to flight at Edwards early next week. More head boxes should be received in the coming days for installation in the remaining jets at Edwards, nine jets at Eglin AFB, Fla., and jets in assembly at the F-35 production plant at Ft. Worth, Texas.

Friday's flight at Edwards was the first since 26 January when high speed ground and flight operations were temporarily suspended at Edwards AFB, Calif., Eglin AFB, Fla. and Lockheed Martin's F-35 production facility in Fort Worth, Texas after discovering improperly packed parachutes in affected production and test aircraft. The apparent cause was due to improperly drafted packing procedures in the -21 and -23 ejection seats. The parachutes packed in the head boxes of these seats were reversed 180 degrees from design during installation. Although the improperly packed parachutes would have still deployed as designed to provide a safe landing, it would have made it more difficult for the pilot to steer the canopy during the parachute descent. The temporary suspension of flight test did not apply to the 8 F-35 test aircraft at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md., which have an earlier version of the ejection seat with the properly packed parachutes head box assembly.