



F-35 Lightning II Program

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FIRST INTERNATIONAL F-35B ARRIVES ABOARD FIGHTERTOWN

Story by Pfc. Samantha Torres

BEAUFORT, S.C. - Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 welcomed the first United Kingdom F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter aboard Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, Feb. 3.

The jet was flown by British Royal Air Force pilot Hugh Nichols, the UK senior national representative from Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

"It's big for the Air Station, the town, and the pilot training center," said Joseph T. Bachmann, the commanding officer of VMFAT-501.

The jet is one of only three British F-35B aircraft and is assigned to VMFAT-501.

The international cooperation of VMFAT-501 and the RAF has a huge impact on the Air Station and the Marine Corps as a whole.

"This is another example of the Marine Corps and the UK working hand in hand to achieve great things with the F-35," said Bachmann.

The F-35B will replace the Marine Corps' aging legacy tactical fleet. In addition to replacing the F/A-18A-D Hornet, the F-35B will replace the AV-8B Harrier and EA-6B Prowler, essentially necking down to one common tactical fixed-wing aircraft and providing the dominant, multi-role, fifth-generation capabilities needed across the full spectrum of combat operations to deter potential adversaries and enable future naval aviation power projection.

According to Lockheed Martin, the Lightning II will also be the backbone of Britain's future carrier operations.

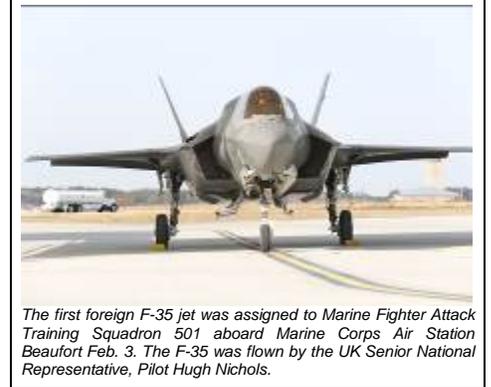
This is the last F-35B delivered from Eglin, turning a page in the next chapter for the program.

"The international cooperation is going to be huge for the next few years," said Nichols. "The fact that we are working with VMFAT-501 is already a big deal and we are setting the scene for the next few years."

Lieutenant Commander Beth Kitchen, the UK senior engineering officer at VMFAT-501, ensures that the aircraft is maintained and the UK is able to develop its own engineering maintenance and air competency in order to independently operate the aircraft.

The F-35 is the UK's future maritime strike ground attack fighter aircraft.

"The fact that we can operate from VMFAT-501 for the next couple years means we will be ahead of the game when it comes to developing our own capabilities back on UK soil come 2018," said Kitchen.



The first foreign F-35 jet was assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 aboard Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort Feb. 3. The F-35 was flown by the UK Senior National Representative, Pilot Hugh Nichols.