

Lockheed Martin Begins Assembly Of U.S. Air Force's First Operational F-22 Raptor

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Assembly of the first operational F-22 Raptor fighter began here today during a short ceremony attended by U.S. Air Force officials from Tyndall AFB, Fla. -- the future home of this particular next-generation aircraft.

(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20010319/DAM057>)

"We're pleased to begin this, the 20th mid-fuselage we've built since the program began in 1991," Gary Keith, Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company deputy program manager for the F-22 said during the event. "With each one, we've learned how to build them more quickly and more cost effectively."

During the ceremony, LM Aero mechanics began assembling the aircraft's mid-fuselage, the largest and most complex structural component of the F-22. It is in the mid-fuselage where the aircraft internally carries its weapons, much of its fuel, and a large number of its major subcomponents, including the majority of the Raptor's electrical, hydraulic, landing gear and flight control systems.

Assembly of the mid-fuselage for Raptor 4018, as this F-22 is designated, will take approximately 11 months. Once completed, it will be delivered to LM Aero's Marietta, Ga., facility, where the aircraft's forward fuselage, wings, aft fuselage, and vertical and horizontal tails will be attached and its F119 engines will later be installed. First flight and delivery of Raptor 4018 to Tyndall AFB are tentatively scheduled for early 2003.

Tyndall AFB is home to the Air Force's 325th Fighter Wing, the "schoolhouse" where future F-22 pilots will be trained to fly and fight in this 21st century air dominance fighter. Today's event is a key event in the program's march toward delivering the first F-22 Raptor to Tyndall AFB.

"The 325th Fighter Wing looks forward to welcoming the F-22 to the Florida panhandle, and to the prospect of training pilots and maintainers with the very best fighter aircraft in the world," U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Leigh Hinkle, Chief of the F-22 Integration Office at the 325th, said during today's ceremony.

"The F-22 will launch a new era in air combat. We are excited about the future it will provide the U.S. Air Force, and we are proud to integrate the Raptor into our mission and embrace the challenges that lie ahead."

The F-22A Raptor is the world's first stealthy air dominance fighter, and is capable of multiple missions. Deadly and unseen at long range, unmatched at close-in dogfighting, and with superb, precision ground attack capabilities, the F-22 will dominate the skies over any future battlefield.

The F-22 is being built by Lockheed Martin (and Boeing as principal subcontractor, with engines supplied by Pratt & Whitney) for the U.S. Air Force. It is currently in the engineering and manufacturing development (EMD) phase.

To date, LM Aero has built 19 F-22 mid-fuselages. The first 11 were used by the program's flight or ground-test aircraft. Three more mid-fuselages were built for the program's Production Representative Test Vehicles (PRTVs), test airplanes that will later join the U.S. Air Force's operational inventory. LM Aero is currently assembling five additional PRTV mid-fuselages, and all will be finished during 2001.

The Air Force plans to field 339 Raptors during the next decade to replace its fleet of F-15 Eagles. The first Raptor squadron is scheduled to be operational in 2005.

For more information about the F-22 Raptor, please visit: <http://www.f22-raptor.com/>

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