F-35 Aft Fuselage Arrives At Lockheed Martin - All Major Sections Of First Aircraft Now In Place

The aft fuselage -- the last major subassembly of the first F-35 Joint Strike Fighter -- has arrived at Lockheed Martin in Fort Worth and is being readied for attachment to the aircraft's center fuselage. BAE Systems recently completed manufacture of the component in Samlesbury, England, and shipped it to the Fort Worth plant, where it arrived on May 31.

"Again, the F-35 digital design and manufacturing process has produced an exceptional aircraft assembly, with all the hallmarks of precise fit and finish that we've come to expect on this program," said Bob Elrod, executive vice president and F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program general manager. "We're proud of the F-35 team's accomplishments, particularly our BAE Systems teammates whose fine craftsmanship is evident in this crucial part of the airplane."

Workers will attach the aft fuselage section directly to the center fuselage on June 9, completing the union of the aircraft's four major subassemblies. The center fuselage, manufactured by Northrop Grumman, arrived at Lockheed Martin in early May. It was subsequently attached to the wing and forward fuselage, both produced by Lockheed Martin.

The F-35 is a next-generation, supersonic, multi-role stealth aircraft designed to replace aging AV-8B Harriers, A-10s, F-16s, F/A-18 Hornets and United Kingdom Harrier GR.7s and Sea Harriers. The first F-35, a conventional-takeoff-and-landing (CTOL) variant, is scheduled for completion at year's end and first flight in the third quarter of 2006.

Three versions of the F-35 are planned: a CTOL, a short-takeoff/vertical landing (STOVL) and a carrier variant (CV). Each is derived from a common design, and will ensure that the F-35 meets the performance needs of the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy, the U.K. Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, and allied defense forces worldwide, while staying within strict affordability targets.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 130,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture and integration of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2004 sales of $35.5 billion.

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