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Ground-breaking ceremony: Rheinmetall begins construction of state-of-the-art F-35 factory in Weeze, Germany

Rheinmetall and US-based Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin have begun construction of a state-of-the-art factory for the F-35 Lightning II fighter aircraft center fuselage. On 1 August 2023, a ground-breaking ceremony took place at the Weeze Airport site in the Kleve district of western Germany. It was attended by Hendrik Wüst, governor of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Numerous other guests from the world of politics, civil society, the armed forces and industry also took part, including Mona Neubaur, the minister for economic affairs, industry, climate protection and energy of North Rhine-Westphalia; Vice Admiral Carsten Stawitzki, chief of the equipment division in the German ministry of defence; Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz, supreme commander of the German Air Force; and Annette Lehnigk-Emden, head of the Federal Office of Equipment, Information Technology and In-Service Support, the German procurement agency, and US Consul General NRW Pauline Kao.

The world's top-performing warplane, the F-35 Lightning II is now being procured by the German Air Force. Rheinmetall is investing more than €100 million to build a cutting-edge production facility. Featuring state-of-the-art technology developed and used by Northrop Grumman in producing the F-35 center fuselage at the company's facility in Palmdale, California, the planned factory will be operated under the auspices of Rheinmetall Aviation Services GmbH. It will have 30,000 square metres of production space. Over 400 highly skilled staff will crew the ultramodern plant, which will also include logistics and warehouse facilities, research and test centres, classrooms and quality control units.

This effort represents the standup of a second source for F-35 center fuselages, allowing Northrop Grumman and Rheinmetall to jointly produce up to 185 center sections annually.

The Weeze plant is due to produce at least 400 F-35 fuselage sections for the air forces of Germany and other friendly nations. An integrated technology group, Rheinmetall will be drawing here on its extensive experience in fabricating sophisticated components as well as in the aviation domain. Production is expected to begin in 2025.

Rheinmetall will also be including other companies with relevant technical capabilities in the F-35 programme, creating or securing numerous jobs in various sectors.



► Key facts


- Rheinmetall starts construction of state-of-the-art factory for production of fuselage sections for the F-35 fighter aircraft in Weeze
- Groundbreaking ceremony on 1 August 2023 was attended by top officials
- Collaboration with Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin
- Production starts in 2025
- 400 highly skilled jobs, other companies to be included

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"With the F-35 factory here in Weeze, we are creating a new nucleus for aerospace technology in North Rhine-Westphalia and opening a new chapter in German-American cooperation," declared Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger. "The F-35 Lightning II is a core element of Western security preparedness. Just as the former Royal Air Force base at Weeze was a pillar of NATO air defence during the Cold War, the Rheinmetall factory in Weeze is destined to play a significant role for NATO's F-35 user nations. We are aware of this responsibility and will do everything in our power to ensure that our F-35 fuselage production is a success."

"The proven success of our Integrated Assembly Line helps to ensure that Northrop Grumman affordably manufactures a next-generation aircraft that meets the needs of a growing number of international customers," said Tom Jones, corporate vice president and president, Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems. "Combined with Rheinmetall's experience with German Armed Forces and European industry, the collaboration with Rheinmetall and Lockheed Martin will foster critical skills and energize the region's economy with high-tech job opportunities."

About Rheinmetall: An integrated technology group, Rheinmetall AG is a publicly traded company headquartered in Düsseldorf, Germany. It is one of the world's foremost suppliers of defence technology systems and equipment as well as a driver of forward-looking technological and industrial solutions in the civil sector. Rheinmetall AG consists of five divisions: Vehicle Systems, Weapon and Ammunition, Electronic Solutions, Sensors and Actuators, and Materials and Trade. At 131 locations worldwide, the Group's 28,000 employees generated sales of around €6.4 billion in 2022. Rheinmetall AG has been listed on the DAX stock exchange since March 2023.

About Northrop Grumman: Northrop Grumman is a leading global aerospace and defense technology company. Our pioneering solutions equip our customers with the capabilities they need to connect and protect the world, and push the boundaries of human exploration across the universe. Driven by a shared purpose to solve our customers' toughest problems, our 98,000 employees define possible every day.

About Lockheed Martin: Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, Lockheed Martin Corporation is a global security and aerospace company that employs approximately 116,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services.