MEDIA RELEASE

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The most advanced fighter jet of the German Airforce takes shape: Rheinmetall completes the first F-35 centre fuselage section in Weeze



Rheinmetall has completed the first centre fuselage section for the F-35A Lightning II in Weeze—as scheduled and to the highest quality standards. The plant on the Lower Rhine has been producing since the summer of 2025. This marks a significant milestone for one of Europe's most modern military aircraft manufacturing facilities, achieved in less than a year and a half.

Rheinmetall plans to deliver the component to Northrop Grumman in the first quarter of 2027. The component is earmarked for the 18th German F-35 of the current production series. In September 2026, the German Armed Forces celebrated the rollout and handover of its first F-35 fighter jet at Lockheed Martin in the United States.

Federal Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius and the Chief of the German Air Force, Lieutenant General Holger Neumann, are expected to attend the completion of the first German-produced centre fuselage section in Weeze. Also, Rheinmetall CEO Armin Papperger and Tom Jones, Vice President and President of Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems, will be attending. During the traditional "Component Signing" ceremony, Federal Minister Pistorius and Lieutenant General Neumann, among others, will autograph the centre fuselage section.

Armin Papperger, CEO of Rheinmetall AG: "The heart of the F-35A is now 'Made in Weeze'. Our team is demonstrating what we are able to achieve together with Northrop Grumman. We deliver the highest quality and follow our timeline. In doing so, we are strengthening the German Air Force and are building valuable expertise in Germany. Weeze symbolizes the close transatlantic partnership between Germany and the United States. Who would have thought this would be possible just a few years ago! I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this tremendous success".

300,000 individual parts form the core of the F-35A: The centre fuselage section, which weighs about two metric tons, connects the cockpit and the tail. It supports the wings and integrates the interfaces to the tail unit, the engine and the weapons systems. Its structure includes the air intakes as well as key components of the weapon bays and fuel tanks.

▶ Key facts

- First F-35 centre fuselage section completed in Weeze
- Earmarked for the Bundeswehr's 18th F-35
- Delivery planned in first quarter of 2027

▶ Contact

Patrick Rohmann
Spokesperson Digital Systems
Tel.: +49 151 70505366
patrick.rohmann@
rheinmetall.com

Oliver Hoffmann
Head of Public Affairs
Tel.: +49 211 473 4748
oliver.hoffmann@
rheinmetall.com

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The centre fuselage section houses the avionics, weapons, fuel supply, electrical systems, hydraulics, and propulsion components. The F-35A has a fuel capacity of 8.3 metric tons. Most of this fuel is stored in the central fuselage. Its outer skin is made of advanced composite materials, which contribute to its stealth design and low-observability technology. A container approximately six meters long, five meters wide, and three meters high is used for transport.

Tom Jones, Corporate Vice President and President, Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems: "This milestone underscores how allied co-production expands F-35 capacity, strengthens the resilience of the defense industrial base and supports NATO deterrence, while remaining anchored in a strong U.S. manufacturing foundation. By combining Northrop Grumman's expertise, advanced manufacturing technology and skilled workforce with Rheinmetall's production capability, we're increasing F-35 center fuselage capacity and deepening industrial cooperation among the nations participating in the program."

Rheinmetall Aviation Services GmbH

Rheinmetall Aviation Services GmbH is part of Rheinmetall's Digital Systems division. It manufactures components at Weeze Airport for Northrop Grumman as part of the F-35 program headed by Lockheed Martin. Along with the facility in Palmdale, California, Rheinmetall operates the world's second integrated production line for this key component there.

Over the next few years, Rheinmetall will manufacture at least 400 centre fuselage sections. At full capacity, the plant can deliver up to 36 units per year. State-of-the-art production processes, robots, and digital quality controls ensure the highest precision. Skilled workers assemble approximately 300,000 individual parts for each centre fuselage section.

Rheinmetall invested approximately 200 million EUR in the construction of the facility, which spans about 30,000 square meters. It provides space for production, logistics, research, and training. Construction began in the third quarter of 2023 and took less than 18 months. About 350 people work at the site. By 2027, the plant is expected to employ about 400 highly qualified specialists. Teams are trained at Northrop Grumman in Palmdale and deepen their knowledge in Weeze. This is how German expertise in military aircraft manufacturing is growing.