Photo Release -- Northrop Grumman Completes Center Fuselage for First U.S. Navy F-35 Aircraft

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Historic First Continues Company's Record of On-Time Performance

PALMDALE, Calif., Aug 19, 2008 (GlobeNewswire via COMTEX News Network) -- Northrop Grumman Corporation (NYSE:NOC) today completed -- on budget and on schedule -- the center fuselage for the first U.S. Navy F-35C Lightning II aircraft, an aircraft carrier-capable variant designated CF-1.

Photos accompanying this release are available at http://media.primezone.com/noc/

The company celebrated the production milestone with a brief ceremony at the Palmdale facility where it assembles center fuselages for F-35 prime contractor Lockheed Martin. More than 200 Northrop Grumman employees shared the historic occasion with executives from the U.S. Department of Defense's F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office, and F-35 prime contractor Lockheed Martin.

"Today's event represents not only the completion of a major aircraft assembly for the F-35 program, but also the delivery on a promise by Northrop Grumman," said Mark Tucker, vice president and F-35 program manager for Northrop Grumman's Integrated Systems sector. "We've shown that we can design and produce a common center fuselage that will meet the operational and logistic support requirements of all three variants of the F-35. And that we're ready to transition to the production phase of the program."

The CF-1 center fuselage will be the seventh of ten center fuselages that Northrop Grumman plans to deliver to Lockheed Martin this year, he added.

"Meeting this delivery commitment on time helps ensure that the F-35C Lightning II will begin flight test on-schedule in 2009. This important step is vital to our commitment to fielding the F-35C for the U.S. Navy as planned in 2015," said Maj. Gen Charles R. Davis, the Defense Department's F-35 Lightning II Program Executive Officer. "The F-35 carrier variant will give the Navy a powerful, multi-role strike fighter that can begin to assume the duties of the F/A-18 Hornet A/B/C/D aircraft that have been successfully protecting and extending the reach of the U.S. fleet since 1983."

The CF-1 center fuselage is one of 19 center fuselages that Northrop Grumman is producing for the system development and demonstration (SDD) phase of the F-35 program. To date, the company has completed center fuselages for 12 aircraft, including AA-1, a conventional take-off and landing (CTOL) variant and the first F-35 aircraft to fly, and BF-1, the first F-35B short take-off/vertical landing (STOVL) variant to fly.

The remaining seven SDD center fuselages are currently in the assembly flow in Palmdale. Northrop Grumman is also currently producing center fuselages for the first two phases of the F-35 low rate initial production program.

The F-35 Lightning II is a stealthy, supersonic multi-role fighter designed to replace a wide range of aging fighter and strike aircraft. It is being produced in three variants -- CTOL, STOVL, and a carrier variant (CV) -- to meet the diverse performance needs of the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Navy and allied defense forces worldwide. The three variants use a high degree of commonality to meet strict affordability requirements.

Northrop Grumman uses disciplined design, manufacturing and assembly processes to ensure the performance and reliability of the F-35 center fuselage. The structure's all-composite inlet and aft ducts are produced in El Segundo, Calif. then mated in Palmdale with the upper and lower subassemblies of the center fuselages, which include the fuel tanks.

The aircraft's outer skins, also made from composites, are then applied and drilled using automated, high precision drilling machines. Final systems installation and testing of hydraulics, actuator doors, the power thermal management system and wire harnesses complete the center fuselage assembly process.

As a principal member of the Lockheed Martin-led F-35 global industry team, Northrop Grumman plays a critical role in the development and production of the weapons system. The company's contributions include: producing and integrating a major section of aircraft's structure; producing key radar and electro-optical subsystems; producing key avionics and communications subsystems; developing mission systems and mission-planning software; developing pilot and maintenance training systems; and developing logistic support hardware and software. The F-35 team also includes BAE Systems.

(Photo: http://www.primezone.com/newsroom/prs/?pkgid=5350)

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Northrop Grumman Corporation is a global defense and technology company whose 120,000 employees provide innovative systems, products, and solutions in information and services, electronics, aerospace and shipbuilding to government and commercial customers worldwide.

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