

Fourth *Lightning II* off the Assembly Line in Fort Worth

By Dick Cole
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With one F-35 *Lightning II* aircraft in structural testing, two in flight test, six in final assembly and another 14 in various stages of production, Lockheed Martin Corporation finished assembly of the fourth F-35 aircraft Saturday, Aug. 16 — a short takeoff/vertical landing F-35B.

“Being part of the transformation of Lockheed Martin’s Fort Worth assembly line has been absolutely amazing,” said Air Force Col. Dennis Hunt, commander of DCMA Lockheed Martin Fort Worth, Texas. “This state-of-the-art assembly line will be producing this fifth-generation fighter at a rate of one aircraft per day in the near future.”

“In just a few days we will have all three *Lightning II* variants in final assembly when we take delivery of the first F-35C carrier variant center fuselage,” said Dan Crowley, Lockheed Martin executive vice



The second short takeoff/vertical landing version of the *Lightning II* was delivered at the Fort Worth Assembly plant on Aug. 16. (Lockheed Martin Corporation photo)

president and F-35 program general manager.

The new aircraft moved immediately to the flight line, where it is undergoing an extensive battery of ground tests before its first flight in early 2009. The first F-35B made its inaugural flight on June 11 and has completed nine missions. The first F-35A, a conventional takeoff and landing

variant, has flown 45 times.

The U.S. Marine Corps plans to operate approximately 340 F-35Bs. The United Kingdom’s Royal Air Force and Royal Navy and the Italian Air Force and Navy also will operate the STOVL variant, which will be the world’s first STOVL aircraft to combine stealth with supersonic speed.

The F-35 is a supersonic, multirole, fifth-generation stealth fighter. Three F-35 variants derived from a common design, developed together and using the same sustainment infrastructure worldwide, will replace at least 13 types of aircraft for 11 nations. **C**

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