

First Boeing 767 AWACS Completes Flight Testing

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The first Boeing 767 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft has successfully completed flight testing, three weeks ahead of schedule. Four 767 AWACS aircraft, designated the E-767, have been sold to the government of Japan.

Since its first flight last August, the plane has logged 130 flights and 383 flight hours.

Take-off performance tests were done at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif. In Moses Lake, Wash., engineers looked at minimum ground-control speeds where the plane is slowed down incrementally while fuel is cut to the engine to simulate an engine failure. Under the hot sun of Yuma, Ariz., engine and nacelle (the engine's covering) cooling capabilities were put to the test. Tests were performed on a new electrical system and a special fuel that will be used by the Japan Air Self Defense Force.

Jim Smith, 767 AWACS program manager, said the plane's performance was outstanding. "We met or exceeded our expectations," he said.

The airplane is undergoing a week of instrument refurbishment in Seattle before it flies to Wichita, Kan., for additional refurbishments. During this process, flight-test equipment such as water barrels, instrument racks, wiring and electrical power connections are removed. Once completed, the plane returns to Seattle in May for mission-system installation and checkout. Meanwhile, aircraft number two begins flight testing in June.

Two of the 767 AWACS planes are scheduled to be delivered to the government of Japan in 1998, with two more the following year.

AWACS is the world's standard for Airborne Early Warning System (AEW) systems. Currently carried on-board militarized 707 aircraft, it fills the need of both airborne surveillance, and command, control and communications functions for tactical and air defense forces. Production of the 707 airframe ended in 1991, with the 767 platform chosen as its replacement.

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