Bell Boeing Gets Final Word to Start Producing V-22s

The Department of Defense has given final approval for the Bell Boeing Tiltrotor Team to begin producing V-22 Osprey aircraft for the U.S. Marine Corps. Five of the Ospreys were approved in this year's defense budget.

The clearance came after defense acquisition leaders reviewed the V-22 program at a Defense Acquisition Board(DAB) readiness hearing April 4. Because no problems were identified at the readiness meeting, the DAB review scheduled for April 18 was canceled and a recommendation to proceed with low rate production was approved by Dr. John Kaminski, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition. The Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD) program had passed all established exit criteria including passing an operational test assessment, an empty weight below 34,182 pounds, demonstrated 220 knots airspeed and delivery of the first EMD aircraft to Patuxent River Naval Air Station, Md.

With this approval, funds to pay for the first five production tiltrotor aircraft were released by the Navy today. The first payment is for $402 million that is part of the $1.454 billion contract awarded Bell Boeing last June for the first three LRIP lots. At that time, $42 million also was released for long-lead component procurement for the first lot of five aircraft. Current production schedules call for another five V-22s to be produced in 1998, seven in 1999 and eight in 2000.

"This is the news we've wanted to hear for many years and now that it's been received, Bell and Boeing are ready to move quickly forward in the V-22's production," said Stuart Dodge, vice president and director of the Bell Boeing team. "The Marine Corps needs V-22s and we're prepared to give them the best aircraft to perform its important missions around the world. The V-22 will give them increased capabilities to meet real-world needs."

The Marines require 425 of the versatile aircraft that can take off vertically and fly like an airplane. The V-22's capability to land without the need of a runway will allow the Marines to go when and where they are needed anywhere in the world.

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