First Airborne Laser Aircraft Arrives at Boeing Wichita for Start of Major Modification Work

747-400 Freighter to undergo 18 months of modification by Team ABL in preparation of laser system installation and testing next year

The first Airborne Laser (ABL) flying platform - a 747-400 Freighter - flew into Boeing (NYSE: BA) facilities in Wichita, Kan., today (Saturday, Jan. 22) and will immediately begin 18 months of major modification work by Team ABL. The aircraft left Paine Field in Everett, Wash., earlier today on its next step toward becoming the world's first flying missile defense system.

At the end of the modification effort, the aircraft will be ready for installation and testing of a sophisticated high-energy chemical laser system capable of shooting down Scud-like missiles at the speed of light from hundreds of miles away. The ABL is to be the world's first laser-armed aircraft of the new millennium and a critical component of the Department of Defense's theater missile defense strategy.

The 747-400 Freighter rolled out from a Boeing assembly building in December four months after manufacturing started.

Team ABL -- Boeing, Lockheed Martin and TRW -- and the Air Force are developing a high-energy chemical oxygen-iodine laser carried aboard a modified Boeing 747-400 Freighter.

Welcoming the widebody aircraft to Wichita was Lt. Gen. Robert H. Foglesong, commander of the 12 th Air Force and U.S. Southern Command Air Forces. Joseph Diamond, Air Force program executive officer for weapons, the Pentagon, joined the ceremony, as well. Also on hand were Kansas state and congressional leaders, led by U.S. Senator Pat Roberts, U.S. Rep. Todd Tiahrt, U.S. Rep. Jim Ryun and Wichita Mayor Bob Knight.

"We are moving forward with the ABL to ensure that we are providing the right equipment to our warfighters and thereby continuing to enjoy our reputation as the only all-purpose aerospace force in the world," Foglesong said. "It would not be smart to ever let our airmen enter a fair fight -- the ABL is another step toward ensuring we have an unfair advantage over our enemies."

Col. Michael Booen, director of the Air Force Airborne Laser System Program Office at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M.; and Team ABL's industry leadership, also flew into the Boeing plant this afternoon.

Over the next 18 months, this Airborne Laser platform will undergo significant changes. The most visible difference will be the installation of a turret in the aircraft nose, from which a beam of laser light will emanate to destroy Scud-like missiles hundreds of miles away.

Additionally, the aircraft will be modified to accept a multi-megawatt-class chemical laser, specialized optics, and computer hardware and software that will allow the aircraft to spot a theater ballistic missile in its boost phase shortly after being launched, lock onto and destroy it.

"Today marks the hardware part of ABL's revolution -- a revolution in global airpower, missile defense, and in military affairs," Col. Booen said. "My hat is off to the Air Force - industry team which has worked so hard. Your effort will save American lives in the future."

This first aircraft designated for ABL -- the YAL-1A Attack Laser -- is the first to be acquired for Air Force use under the military's new commercial "off-the-shelf" philosophy. Labeled Aircraft No. 00-0001, the ABL platform also is the first U.S. Air Force aircraft of the new century. The plane also is the third-ever Boeing 747-400 built using a new fuselage assembly process that significantly improves quality, and reduces rejection tags and cycle time.

As Team ABL leader, Boeing is responsible for creating the ABL surveillance system; developing the battle management, and command and control system; integrating and testing the weapon system; and supplying the 747-400 Freighter airplane. Lockheed Martin Missiles & Space, of Sunnyvale, Calif., is building the ABL target-acquisition, fire control and beam control systems. TRW, of Redondo Beach, Calif., is building the laser and the related ground-support subsystem.

"The ABL program continues on track to develop this critical element toward establishing a comprehensive theater ballistic missile defense," said Paul Shennum, Boeing vice president and Team ABL program director.

"Reaching this delivery and modification-start milestone is significant in a number of ways: we've achieved it through teamwork with the Air Force, innovation and dedication of all the Team ABL people. And we've done it when we said we'd do it, for the price we promised."

Air Force plans call for a fleet of seven ABL aircraft to be ready for rapid deployment within 24 hours to any spot around the globe. The fleet's mission is to deter the use of theater ballistic missiles. More than 30 nations today are believed to have at their disposal more than 13,000 of those missiles. Many of those countries also are known to have or are developing nuclear,

chemical and biological capabilities for their missiles.

During the current $1.3 billion Program Definition and Risk Reduction phase, Team ABL is designing, developing, integrating and testing the ABL weapon system. The effort will culminate with the planned test destruction of Scud-type missiles by the ABL in 2003, providing the U.S. and its allies with emergency defense if needed against theater ballistic missiles.

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