Boeing Completes Major Modifications to First Airborne Laser Aircraft

After the most extensive modification ever performed at a Boeing facility, the first Airborne Laser (ABL) ballistic missile-defense system aircraft is progressing toward flight-worthiness testing in Wichita, Kan.

This modification completion is a significant marker in the life of the Block 2004 aircraft development contract with Team ABL: The Boeing Company [NYSE:BA] and its teammates Lockheed Martin [NYSE:LMT] and TRW [NYSE:TRW]. The aircraft now is ready to accept the heart of the ABL system -- its sophisticated tracking and high-energy laser system.

The revolutionary aircraft has been moved to the flight ramp at the Boeing modification center, and is preparing it for ground- and flight-tests later this summer. Aircraft 00-0001 is the initial airborne platform for the ABL system.

"The successful completion of the modification work in Wichita keeps us on track toward first flight of the modified aircraft this summer and later, integration of the laser system hardware at Edwards," said Scott Fancher, Boeing vice president and ABL program director.

The 747-400 Freighter modification effort dwarfed others accomplished at Boeing. Approximately 1.6-million employee hours were invested to transform the freighter into a revolutionary airborne defender against ballistic-missile attack. Previously, the company has undertaken other large-scale modifications, including the 747 aircraft for the presidential Air Force One fleet, the 767 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) fleet, the 747 Space Shuttle Carrier, and military tanker aircraft.

Boeing is the ABL team leader and is developing the ABL surveillance battle-management system, integrating the weapon system and supplying the modified aircraft. TRW is providing the complete chemical oxygen-iodine laser system. Lockheed Martin is developing the beam control/fire control system, which will acquire the target, then accurately point and fire the laser.

Boeing Space & Communications (S&C) with headquarters in Seal Beach, Calif., is the world's largest space and communications company. S&C provides integrated solutions in launch services, human space flight and exploration, missile defense, and information and communications. It is NASA's largest contractor; a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; and a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The global enterprise has customers worldwide and manufacturing operations throughout the United States and Australia.

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