

Boeing Receives Aircraft for Laser Gunship Program

Boeing [NYSE: BA] Missile Defense Systems (MDS) has taken delivery of the aircraft for the Advanced Tactical Laser (ATL) program, achieving the first of several key milestones in the laser gunship effort.

The C-130H transport, which belongs to the U.S. Air Force's 46th Test Wing, was handed over to Boeing on Jan. 18 in Crestview, Fla., near Eglin Air Force Base. Boeing is modifying the aircraft to enable it to carry a high-energy chemical laser and battle management and beam control subsystems.

Boeing will begin flight testing the aircraft this summer with all subsystems on board except the high-energy laser. A low-power surrogate laser will stand in for the kilowatt-class, high-energy laser.

The high-energy laser is being built in Albuquerque, N.M., and is scheduled to achieve "first light" in ground tests this summer. By 2007, Boeing will install the device on the aircraft and fire it in-flight at mission-representative ground targets to demonstrate the military utility of high-energy lasers. The laser will be fired through an existing 50-inch-diameter hole in the aircraft's belly.

Boeing is developing the Advanced Tactical Laser for the U.S. Defense Department through an Advanced Concept Technology Demonstration (ACTD) program. Following the 2007 tests, it is anticipated that DOD will approve starting ATL's full-scale development.

ATL can produce both lethal and non-lethal effects, supporting missions on the battlefield and in urban operations. It can destroy, damage or disable targets with little to no collateral damage. As a directed energy weapon, the Advanced Tactical Laser is complementary to the Airborne Laser (ABL), which Boeing is developing for the U.S. Missile Defense Agency to destroy ballistic missiles in their boost phase of flight. ABL consists of a megawatt-class chemical laser mounted on a Boeing 747-400 freighter aircraft.

"ATL will do for air-to-ground combat what ABL will do for missile defense: revolutionize the battlefield," said Pat Shanahan, Boeing Missile Defense Systems vice president and general manager. "ATL will give the warfighter a speed-of-light, precision engagement capability and avoid the kind of collateral damage sometimes associated with such traditional weapons as bombs and missiles."

Boeing's Advanced Tactical Laser industry team includes L-3 Communications/Brasher, which made the turret for the laser, and HYTEC Incorporated, which made various structural elements of the weapon system.

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