Boeing Installs High-Energy Laser on Laser Gunship Aircraft

The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] has installed a high-energy chemical laser aboard a C-130H aircraft, achieving a key milestone for the Advanced Tactical Laser (ATL) Advanced Concept Technology Demonstration program.

Boeing completed the laser installation Dec. 4 at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. The laser, including its major subsystem, a 12,000-pound integrated laser module, was moved into place aboard the aircraft and aligned with the previously-installed beam control system, which will direct the laser beam to its target.

With the laser installed, Boeing is set to conduct a series of tests leading up to a demonstration in 2008 in which the program will fire the laser in-flight at mission-representative ground targets to demonstrate the military utility of high-energy lasers. The test team will fire the laser through a rotating turret that extends through the aircraft's belly.

"The installation of the high-energy laser shows that the ATL program continues to make tremendous progress toward giving the warfighter a speed-of-light, precision engagement capability that will dramatically reduce collateral damage," said Scott Fancher, vice president and general manager of Boeing Missile Defense Systems. "Next year, we will fire the laser at ground targets, demonstrating the military utility of this transformational directed energy weapon."

The program achieved two other major milestones earlier this year. "Low-power" flight tests were completed in June at Kirtland; the ATL aircraft used its flight demonstration hardware and a low-power laser to find and track moving and stationary ground targets. The flight demonstration hardware includes the beam control system; weapon system consoles, which display high-resolution imagery and enable the tracking of targets; and sensors. The low-power laser, a surrogate for the high-energy laser, hit its intended target in each of more than a dozen tests. Also, in late July, the high-energy laser concluded laboratory testing at the Davis Advanced Laser Facility at Kirtland, demonstrating reliable operations in more than 50 firings.

ATL, which Boeing is developing for the U.S. Department of Defense, will destroy, damage or disable targets with little to no collateral damage, supporting missions on the battlefield and in urban operations. Boeing's Advanced Tactical Laser industry team includes L-3 Communications/Brashear, which made the laser turret, and HYTEC, Inc., which made various structural elements of the weapon system.

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