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16th August: Fix for F-35 final assembly problem pushed back

Lockheed Martin has pushed back the resolution of a manufacturing problem plaguing F-35 Joint Strike Fighter final assembly schedules, but key suppliers are making progress building components as the programme prepares for the next leap in production orders.

In October 2009 government audit reports showed that Lockheed expected to eliminate the "wing-at-mate overlap" problem for the F-35's four-piece wing with final assembly of BF-13, the thirteenth short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) in production.

The overlap means that key parts are delivered after the wing has entered final assembly, requiring workers to partially disassemble the structure.

The Defense Contracts Management Agency (DCMA) identified the resulting delays and inefficiency in the wing manufacturing process as one of the key drivers for production delays ranging from four to six months during the first two years of low-rate initial production (LRIP).

17th August: F-35 targeting system enters flight-testing on CATBird

A new sensor for the Lockheed Martin F-35 targeting system has entered flight tests aboard a surrogate aircraft.

The electro-optical targeting system (EOTS), developed by Lockheed's Missiles and Fire Control division, is being tested aboard the BAE Systems co-operative avionics test bed (CATBird).

The tests on the Boeing 737 modified with the F-35's cockpit and flight-control surfaces is the final step before integrating the passive targeting system on BF-4, the flight-test aircraft for the short-take-off and vertical landing variant dedicated to mission systems testing.

The EOTS is installed under the F-35 cockpit and tucked inside a faceted, low-observable turret. Its job is to lock on to targets visually, especially when the F-35 is unable to use radar.