

Court rules in favour of A-12 companies

A US JUDGE HAS ruled that General Dynamics (GD) and McDonnell Douglas (MDC) did not conceal from the US Department of Defense (DoD) problems with the A-12 attack aircraft. The ruling clears the way for a settlement of the companies' lawsuit arising from the 1991 cancellation of the \$52 billion programme to produce a stealthy successor to the US Navy's Grumman A-6 attack aircraft.

US Claims Court Judge Robert Hodges has ruled that the DoD failed to prove its claim that the contractors withheld information on problems with the A-12 programme, which was over budget and behind schedule when it was cancelled without a single aircraft being completed.

GD and MDC are fighting the DoD's decision to terminate the programme for default, putting the blame for the cancellation on the contractors and preventing them from receiving compensation. The companies claim that they are owed more than \$2 billion.

Hodges says that it was "manifestly clear" that the US Government "cannot prove its case". Evidence of concealment presented by the DoD was "discredited on cross-examination", he rules. The judge will rule on compensation and damages in 1996. Estimates of potential settlements range from \$1 billion to \$3 billion. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ ANGOLA ACCIDENT

A Trans Service Airlift Lockheed Electra has crashed in Lunda Norte province, Angola, killing 139 of the 144 people on board. The Kinshasa, Zaire-based airline had been chartered by the Angolan political movement UNITA to operate the flight from Jamba, Lunda Norte, on 18 December.

UK and USA sign JAST MoU

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THE UK AND USA signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 20 December committing the UK to take part in the four-year concept demonstration phase of the Joint Advanced Strike Technology (JAST) programme to develop a future strike fighter.

Under the MoU, the UK will contribute £130 million (\$200 million), some 10% of the concept demonstration phase costs, to the project. The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) is hoping that the advanced short take-off and vertical landing (ASTOVL) JAST will meet the Royal Navy's British Aerospace Sea Harrier FA/2 replacement needs.

The MoD was forced to renegotiate the MoU covering the F/A2 replacement when the US Department of Defense (DoD) merged the JAST and ASTOVL programmes.

The MoD says: "Our involvement is limited to the concept demonstrator phase. Following this we will then decide whether to go ahead with the engineering, manufacturing and development phase of the JAST programme."

While the MoD would not discuss the MoU in detail, it confirms that it "...allows for UK companies to compete for work within the JAST programme". This covers

both the ASTOVL and conventional variants. Both British Aerospace, teamed with McDonnell Douglas, and Rolls-Royce stand to benefit from the JAST programme.

The DoD has also awarded Pratt & Whitney a \$30 million contract to support the JAST concept-demonstration phase, scheduled to begin in October.

All three contractors working on JAST designs have based their proposed concept-demonstrator aircraft around P&W's F119 engine, under development for the Lockheed Martin/Boeing F-22.

Under its 11-month contract, P&W will provide preliminary-design support and procure long-lead items for engines required by the JAST teams.

The plans call for two concept-demonstration contracts, under which competing teams will build conventional take-off and landing and short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) variants of their designs.

The three JAST contractors are pursuing different STOVL propulsion concepts (*Flight International*, 13-19 December, 1995,



UK JAST involvement lifts off

P26). Boeing is working on a direct-lift design, using a refanned F119 with two-dimensional thrust-vectoring propulsion nozzle and swivelling, retractable, lift nozzles. Lockheed Martin's design uses a lift fan, shaft driven by a modified F119 fitted with a vectoring lift/cruise nozzle. MDC's lift-plus-lift/cruise concept combines an unmodified F119, with separate lift and cruise nozzles, with a General Electric/Allison lift engine.

The GE/Allison team has a received a \$7 million contract to study derivatives of GE's F110 and F120 engines as alternatives to the F119 for use in the production Joint Strike Fighter aircraft expected to emerge from the JAST concept-demonstration programme. □

Boeing optimistic about GE-powered 777s

GRAHAM WARWICK/ATLANTA

BOEING DELIVERED three General Electric GE90-powered 777s by the end of 1995, after GE's proposed increase of the fan-blade-tip clearances had been approved by the US Federal Aviation Administration (*Flight International*, 20 December, 1995-2 January, P4). Efforts continued to determine the cause of an engine surge. The aircraft affected are two for British Airways and one for China Southern Airlines.

GE sought US Federal Aviation Administration permission to

increase blade-tip clearance by 1.3mm on engines ready for delivery, after the 3 December surge (during high-angle-of-attack flight testing) was attributed to heavy rubbing of the composite fan blades against the fan-case abrasible seal.

As of mid-December, GE had been unable to replicate the rub problem in ground tests of the fan and fan-case module removed from the affected engine. The manufacturer believes that the surge may have been a one-time event unique to that module.

The module was replaced and Boeing made a "flawless" accep-

ance flight with the aircraft, BA's third 777. GE nevertheless planned to increase blade-tip clearances on GE90s powering this and two other aircraft, BA's second 777 and China Southern's first, as a precaution and to allow their delivery by the end of 1995.

The FAA's Reliability Assessment Board will decide in mid-January whether the GE90 is ready to proceed into 1,000-cycle extended-range twinjet-operations testing. GE says that BA has logged 1,000 engine hours in the first 50 flights of its first 777 "with zero problems". □