
Defense Report

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The B-1; Thoroughly Tested

Despite news stories and Congressional statements to the contrary, the B-1 Bomber has been successfully tested to a far greater degree than comparable civilian aircraft, according to the Secretary of the Air Force, Thomas C. Reed.

In a recent speech in Washington, Secretary Reed pointed out that four of the six major structural assemblies have already experienced four lifetimes of fatigue testing and the other two will have completed at least two lifetimes of tests by November. All major subsystems have completed four lifetimes of such testing.

Reed said that all of this testing will be completed two and one-half years prior to the delivery of the first production model. He compared this with the testing given the 747 and the DC 10 giant commercial airplanes which did not complete two lifetimes of similar fatigue tests until over a year after the first production aircraft had been delivered to purchasers.

In addition to the fatigue testing, the B-1 had completed more than 230 hours of flight testing by the end of July. The tests included maximum weight take-offs, heavy-weight landings, air refueling, and both low altitude, high subsonic and high altitude Mach 2 flights. Secretary Reed added that this exhaustive testing program has created great confidence "that the B-1 can successfully perform its operational mission."

At the present time, the Air Force plans to buy 244 B-1's and combine them with 300 of the most recently manufactured B-52's (which would be equipped later with cruise missiles) and the current fleet of about 75 FB-111's to provide an effective strategic bomber mix for years to come. Said Reed, "We think this combination, with the penetrating bomber (the B-1) as the central figure, is the right solution for the future bomber force. Our conviction is based on exhaustive study and thorough testing."

He added that postponing the first buy of production models of the B-1 until February 1977, as was being proposed by some members of Congress at the time of Reed's speech, "would lay off thousands of trained workers and would add half a billion dollars to the cost of the program for no purpose."

Congress apparently heeded Secretary Reed's warning, at least in part, in its final action on the B-1 subsequent to the speech. The production decision was postponed until February, but \$87 million per month was allocated to keep the production line open. Although this action will cost the taxpayers a considerable sum, it will be less than half a billion and the necessary skilled technicians will not be laid off.