

Gulf Coast Reporters' League

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Florida



Vol. VII, Issue II

Gulf Coast Aerospace Corridor's bimonthly update of aviation activities in the I-10 region

October 2019



The World Trade Organization in Geneva still has to rule on the EU case against the U.S.

The past and the future

It's been a busy 2019, that's for sure, with a lot of notable aviation-related events occurring along the four-state Gulf Coast Aerospace Corridor.

So in our final issue of 2019 in December, we'll take a look back at some of the key events that oc-

(Continued on page 8)

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Commercial aviation

U.S. case done; EU case next

The WTO decision to let the U.S. recover tariffs from \$7.5 billion in goods does not include tariffs on parts shipped to Mobile, but there's no guarantee that won't change.

Mobile, Ala.

It was the crisis that in the end - at least for now - was avoided.

Since it was first reported in early September that the World Trade Organization ruled again in favor of the U.S. in its dispute over Airbus subsidies, the concern in Mobile was how much would the WTO determine the U.S. could recover through

tariffs, and would components shipped to Mobile to build jetliners be on the list?

In early October the WTO said the U.S. could place tariffs on \$7.5 billion worth of goods. Shortly later, the U.S. announced the goods that would be taxed - a list that did not include components shipped to Mobile.

"Great news," Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., said in an Oct. 3 tweet. He said the decision was great news for the state and "all the hard-working Americans associated with Airbus Mobile," adding that he was pleased his discussions with the administration helped prevent the tariffs from impacting the local plant and jobs.

Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Ala., in an Oct. 2

press release called the decision a “massive win for the thousands of Alabama workers connected to Airbus Mobile,” and thanked Sen. Shelby, Gov. Kay Ivey, Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson and others who joined him working on the issue.

But the threat is not over.

“As it stands now, Airbus’ Mobile, Alabama Manufacturing Facility does not appear to be affected in the immediate term. In the longer term, however, it’s not yet fully clear. The U.S. Trade Representative included aircraft components on an earlier list of European goods that might be tariffed, and USTR could impose tariffs on other goods in the future - possibly including components destined for Airbus’ Mobile factory,” an Airbus spokesperson said. “The only real resolution to this long-running dispute is through a settlement agreement, and we are hopeful that the U.S. and European Union will sit down and negotiate one quickly.”

The concern is real. According to a *Bloomberg* report, the Trump administration has been considering a trade weapon known as “carousel” retaliation, which would enable the United States to regularly change which goods it targets, people familiar with the deliberations said in September.

For the people from this region, anything that might jeopardize the Mobile aircraft assembly campus would put a crimp on one of the major success stories. Airbus not only operates the jetliner assembly plant, but also has an engineering center and military aircraft repair and overhaul operation.

Old case

The U.S./Boeing and EU/Airbus have been at odds over subsidies going back many years. The U.S. cites launch aid from various European governments as providing an unfair advantage, while the EU points to U.S. research and development grants and tax breaks as having the same impact.

Both sides have successfully challenged the other, and there have been

repeated appeals, dragging out the issue for well over a decade.

It was back in 2004 during the Bush administration that the U.S. first filed a complaint in Geneva against subsidies and other advantages for the development of the A350 and A380. A parallel complaint by the EU, alleging illegal U.S. subsidies for Boeing, was filed some eight months later.

The rulings have been dizzying.

In June 2010, at a time when Boeing was competing against Airbus for a \$35 billion contract to build U.S. Air Force tankers, the WTO ruled that aid European governments provided to Airbus violated global trade rules. The WTO ruled that four decades of government-backed loans to Airbus helped it gain foreign sales, harming Boeing.

Then it was the EU’s turn. In January 2011, after an interim ruling four months earlier, the WTO ruled that U.S. federal and local governments provided billions of dollars in illegal subsidies for the 787 and other aircraft, giving Boeing an unfair advantage against Airbus. At the end of March 2011, the WTO said Boeing received at least \$5.3 billion in improper subsidies. The EU claimed R&D grants from NASA and the Defense Department, including development of carbon composites, contributed to the technologies to build the 787.

Fast forward to September 2016. The WTO ruled that European governments failed to comply with a WTO ruling and end billions in state subsidies to Airbus. The ruling moved the U.S. a step closer to being able to impose tariffs against goods and services from the EU.

Two months later the WTO determined a tax benefit granted to Boeing for production of its long-haul 777X violates international trade rules. The tax cut in question was provided by the state of Washington in 2013 to ensure that wings for the 777X were made only there. The tax cut was prohibited under its rules, said the WTO.

In May 2018, the WTO issued a final

ruling. The U.S. won its case challenging subsidies that EU nations provided to Airbus to develop A350 and A380 jetliners. The final ruling meant the United States could impose retaliatory sanctions. An appellate panel for the WTO affirmed a 2016 ruling that the EU had failed to eliminate unfair funding for two Airbus models. The next stage was to determine the size of the tariffs the U.S. could impose.

In September 2019, the WTO ruled in favor of the U.S. in the dispute over Airbus subsidies, and in October said the U.S. could move forward with plans to impose tariffs on some \$7.5 billion worth of EU goods annually, to counteract years of European loans and illegal subsidies to Airbus.

The United States after the ruling said it would slap 10 percent tariffs on European-made Airbus planes and 25 percent duties on French wine, Scotch and Irish whiskies, and cheese from across the continent as punishment for illegal EU aircraft subsidies.

The size and scope of the tariffs were reduced considerably from a \$25 billion list floated by Washington earlier this year that included helicopters, major aircraft components, seafood, luxury goods and other big-ticket categories that were excluded from Wednesday’s announcement. The inclusion of aircraft components would have hit Airbus’ Mobile, Ala., operation, which assembles A320 and A220 jetliners.

But the clash is not over: The WTO will rule in the coming months on the EU’s own request to levy tariffs on the U.S. over aid to Boeing.

While on the surface the October ruling is a win for an American company over a foreign competitor, it’s far more complicated given the global nature of the aerospace industry. Both Airbus and Boeing have operations, employees and suppliers worldwide that are impacted in the dispute.

World footprint

While one of the giants is headquartered in Europe and the other in the

United States, both are multinationals.

Boeing, the oldest of the two and headquartered in Chicago, builds its planes in Washington State, and North Charleston, S.C.

Boeing has a reach that includes customers in about 150 countries and 145,000 employees and operations in more than 65 countries. It has manufacturing, service and technology partnerships with companies and governments worldwide and contracts with 20,000-plus suppliers and partners.

Boeing has regional executives in offices worldwide, including Africa, Australia, China, Europe, India, Israel, Japan, Latin America, Middle East, North Africa and Turkey, Republic of Korea, Russia/CIS, Saudi Arabia, and Southeast Asia. Its commercial jetliners are the Next-Generation 737, 737 Max, 747-8, 767, 777, 777X, and 787.

The company has gone through a tough stretch in recent years. Its 737 Max remains grounded after two crashes that killed a combined 346 people. The 737 Max problem was caused by a faulty sensor that erroneously reported the aircraft was stalling, triggering an automated system that caused repeated nosedives.

Boeing's KC-46 tanker has also had rough going. The Air Force says it will be three or four more years before it can perform its mission. It's withholding \$28 million from every tanker it receives until the problems are fixed. This September the airplanes delivered were crippled because their other role, carrying cargo and passengers, was suspended because of an unsafe cargo locking mechanism.

In a press release Sept. 30, Boeing Chairman, President and CEO Dennis Muilenburg announced several immediate actions to strengthen the company's commitment to product and services safety. The actions follow recent recommendations from the Boeing Board of Directors that were the result of a five-month independent review of the company's policies and processes for the design and development of its

airplanes by a specially appointed committee.

But Boeing has also received bad press from other moves. After complaining about the C-Series jets that were purchased from Bombardier by Delta Air Lines, a 300 percent tariff was placed on the planes even though Boeing had no plane of that size. It never happened, but it did result in an arrangement that hurt Boeing.

Bombardier and Airbus reached an agreement where Airbus took a majority share of the C-Series, renamed it the A220 and opted to build them in Mobile. The plane has been highly praised for its efficiency, seating arrangements and oversized windows. Boeing has since been working to get a competing plane, built by Embraer, in its lineup.

Airbus traces its origins to 1970, when European aerospace companies and governments realized they could not compete with the huge aerospace companies and production capacity of the United States. They formed a consortium of aircraft makers, named Airbus Industrie GIE. In 2000 it became the European Aeronautic Defense Company, and in 2017 the parent and subsidiary companies were merged and took the name Airbus SE.

Like Boeing, it has operations worldwide. With 130 nationalities represented by Airbus, it has activities in Europe (France, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, Finland, Romania, Russia, Turkey), the Americas (Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, and the United States), Africa and the Middle East, and Asia (Asian-Pacific region, Brunei, China, Japan, India, Malaysia, Pacific region, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam).

Airbus commercial aircraft are the A220, A320, A330, A350 and A380.

But Airbus has not had smooth sailing on all fronts. The most recent problem for the company has been the A380 superjumbo jet, a massive plane that is even larger than the Boeing 747.

It's being phased out with produc-

tion scheduled to end in 2021 because airlines could not operate it profitably.

Although it is considered a beautiful plane and a high-tech marvel, it's a plane some say never should have been built. Even Airbus competitor Boeing, at a time when the two companies were considering a joint project to build a massive plane, warned against it because the market was not there.

Airbus' U.S. footprint

The footprint in the U.S., which started with a single sales office and staff of fewer than a dozen people in 1978, is growing. According to Airbus, it is "approaching 4,000 Airbus team members in the U.S., with around 900 of them in our helicopter business."

Airbus has a nationwide network of 38 locations in 16 states (*see page 4*), including production facilities in Mobile and Columbus, Miss.

The United States is the largest single supplier county to Airbus, which has spent more than \$187 billion in the U.S. since 1990. Airbus spending in the U.S. supports more than 275,000 American jobs. It has about 450 U.S. suppliers in around 40 states, and is the largest export customer of the U.S. aerospace industry.

Mobile is on its way to becoming the world's fourth largest producer of passenger jets. The most popular Airbus jetliner, the A320 series, is built in Mobile as well as Toulouse, France; Hamburg, Germany; and Tianjin, China.

Mobile's connection with Airbus goes back to 2005, when Mobile Regional Airport got a military aircraft service center. Then in June 2005, European Aerospace Defense System (EADS, now Airbus) said it would build an Airbus engineering center at Brookley Field. In October EADS and its partner, Northrop Grumman, picked Mobile as the site where KC-30 tankers would be built, if they won the Air Force contract. Mobile won out over 70 sites in 32 states.

While the EADS/Northrop bid was initially chosen, Boeing protested and

won the new competition. But Mobile, which continued to nurture the ties to Airbus, was chosen as the site to build the A320 series of jetliners. It delivered its first plane in 2016.

Since it first began building A320 series jetliners in Mobile, the Airbus campus experience can be described with one word: growth. It is increasing the number of A320s built, adding more workers and is now building A220 passenger jets and hiring more workers for the second assembly line.

But the WTO decision in the 15-year battle between Boeing and Airbus over illegal subsidies had - and still has - the potential to impact the campus and throw a monkey wrench into one of aviation's most striking success stories.

Washington's list of EU exports that could be subjected to tariffs was large. The U.S. planned to chose products from the list and then tax them at different rates in order to claw back from an amount set by the WTO.

The list includes EU aircraft parts — a move that EU officials said was designed explicitly to disrupt the company's supply and manufacturing chain by depriving the company of the parts it needs for the final assembly of its A320 model in Mobile. EU officials warned the U.S. that such a move would end up destroying U.S. jobs.

While the parts were not on the list released after the WTO decision, they could still get on any revised list.

Boeing and Airbus won't gain anything by "going at each other's jugular," according to the Airbus top salesman. Speaking to CNBC's Charlotte Reed after the WTO ruling, Airbus's Chief Commercial Officer (CCO), Christian Scherer, said the legal action was unlikely to benefit either company.

"I don't think that the aerospace communities or eco-systems on either side of the Atlantic have anything to gain (by) going at each other's jugular," he said at the launch of the firm's annual commercial outlook.

"In general, aviation is a global industry, no aircraft is coming from one

Airbus in the United States

Mobile, Ala.

Airbus U.S. Manufacturing Facility
Airbus Engineering Center
Airbus Defense and Space Military Aircraft

Wichita, Kan.

Design and Engineering Center

Miami, Fla.

Airbus Training Center
Latin American/Caribbean marketing

Denver, Colo.

Airbus training facility

Herndon, Va.

Airbus Americas Inc. headquarters

Ashburn, Va.

Satair (formerly the Airbus Spares Center
Metron Aviation

Washington, D.C.

Airbus Americas' Safety /Technical Affairs
and Government Relations departments
Airbus Experience Center

Grand Prairie, Texas

Airbus Helicopters

Columbus, Miss.

Airbus Helicopters

Plano, Texas

Airbus DS-GS

Merritt Island, Exploration Park, Fla.

OneWeb Satellites (joint venture between
OneWeb and Airbus)

Atlanta, Ga.

Airbus Aerial
Satair

Silicon Valley, Calif.

A Cubed

Airbus Helicopters Service Centers

Mesa, Ariz.

Precision Heli-Support

Woodland, Calif.

Advanced Helicopter Services

Stockton, Calif.

Big Valley Aviation

San Diego, Calif.

Corporate Helicopters

Redding, Calif.

Redding Air Service

Van Nuys, Calif.

Rotorcraft Support

Loveland, Colo.

Trans Aero

West Palm Beach, Fla.

Rotortech Services

Peachtree City, Ga.

Precision Aviation Services

Meridian, Idaho

Nampa Valley Helicopters

Georgetown, Ky.

Thoroughbred Aviation Maintenance

Broussard, La.

Arrow Aviation

Portsmouth, N.H.

New Hampshire Helicopters

Marshville, N.C.

U.S. Helicopter

Croydon, Pa.

Sterling Helicopter

Belle Vernon, Pa.

Uniflight West Penn

Grand Prairie, Texas

Uniflight

Woods Cross, Utah

Helicopter Services of Utah

Auburn, Wash.

Cascade Helicopter Services

Janesville, Wisc.

Helicopter Specialties

- Ted Kordecki, research associate

single country or zone. It's a lose-lose for the whole industry if we move to tariffs," said Kristi Tucker, a spokeswoman for Airbus in Mobile.

"Such a tit-for-tat fight poses huge risks to the entire aviation industry on both sides of the Atlantic: Airbus has brought past subsidies in compliance with WTO rules. The counter WTO ruling against the U.S. and Boeing will eventually follow, likely allowing the

EU to impose even greater tariffs on U.S. goods. Boeing will be hit much harder as their subsidies continue to create huge market harm — estimated by the EU to be approximately \$12 billion per year. In short, a negotiated solution is the only real way of resolving this complex dispute."

Where it will all end up is unclear.

- David Tortorano

Military

EA done, but TH-XX race continues

The new training help will have no significant impact, but decision still needs to be made on training helicopter replacement

Milton, Fla.

While it's still unknown what helicopter will become the new Navy trainer at Naval Air Station Whiting Field, one piece of the puzzle has been put in place. The Navy determined that replacing the TH-57 training helicopters with a more advanced helicopter and new ground based training system will have no significant impact on the quality of the human environment.

A finding of no significant impact has been issued and preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

The Navy is modernizing its rotary-wing and tilt-rotor integrated pilot production training program at Training Air Wing Five at NAS Whiting Field, near Milton, Fla., and its associated helicopter training Outlying Landing Fields in Florida.

The Advanced Helicopter Training System (AHTS), also called the TH-XX, will replace the TH-57 Sea Ranger training helicopters and simulators, and the training tempo will also increase. There will also be changes in operational tactics based on a new curriculum, construction of temporary and permanent supporting facilities, and an increase in personnel.

All eyes are now on which of three candidates will replace the TH-57. In the running is Bell's 407GX_i, Airbus Helicopter's H135 and Leonardo Helicopter's TH-119. The Airbus offering is the only twin-engine of the three contenders.

One of the helos is assembled in



Clockwise from top, Bell 407 GX_i, Leonardo TH-119, and Airbus H-135. Photos from company websites.

Philadelphia, and the other two will be assembled in the Southeast - one in Columbus, Miss., the other Ozark, Ala.

Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) anticipates awarding a single firm-fixed-price contract for 130 helicopters through a base and up to four options. The contract award is expected in the first quarter of fiscal 2020. The new platforms will be purchased beginning in fiscal 2020 and the entire fleet of TH-57s will be replaced by 2023.

One competitor has committed to setting up an operation here. Leonardo Helicopter says it will build a 100,000 square-foot support center at the 267-acre Whiting Aviation Park, adjacent to the Navy base, if it is selected to supply the TH-XX. It plans to hire up to 50 workers for around-the-clock maintenance for the helicopters.

The EA

The Navy has made available the

Final Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, which evaluates the potential environmental effects of the replacement program. The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from June 28 through July 19, 2019. All comments were considered in preparing the Final EA, according to U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

The TH-XX will be a more capable and reliable commercially available helicopter than what's currently used by Training Air Wing 5 and will be in use through 2050. It will require an additional 33 training personnel at Whiting Field.

For the Draft EA, a conservative representative surrogate helicopter, the UH-72 Lakota, larger and louder than comparable commercially available helicopters, was used to analyze the potential impacts from the TH-XX.

Training operations would generally

be similar to existing training. However, there would be an increase in the number of annual flight operations, to include training involving night vision device training, flying in formation at night, and search and rescue.

Prior to arrival of the TH-XX, new facilities and associated infrastructure would be constructed at NAS Whiting Field to accommodate helicopter maintenance activities and ground based training requirements. Two temporary facilities will be built but replaced by two permanent structures.

The replacement helicopter

The Sea Ranger, an aircraft based on the Bell Jet Ranger 206, was procured by the Navy between 1981 and 1985. According to an April 2019 *National Defense* story, it's "experiencing obsolescence, diminishing manufacturing sources and material shortages, and increasingly expensive operating costs relating to aging aircraft issues," stated the House Armed Services Committee markup for the fiscal year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. Pilot shortfalls due to these issues could impact readiness, the document said.

The Navy requested \$261.2 million in the base budget to fund 32 aircraft in fiscal year 2020, according to budget justification documents. Budget projections include acquiring 31 in fiscal year 2021, 31 in 2022 and 15 in 2023, according to *National Defense*.

The new trainer must be able to operate in temperatures ranging from -2 degrees to 102 degrees Fahrenheit. The helicopter must be Federal Aviation Administration certified and able to fly at 115 knots true air speed at cruise airspeed and capable of flying at 80 knots when the doors are opened or removed. The aircraft must be instrument flight rules certified, the document stated, meaning it must meet requirements to fly in low-visibility conditions where relying on instruments for navigation is important, wrote *National Defense*.

The Navy is also requiring a digital

health and usage monitoring system (HUMS) for ground-based display of information to aid in predictive maintenance and reduce sustainability cost.

The TH-119 earlier this year achieved FAA certification to fly with its new Genesys Aerosystems glass cockpit, according to an April story by *Rotor and Wing*. It reported in July 2019 that the TH-119 was cleared by the FAA to fly in inclement weather under instrument flight rules, the first single-engine helicopter in decades to earn that certification.

According to *Avionics International*, about a month after the FAA cleared the Leonardo TH-119 to fly in inclement weather under instrument flight rules (IFR), on Aug. 15 Bell received IFR certification for the 407GX helicopter, the company said. The Airbus H135 was previously IFR certified.

Leonardo's TH-119 is currently assembled in the U.S., at the company's facility outside Philadelphia. Airbus builds the H135 in Germany, but plans to assemble the aircraft at its manufacturing facility in Columbus, Miss., where it also builds the UH-72 A Lakota for the U.S. Army. Bell builds the 407 in Mirabel, Canada, and in April 2019, Bell announced it would assemble the 407GX in Ozark, where it also works on the Fire Scout unmanned helicopter.

Simulators

Although the Navy knew the TH-57 would be replaced, in December 2014, the Navy opted to upgrade the TH-57 simulators with new devices as part of a larger goal of modernizing the entire helicopter ground training system. Earlier this year NAS Whiting began receiving new simulators for the TH-57.

"NAS Whiting Field and Training Air Wing Five are responsible for training the nation's future aviation warfighters with a world class training program. The wing trains 100 percent of all Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps helicopter students, as well as

some international students," said Julie Zieghorn, a Whiting spokeswoman.

"The helicopter training simulators in use to accomplish that mission are 1970s technology and required updates to continue the level of training needed for today's aviation requirements. The new advanced helicopter training system will take some time to complete acquisition, and the Navy decided to proceed with the purchase of the new Level 6 and 7 simulators to afford our students the most advanced training possible. The simulators will be in use for at least seven years, until the new advanced helicopter training system with simulators are completely on line."

The Whiting role

NAS Whiting Field, a 4,000-acre complex north of Milton, is one of the Navy's two primary pilot training bases and the busiest aviation complex in the world. It accounts for more than 1 million flight operations annually. It's comprised of the North Field and South Field, and 12 outlying landing fields encompassing some 18,000 acres across four counties in Southeast Alabama and Northwest Florida.

Training Air Wing Five has three primary fixed-wing and three advanced helicopter squadrons to train aviators from the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Air Force, and allied nations. The wing has 148 T-6 Texan II aircraft for fixed-wing training and 113 TH-57 helicopters for rotary wing training. Some 1,200 student aviators are trained each year, including more than 500 helicopter aviators.

More than 60 percent of all primary flight training is performed at Whiting Field, along with 100 percent of advanced U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard rotary wing training. Roughly 15 percent of all Navy flight hours are performed at NAS Whiting Field annually and about 11 percent of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard flight time worldwide.

Unmanned

UAV center delivering on its promise

The Fire Scout is destined to be coupled with a new strike missile system that extend the killing range of littoral combat ships

Moss Point, Miss.

When Northrop Grumman first established its Unmanned Systems Center in Moss Point in 2006, the hope of economic development officials was that it was the first step for a facility destined to grow. That optimism made sense because unmanned systems represents a growth field in the military.

It has delivered on that promise.

Today workers at the plant are doing the finishing work on the second version of the Fire Scout, a larger, more capable model based on the Bell 407 helicopter. Designated the MQ-8C, the helicopter's role in the Navy is expanding, with the helicopter now one element of new Navy approach to the mission of the Littoral Combat Ship. The Fire Scout, working with the Raytheon/Kongsbert-made Naval Strike Missile, promises to turn the LCS fleet into high-tech ship-killers able to destroy an enemy ship more than 100 nautical miles away.

That, in itself, would be an important contribution of the manufacturing plant. But the MQ-8C, which is also test flown here, is not the only work done in Moss Point. It also does fuselage work on variants of the Global Hawk, and is doing subassembly work on the F-35 fighter.

More UAVs

In August Northrop Grumman said it plans to more than double production capacity for the RQ-4 Global Hawk and MQ-4C Triton unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) to 12 aircraft per



Northrop Grumman MQ-8C Fire Scouts on the assembly line in Moss Point, Miss.

Northrop Grumman photo

year in anticipation of growing demand for the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platform.

The manufacturer is adding production capacity to its Site 7 facilities in Palmdale, Calif. It started production out of a recently remodeled building the week of Aug. 26, the company told *FlightGlobal* on a tour of the facilities on Aug. 20. The building is on the grounds of United States Air Force Plant 42 and was previously a manufacturing facility for the Northrop F-5 fighter.

Northrop Grumman has lined up six customers for variants of its high altitude long endurance UAV: The U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force (USAF), NATO, South Korea, Japan and the Royal Australian Air Force.

The company previously produced between three to five RQ-4 Global Hawk or MQ-4C Triton aircraft per year. Typically it takes 162 to 174 days to build the UAV: 150 days to build the fuselage in Moss Point, Miss. and 12 to 24 days for final assembly in Palmdale, the company says.

It was this type of growth in the un-

manned systems field that prompted the excitement in Jackson County about what the future could hold. Growth was expected.

Improvements

Northrop Grumman in June 2018 officially opened a new operational area at its 101,000-square-foot Moss Point manufacturing center to add a new line of work. The company said the expanded production facility could now handle projects on manned aircraft systems and more jobs.

Kevin Mitchell, vice president of global operations at Northrop Grumman's aerospace systems sector, said the company saw the number of employees at the site grow by more than 40 percent since 2017. Gov. Phil Bryant was among those attending a ribbon-cutting that marked the official launch of the new machine shop section at the Moss Point facility.

The \$3.7 million expansion was announced in May 2017 by Bryant during the annual investors meeting of the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation. He said at the time



**Additional support
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Crossroad

(Continued from page 1)

curred. We'll also try to be prognosticators and fill you in on some of the things we expect to happen in 2020.

The look back is a piece of cake. We publish a reference book every other year, and this newsletter every other month. We also have our daily aerospace news feed. But the look ahead will be a much bigger challenge.

We'll touch base with some of the folks from our region to get their read on what to expect, and we'll put in our two cents.

If you have your own ideas about what you expect in the aerospace field in the coming year, feel free to reach out and let me know what you see, and we'll try to work it in.

Until then, hope you enjoy this issue.

David Tortorano

Editor

October 15, 2019

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that it would create 60 additional jobs. The new work includes sub-assembly work for the F-35 stealth fighter. The state contributed \$7.5 million in BP restoration money to harden the runway at the airport.

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in late August was awarded a grant of more than \$6.7 million for the Trent Lott International Airport Runway Improvements project. It's part of the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act), which provides funding for Gulf Coast states affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill.

MDEQ will subaward the project to the Jackson County Airport Authority to support engineering and design, surveying, permitting, and construction at the airport in Moss Point. The improvements will allow the airport to accommodate medium and large cargo planes used by local industries.

"Trent Lott International Airport already is home to world class manufacturing at Northrop Grumman's manned and unmanned systems facility," said George Free-land, executive director of the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation, "but Jackson County remains focused on strategic improvements that position this community for continued growth in the aviation sector."

Initial operation capable

The U.S. Navy declared initial operational capability for the Northrop Grumman MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned helicopter on June 28. It clears the way for the unmanned air vehicle to begin fleet operations and training.

The MQ-8C is to deploy aboard the Navy's littoral combat ships in FY2021, and is intended for intelligence, and surveillance and reconnaissance, as well as precision targeting. The airframe is the commercial Bell 407, with seats and other manned avionics equipment stripped out and replaced with remote controls and extra fuel tanks.

Over the next few years, Northrop Grumman plans to deliver 38 MQ-8Cs to the U.S. Navy, with some homeported on the West Coast, some on the East Coast.

Fire Scouts are now strongly linked to the Littoral Combat Ship program, which was designed to produce a



MQ-8C Fire Scout

less expensive ship with a smaller crew and venture in more shallow waters closer to shore. But it's had troubles.

Conceived during President George W. Bush's administration, there are two versions of the ship: a mono-hull built by Lockheed Martin in Wisconsin, and the General Dynamics trimarin built by Austal USA in Mobile, Ala.

The LCS was envisioned as a cheap, speedy, nimble, sparsely-manned warship that relied on robots to wage war along shallow shorelines that the Navy's guided-missile destroyers couldn't enter. But by late 2016, the LCS had become a punching bag for lawmakers who saw the program as a \$12.4 billion boondoggle. Instead of replacing the mothballed fleet of frigates or the aging minesweepers, it was seen as an under-gunned sitting duck.

The LCS program was in stand down mode for 19 months as Navy leaders tried to overcome cost overruns, technology glitches and leadership snafus.

But the combination of the over-the-horizon Fire Scout and the Raytheon/Kongsbert-made Naval Strike Missile may end ensuring the future of the LCS.

- Gulf Coast Reporters League



LCS 2 and 4, built by Austal USA.

Austal photo