

## Integrated Defense Systems

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KEITH SKELTON PHOTO

### Ready for the test

### **767 tanker/transport begins certification program with its first post-modification flight**

**BY ANDY TRINCIA**

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Only three months after its public debut, the KC-767A tanker/transport reached another milestone in May with a successful first flight after modifications.

The aircraft's flight of more than an hour over the Great Plains marked the official start of its flying and aerial refueling certification test program. The first-of-its-kind, advanced aerial tanker will continue a rigorous testing and

certification process for about 10 months before being delivered to the Italian air force in spring 2006.

Italy #1, as it is known, lifted off May 21 from McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kan. Boeing employees, customers and suppliers viewed the event, including members of the on-site partner team from Aeronavali, which will lead modifications of the next Italian tankers at its facilities in Naples, Italy. The flight marked yet another accomplishment for Boeing and teammates who work on the program, which also showcases strategic cooperation between Integrated Defense Systems and Commercial Airplanes.

"We have put a lot of energy and tanker know-how into this aircraft," said Jim O'Neill, Boeing vice president and Tanker program manager. "To see it fly is a testimony to the dedication of many teammates and supplier partners whose skills in aerial tanker production made this milestone possible."

Lt. Col. Roberto Poni, the on-site Italian air force liaison officer to the tanker program, echoed O'Neill's sentiments about the KC-767A.

"We are extremely proud of the progress on the KC-767A," Poni said. "We have together managed some significant challenges, and together we will perfect this much-needed asset—the world's most advanced aerial refueling tanker."

The Italian air force helped launch the tanker program in 2001 with an order for four KC-767s. In July 2003, the first tanker left the Boeing production line in Everett, Wash., for the Boeing-Wichita Development and Modification Center. Boeing teammates in Wichita



JOE ORSILLO PHOTOS

The first KC-767A tanker/transport takes off (top) on its initial flight as a military airplane on May 21. The aircraft is also shown in the photo above. Employees at the Boeing-Wichita Modification Center in Kansas transformed a commercial 767 into the world's most advanced aerial refueling tanker for the Italian air force. The airplane will be delivered to the Italian air force in spring 2006. Three others will be modified by Boeing and Aeronavali in Italy for delivery beginning in spring 2007.

transformed it into a military tanker. The Japan Air Self Defense Force also has ordered the KC-767 to meet its aerial refueling requirements.

"Boeing has a great launch customer in the Italian air force," O'Neill said. "They and our Japan customer will provide the world with a completely new and efficient aerial refueling aircraft and capability. We have designed capabilities into this aircraft that are uniquely suited for the security needs of today and tomorrow."

After the May 21 flight, the tanker was sent to Louisiana for painting and Italian markings.

The aircraft's next big event is at this month's Paris Air Show, where it will make its European debut. The aircraft is expected to garner wide attention at the show, including that of key government officials, potential customers, industry representatives and suppliers from around the world.

"Nearly four years of hard work have gone into making this first flight happen," said George Muellner, vice president and general manager of Boeing Air Force Systems. "This is an important milestone for our customer, the Italian air force, and for all Boeing employees and suppliers involved in this program."

Agostino Melani, chief executive officer of Aeronavali, noted the long-term relationship between his company and Boeing.

"This program confirms the excellent results of our partnership on both military and commercial programs, from engineering activities to final assembly, tests and certification. The Italian air force's choice of this tanker represents an important commitment for the future of this successful program," Melani said.

A few days before Italy #1's first flight, the Italian air force's second KC-767A tanker was inducted into the aircraft modification center at Aeronavali in Naples. During the next 15 months, a joint Boeing-Aeronavali team will transform the 767 into an aerial tanker. Italy #2 is slated for a spring 2007 delivery to the Italian air force. The structural and system modifications are extensive, but through open-architecture systems, new technologies can be integrated with ease as they become available.

When Italy #1 was rolled out in February, nearly 1 million engineering hours and 200,000 manufacturing hours already had gone into the program. These numbers continue to grow, a testament to the complexity of the tanker and its advanced capabilities.

In addition to pushing Boeing and Aeronavali to new levels of technology and know-how, the program incorporates full integration and Lean manufacturing processes.

O'Neill and Boeing employees from Everett to Wichita stand ready for new orders.

"We are ready to provide the most advanced aerial tanker solution," O'Neill said. "This is the most modern and capable—and affordable—refueling tanker in the world. It has the ability to refuel all types of aircraft from the NATO nations. We're positioned well for serving future customers."

Boeing, with more than 60 years' aerial refueling technology experience and 90 years of experience in building airplanes, O'Neill said, has the people and the skills to meet any customer's expectations.