U.S. Air Force Ready To Launch Last Lockheed Martin-Built Milstar Satellite

A combined U.S. Air Force/Lockheed Martin-led team is ready to launch the last Milstar II satellite aboard a Titan IVB launch vehicle from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., on Sunday, April 6. Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company built the satellite and launch vehicle at its operations in Sunnyvale, Calif. and Denver, Colo. respectively.

Milstar is the Defense Department's most technologically advanced telecommunications satellite system, which provides critical, secure links to U.S. national leaders, air, land and sea forces around the globe and has been used to support military operations since 1994. The last satellite is the fourth to carry the Medium Data Rate (MDR) payload. Built by Boeing Satellite Systems, El Segundo, Calif., the MDR payload has 32 channels, which can process data at speeds up to 1.5 megabits per second. Increased data rates can be used for applications such as distribution of air tasking orders and targeting updates to the military forces.

The spacecraft also features the Low Data Rate (LDR) payload, built by Northrop Grumman Space Technology (formerly TRW Space and Electronics), Redondo Beach, Calif. Northrop Grumman also supplies MDR antennas and the MDR digital processor to Boeing. Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company is the prime contractor and lead systems integrator for Milstar and the Titan IVB/Centaur launch vehicle.

"The entire Milstar team is extremely proud of the Milstar program's success and its important contribution to national security over the past eight years," said Leonard F. Kwiatkowski, vice president, Lockheed Martin Space & Strategic Missiles in Sunnyvale. "Our warfighters require rapid, high-volume, secure and dependable communications to achieve their missions and we look forward to enhancing that capability with this critical event."

The satellite will join a ring of four Milstar satellites currently on orbit. The spacecraft constellation provides protected, global communication links for the joint forces of the U.S. military and can transmit voice, data, and imagery, in addition to offering video teleconferencing capabilities. Milstar's "switchboard-in-space" concept allows communications links to be established rapidly, allowing the networking of satellites together in space and eliminating the need for ground relay stations. This final Milstar launch will significantly increase the Milstar constellation's capability to provide rapid, global coverage for the nation's strategic forces, Air Force's space warning assets and operationally deployed military forces.

Of the four operational Milstar satellites encircling the Earth, two are of the first-generation Block I design, launched in 1994 and 1995. In the post-Cold War era, the system graduated to a new Block II design and the Air Force transitioned to the Block II configuration with the first successful launch of the Milstar II satellite in Feb. 2001.

The Block II system offers a variety of enhanced communications features for the U.S. military, including added security through the use of specially designed antennas and faster data-rate transmissions for all users.

Milstar is used for communications among ships, submarines and land-based Naval stations via Navy Extremely High Frequency Satellite Communications Program terminals. The system provides communications networks to Army units via the Secure Mobile Anti-Jam Reliable Tactical Terminals mounted on vehicles, and to individual troops and small units from the Single Channel Anti-Jam Man-Portable terminals. For the Air Force, the Milstar system provides links for Air Force Command Post Terminals.

Lockheed Martin is also under contract to develop the Department of Defense's next generation of highly secure communications satellite known as the Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) system. As envisioned by the Pentagon, the fully operational Advanced EHF constellation will consist of four networked satellites providing coverage of the Earth from 65 degrees north latitude to 65 degrees south. These satellites will provide more secure data throughput capability and coverage flexibility to regional and global military operations than ever before and will be also be backward compatible with the Milstar I and II system.

Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company, headquartered in Denver, Colo., is one of the major operating units of Lockheed Martin Corporation. Space Systems designs, develops, tests, manufactures and operates a variety of advanced technology systems for military, civil and commercial customers. Chief products include space launch and ground systems, remote sensing and communications satellites for commercial and government customers, advanced space observatories and interplanetary spacecraft, fleet ballistic missiles and missile defense systems.

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