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Northrop Grumman Statement Regarding Joint STARS Aircraft Incident

MELBOURNE, FLA – July 9, 2009 – Today the U.S. Air Force Air Combat Command (ACC) released an Accident Investigation Board (AIB) report regarding an incident that took place with an E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (Joint STARS) aircraft on March 13, 2009.

Northrop Grumman takes the safety of our armed forces and the mission capability of the E-8C Joint STARS fleet very seriously. We are committed to providing superior program performance with the Joint STARS aircraft being delivered following programmed depot maintenance.

The aircraft involved in this incident arrived at our Lake Charles, La., Maintenance and Modification Center for routine scheduled depot maintenance in August 2008 and was returned on January 7, 2009. As reported by the AIB, the aircraft was returned with a quality issue, specifically, a mechanical test plug was left in a fuel tank climb vent during maintenance. This issue was not known until the aircraft experienced an over pressurized fuel tank during in-flight refueling on March 13th. The plane landed safely.

Immediately following notification of the incident, a number of corrective actions were implemented in concert with our Air Force customer and the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) associated with processes and procedures. We assembled an independent team of experts to analyze the detailed work flow processes, identify quality escapes. That team has been working non-stop at Lake Charles to put corrective actions into place. Throughout the entire period, we have been transparent in our partnership with the Air Force and collaboration with DCMA. Additional steps will be taken following a thorough assessment of the report and consultation with the Air Force.

Program performance is our top priority at Northrop Grumman and our goal is to return to the high standard of quality we have achieved at Lake Charles in the past as quickly as possible.

Northrop Grumman has delivered 65 aircraft as part of our ongoing programmed depot maintenance plan for the Joint STARS weapon system. A total of 59 aircraft have been delivered from the Lake Charles facility. From January 2006 through December 2008, Northrop Grumman delivered 27 of 29 aircraft with no reportable defects, while incorporating critical capability upgrades during programmed depot maintenance. In addition, Northrop Grumman has supported the 116th Air Control Wing in maintaining a flight effectiveness rating of well over 90 percent, which is above ACC standard.

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