



AOC ISSUE REPORT

COMPASS CALL “CROSS DECK” FUNDING UPDATE | MAR 2020

Since 1983 the fourteen EC-130H Compass Call aircraft have been among the busiest assets in the Department of Defense, flying missions to disrupt enemy command and control communications. The EC-130H’s at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan have been deployed nonstop since 2002, the longest continuously deployed Air Force unit in the Afghanistan war.

What will perform the Compass Call mission as the aircraft ages and is retired? Many remember the retirement of the EF-111 in 1998, when the Air Force divested itself of a platform-centric tactical jamming capability, a mission that was picked up by the Navy and Marine Corps’ EA-6B Prowler. With the retirement of the EA-6B, the Navy “cross-decked” the Prowler capabilities into the EA-18G Growler while the Marine Corps divested itself of a tactical airborne electronic attack capability on a single platform. Similarly, the Air Force is still contemplating where how it will accomplish the electronic warfare mission, seeking to move beyond platform-centric systems. In a request for information released in January 2020, the Air Force stated that it is look to “assess industry capability to design, build, and demonstrate a rapidly configurable EW system to include both Electronic Attack (EA) and Electronic Support (ES) capabilities postured for responding to software-defined, highly agile 21st century EW enemy systems while still addressing all legacy threats.”ⁱ That capability will not be fully fielded before the EC-130H is retired.

In 2014 the Air Force announced its proposal to retire the existing fleet of EC-130H Compass Call aircraft, citing budget constraints and evolving worldwide threats that would reduce future effectiveness of the aircraft. The 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the Air Force to report back on plans to transfer the mission equipment to a different airframe. The Air Force, taking its cue from Congress, released a request for information to industry, seeking to utilize a commercial derivative aircraft that could carry the Compass Call mission systems. It awarded a sole source contract to L3 in April 2017 to serve as the prime contractor for the integration of Compass Call mission systems onto Gulfstream G550 airframes, which was designated the EC-37B Compass Call. The Boeing Company and Bombardier filed protests on the contract award, which was resolved in August 2017 when the General Accounting Office eventually dismissed the protests.ⁱⁱ This “Cross Deck” initiative, as it is commonly called, was summarized in the Association of Old Crows Issue Brief of September 2018.ⁱⁱⁱ

The current fleet of EC-130H aircraft stands at eleven. Three aircraft have already been divested – two in fourth quarter FY18, one in fourth quarter FY19 – and one is planned for divestment in FY20 and another FY21, bringing to total to nine by the end of FY21.

The program of record for the EC-37B aircraft has procured four EC-37B aircraft – one in late FY17, one in FY18, and two in FY19 following a congressional add to accelerate procurement of the fourth aircraft. The program intends to continue at a rate of one aircraft per year, with

one funded in FY20 and one requested in FY21, bringing the program of record to six through 2021. All of these aircraft will receive primary mission equipment (PME) from legacy donor EC-130H aircraft. The first EC-37B is projected to reach initial operating capacity in 2023.

As is always the case when transitioning to a new platform, the challenge will be to ensure that the new EC-37B aircraft and systems are fully operational before the EC-130H aircraft are retired, and to ensure that the EC-130H aircraft continue their operational capability until such time. A gap in capability or assets available would significantly impact the mission of engaged forces overseas.

In its FY2021 budget request, the Department of Defense requested \$269 million for the Compass Call program and more than \$2.6 billion over the future year defense program (FYDP). This is relatively small in comparison to the \$11.4 billion in FY21 for 79 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, \$3.0 billion for 15 KC-46 Tanker Replacements, or \$2.1 billion for 24 F/A-18 E/F Super Hornets, or even \$739 million for five VH-92 Presidential Helicopters.^{iv} It does, however, represent a critical capability that gets little attention. Congress and the EW community of interest should pay close attention to the progress of this “cross deck” and opportunities to shorten the transition timeline. The U.S. ability to dominate the EW and cyber domains rely on successfully accomplishing this transition.

Funding for EC-37B Aircraft Procurement (FY2021 Budget Request)

Prior Years	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	Total
234.566	216.113	114.095	161.117	132.858	136.858	140.952	185.725	1,322.274

Funding for Compass Call Aircraft Modifications (FY2021 Budget Request)

Prior Years	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021 Base	FY 2021 OCO	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	Total
324.443	172.261	110.754	193.389	12.800	143.387	116.081	100.027	19.839	1,260.638

Funding for Compass Call Research, Development, Test & Evaluation – Operational Systems Development (FY2021 Budget Request)

Prior Years	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	Total
-	43.466	31.888	15.854	15.900	16.181	16.475	20.452	Continuing

ⁱ https://beta.sam.gov/opp/6f967f97edd045f08b54ab14500a0900/view?index=opp&page=1&organization_id=300000251&sort=-modified-Date&keywords=electronic%20warfare&date_filter_index=0&inactive_filter_values=false

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/686976.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.crows.org/resource/resmgr/advocacy/compass_call_issue_brief.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2079489/dod-releases-fiscal-year-2021-budget-proposal/>