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The B-21 will take its first flight and new weapons will face critical tests. Northrop Grumman/USAF illustration

First B-21 Moves to New Hangar for Loads Calibration

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The first B-21 expected to fly is largely assembled and has moved to a calibration facility, one of the last steps before powering systems and making final checks ahead of first flight, Rapid Capabilities Office Director Randall Walden reported.

On the sidelines of the [AFA Warfare Symposium](#) in Orlando, Fla., Walden noted that “we’ve taken the first one out” of the production facility.

“It’s got landing gear. ... It’s got wheels on it. ... It’s got the wings on it. It really looks like a bomber,” Walden said. Six B-21s are now under construction at Northrop Grumman’s Palmdale, Calif., facility, he said.

The loads calibration test is a “normal thing you do” and ensures the structure “is designed and built to what we actually meant it to do.” Once that’s done, “that gives us great insight into, ‘Did the actual design meet our needs, and did the manufacturing of that meet our needs?’”

The calibration test aircraft has not yet been assigned a tail number or name, he said, but it’s expected to be the first to fly. Walden said supply chain issues have not significantly affected the production program, but he declined to predict when the rollout and first flight would occur.

Though Walden said it’s “not my final call,” he thinks there will be a formal rollout “with senior leaders and press” because “it will be an historical event.”

Then, there will have to be some “event driven, data driven” activities, such as putting power to the aircraft, starting the engines, testing the hydraulics, “everything you normally do in a ground test to make sure it’s working properly.” There also will be slow- and high-speed taxi tests, he added.

“Once all that data informs where we stand from a design [standpoint] is when we’ll schedule that first flight,” Walden said. The first flight will likely be a hop to nearby Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

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