



# Pilots Remain Involved In MANPADS Study

By Capt. Dennis Dolan, ALPA First Vice-President



ALPA formed a task force in April 2004 to study shoulder-fired missiles, or MANPADS (the acronym for man-portable air defense systems), and the countermeasures to defend against them. ALPA took this action in response to heightened congressional interest in this issue after several MANPADS events took place, with the most noteworthy being the DHL A300 that was hit by a MANPADS missile in November 2003 while departing from Baghdad International Airport. I was appointed chairman of ALPA's Counter-MANPADS Task Force, and our mission was to view the threat from the line pilot's perspective and to develop ALPA's position on this security threat.

While I believe ALPA has successfully accomplished this mission, and has gained much credibility in the process, this was really only the beginning of the effort. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security was tasked with developing a multi-phase effort to evaluate the MANPADS threat as well as to evaluate proposed countermeasures. The DHS program is a three-phase program that extends through the end of 2006. The first phase laid the groundwork for obtaining information on what types of countermeasures were available or could be adapted to airline operations. Phase Two narrowed the field to two contractors—Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems, which would build and install prototype systems for operational testing on several types of airliners. This effort is nearly complete, and Phase Three is set to begin soon.

Phase Three will involve a multi-level program to test not only the installed systems, but also such things



as engine and airframe integrity. At the end of Phase Three, the DHS will make recommendations to Congress regarding what countermeasures, if any, should be adapted for civilian use. ALPA intends to be involved in

far from the courthouse door and could ill afford to be strapped with yet another "security cost." At some point, Congress has to decide that security in the airline industry is a *national* security issue, given our industry's special role in the economy and defense of the nation. The president and many members of Congress are on record saying that security is a



BAE SYSTEMS



NORTHROP GRUMMAN

ABOVE: BAE Systems flight tested its JETEYE™ Counter-MANPADS system on Nov. 10, 2005, aboard an American Airlines B-767 in Fort Worth, Tex.

LEFT: Northrop Grumman technicians mount their Guardian™ system on a FedEx MD-11 for testing at Mojave Airport, Calif.

evaluating whatever recommendations the DHS comes up with, and we will voice our opinion to ensure that line pilots influence the outcome.

While ALPA fully supports the DHS program and believes it is a rational and objective evaluation of the issue, what is lurking in the background is the big issue of cost—or more specifically, who will pay that cost. Congress could decide to mandate the installation of counter-MANPADS equipment, but many of the air carriers that would be prime candidates for such systems are already in bankruptcy or are not too

national issue. If that is truly the case, which I believe it is, then we must insist that Congress make its words match this reality by mandating that the cost of such countermeasures be borne from the federal budget.

If the United States continues down the path of mandating charges that are impossible for airlines to fund, whether they are changes related to security or are some other form of tax or fee, the U.S. airline system is doomed to "death by a thousand cuts." While this may not be very painful and will take a long time, it will be no less fatal. ☛