U.K. Hands Lockheed Martin $1B Contract

Cassandra Vinograd, Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Defense contractor Lockheed Martin has won a 642 million pound ($1 billion) contract to upgrade Britain's Warrior armored vehicles, a decision the British Ministry of Defense said Tuesday would support 600 jobs around the country.

Lockheed Martin U.K. said it was delighted to get the contract, and described the upgrades as critical to maximizing the government's investment in Warrior vehicles.

"It will also bring significant job opportunities for our team of suppliers based here in the U.K.," said Alan McCormick, vice president of Lockheed Martin U.K.'s Ampthill business.

U.S.-based Lockheed Martin employs more than 1,500 people at sites across the U.K.

Britain's defense ministry is facing steep budget and troop cuts as the government looks to balance its books. But this summer, the government pledged to add another 3 billion pounds to the Ministry of Defense's equipment budget from 2015.

Warrior vehicles have been in the British army's service since 1989 and have been used in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Defense Secretary Philip Hammond said the upgraded Warriors "will give commanders and their soldiers greater flexibility and firepower."

The upgrades will extend the lives of the vehicles, and include improvements to turrets and the mounting system that holds their armor. The first deliveries of upgraded Warriors are expected to begin in 2018, with the vehicles expected to enter service by 2020, the defense ministry said.

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