

First LDEW Trial Completed on British Army Vehicle

By Richard Scott

The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) has disclosed first firing trials of a laser directed energy weapon (LDEW) demonstrator from a British Army combat vehicle.

Performed at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) Porton Down range in southern England, the testing – involving a 15-kW palletized High Energy Laser Weapon System (HELWS) laser mounted on a British Army Wolfhound six-wheeled vehicle – saw the LDEW successfully track, engage and defeat targets at ranges in excess of 1 km. The capability demonstrator – known as Project Swinton – has been developed by Raytheon UK under a contract placed in 2021.

Designed to inform the British Army as to the utility of LDEW systems against an evolving threat – notably the defeat of small unmanned air systems (UAS) – Project Swinton is a capability demonstrator being managed by the MoD's Team Hersa. The Team Hersa construct marries Dstl's technical expertise with acquisition acumen from the MoD's Defence Equipment and Support organization.

Raytheon UK has delivered Project Swinton together with Frazier Nash Consultants, NP Aerospace, LumOptica, and Cambridge Pixel. The HELWS unit has been supplied through Raytheon Technologies in the United States, while Blighter Surveillance Systems has supplied two ground-based multi-mode A800 3D active electronically scanned array radars (sited near to the Wolfhound vehicle) to provide target detection and designation.

The Project Swinton demonstrator is the first LDEW integrated on a land vehicle to be fired in the UK. According to Dstl,

the next phase of testing will involve trials with British Army personnel later this year to further evaluate the system's counter-UAS capabilities and the prosecution of land-based targets