



# Merlin Unveils Plans for AI-Powered Autonomy for Commercial Cargo Aircraft

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## Merlin Pilot, the same autonomy core advancing through military airworthiness with U.S. Special Operations Command on the C-130J, is aiming to come to commercial transport

BOSTON, May 14, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- [Merlin, Inc.](#) (NASDAQ: MRLN), an aerospace and defense technology company building the operating system of record for autonomous flight, today announced Merlin Pilot for Commercial Cargo, which aims to bring its aircraft-agnostic AI-powered autonomy core to commercial transport, starting with cargo aircraft. Merlin Pilot for Commercial Cargo is part of [Condor](#), Merlin's new product family for large, multi-crew aircraft, which would apply the Merlin Pilot autonomy core across both civil and military platforms, from Part 25 aircraft to military transports such as the C-130J. Condor is the first product family Merlin is planning to bring to market utilizing the Merlin Pilot platform.

Merlin is working to bring next-generation technology to civil cargo as the global air freight market continues to expand. According to Boeing, the fleet of large cargo aircraft is [projected to grow](#) from roughly 2,340 today to nearly 3,900 over the next two decades, with more than 2,800 production and conversion deliveries forecasted. At the same time, cargo operators are looking beyond the traditional scale-restricted operating model where a number of pilots per aircraft manage all in-flight tasks and decision making. The industry's growing interest in autonomy reflects an evolution toward broader thinking about how aircraft are designed, operated, and scaled to meet demand over the long term.

Merlin Pilot works alongside pilots in real-time to extend crew capabilities and scale operations beyond the limits of the traditional model. Integrating into existing and new cargo aircraft, Merlin Pilot is designed to provide operators a practical pathway to autonomy. From takeoff to touchdown, Merlin Pilot is being built to manage systems, monitor the environment, and handle communications, allowing flight crews to focus where human judgment matters most. Merlin believes bringing these capabilities to commercial cargo operations will enhance both safety and operational performance.

The Merlin Pilot system has already logged hundreds of flights across multiple aircraft platforms, providing a strong foundation for its [ongoing civil certification path](#). The same system is being tested under contract with the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), where it is advancing through a rigorous airworthiness process on the C-130J. The program achieved its latest milestone in March 2026 when Merlin [successfully completed the Preliminary Design Review \(PDR\)](#), advancing efforts toward eventual integration and flight testing.

Merlin is already collaborating with [World Star Aviation](#), a leading freighter lessor, and is developing additional relationships with key players in the commercial cargo conversion market. Together, these collaborations have the potential to establish a framework for integrating Merlin Pilot into the converted commercial cargo airframes that the global cargo market actually flies.

"The pilot shortage is structurally impacting operators and comes at a time when the conversion market is at record volume. The window to integrate autonomy, both during the Passenger-to-Freighter (P2F) conversion and in aircraft being currently built, is open, making this a particularly pivotal moment," said Matt George, CEO and Founder of Merlin. "Condor represents our approach to scaling autonomy across large, multi-crew aircraft, with the Merlin Pilot at its core. It's being built to certify, advancing on real military aircraft with real regulators, and is designed to integrate into the aircraft operators already own. That's what we're building for commercial cargo."

### About Merlin

Merlin is an aerospace and defense technology company building the operating system of record for autonomous flight. Through a first-principles approach, the company is redefining what's possible across aviation, aerospace, and defense with the goal of delivering full-stack autonomy for any aircraft, military or civilian, from takeoff to touchdown. The Merlin Pilot system powers a growing range of aircraft and mission profiles, proven through hundreds of autonomous flights from test facilities across the globe. With \$100M+ total in IDIQ contract ceiling value under its C-130J autonomy program with USSOCOM, Merlin is advancing American leadership in autonomous aviation by helping to solve national security challenges through safe, reliable autonomy. To learn more, visit [www.merlinlabs.com](http://www.merlinlabs.com) or follow us on X [@merlinaero](#).

### Cautionary Statement Regarding Forward-Looking Statements

This press release contains "forward-looking statements" within the meaning of the "safe harbor" provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. These statements include, but are not limited to, statements regarding product capabilities, certification timelines, commercial relationships, market opportunities, and the expected development and deployment of Condor. Forward-looking statements can be identified by words such as "anticipate," "believe," "estimate," "expect," "intend," "may," "plan," "potential," "project," "target," "will," and similar terms. These statements reflect management's current expectations based on information available at the date of this release and involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties, and other factors that may cause actual results to differ materially from those expressed or implied. Important factors that could cause actual results

to differ materially include, but are not limited to: the preliminary, non-binding nature of the Company's memoranda of understanding with Israel Aerospace Industries, Ltd. and World Star Aviation Limited, and the risk that these arrangements may not result in definitive agreements; uncertainties related to the outcome and timing of civil certification proceedings; the early stage of commercial cargo development and deployment; the Company's ability to develop, maintain, and scale commercial relationships; competition from established aerospace and defense companies and other autonomous systems developers; and the other risks and uncertainties described under "Risk Factors" in Merlin's Form S-1 registration statement filed with the SEC, and in subsequent filings with the SEC. Merlin does not undertake any obligation to update any forward-looking statement, whether as a result of new information, future events, or otherwise, except as required by law.

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