AWACS Test Aircraft Undergoes Major Overhaul

The Boeing Company has completed the first major overhaul of Test System-3 (TS-3), an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) test aircraft, which has been flying missions since the 1970s. TS-3, a militarized 707, is maintained and operated in Seattle by Boeing for the U.S. Air Force.

The programmed depot maintenance (PDM) was done at Boeing facilities in Seattle, Wichita, Kan., and Long Beach, Calif., between October 1997 and March 1998. The 120-day effort was completed on schedule and within projected costs.

During that time, crews literally took the aircraft down to its wings. This painstaking process included removing the engines, the tail's horizontal and vertical stabilizers and the flap and wing leading edges, checking for wear and tear throughout the aircraft. The wing leading edge skins also were removed and replaced. Corroded or cracked parts were replaced. Paint was stripped off the plane allowing crews to see if there was corrosion, and stress or fatigue cracks - conditions that could reduce the airworthiness of the plane. All work was done to U.S. Air Force standards for operational aircraft undergoing periodic depot maintenance.

"The effort was extremely well-planned and executed. We had highly motivated crews working under a tight schedule using new process and work flows," said Jay Deeds, AWACS test team leader.

After the work was completed in Wichita, TS-3 flew to a Boeing facility in Long Beach, Calif., where it was painted. It then flew back to Seattle where the rotodome was reinstalled. It had been removed before the trip from Seattle to Wichita to allow access to inspection areas.

The aircraft will be busy this spring and summer with a number of projects being installed and tested prior to its participation in the U.S. Air Force's Expeditionary Force experiment, EFX 98, scheduled for September 1998.

TS-3 has logged more than 1,000 flights and 6,800 flight hours and is used to test AWACS enhancements such as radar improvements, new sensors, computers and displays. Test flights are conducted by crews consisting of U.S. Air Force and Boeing personnel.

AWACS is the world's standard for airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) systems. It fills the need of both airborne surveillance and command and control functions for tactical and air defense forces. With more than 20 years of active service, AWACS are deployed around the world flying daily surveillance missions.

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