Boeing Launches Revolutionary New Search And Rescue Command And Control System

The Combat Survivor Evader Locator (CSEL) system was officially launched recently with the delivery by Boeing of handheld satellite communication radios to the U.S. Air Force. The CSEL system is a revolutionary new search and rescue command and control network that will save lives of America's servicemen and women across the globe.

CSEL is the first system of its kind that provides downed aircrew members or isolated personnel a secure, digital, two-way, over-the-horizon (OTH) communications capability. CSEL integrates a state-of-the-art Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver with the OTH module in a handheld unit that is no larger than previous generation survival radios.

The handheld radios were delivered to Col. James B. Armor Jr., NAVSTAR GPS systems program director of the Air Force Space and Missile Center in Los Angeles, Calif., by Paul Bricker, Boeing manager for Search and Rescue (SAR) Programs. "This has been the single most outstanding program I think I've ever worked with in my career," Armor said, who added that the program "exemplified unique and award-winning teamwork and is a model of acquisition reform and the Air Force Lightning Bolt Initiatives.

"We set an ambitious goal and worked really hard to get there. It's been an exhilarating program," Armor said. "I know our troops in the field won't know the sweat and tears we put into this, but we'll be satisfied knowing they will come home safely because we did."

Previously delivered components of the CSEL system include the UHF SATCOM Base Station, Radio Set Adapter Units (software and crypto key loaders) and the Joint Search and Rescue Center software suite. The OTH relay link, managed by the UHF Base Station, is the key to rapid recovery of the individual and has a high probability of communications success via multiple, redundant networks. These components provide a global search and rescue system that interfaces to Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking (SARSAT) and other U.S. government secure networks.

Historically, combat search and rescue missions experienced a limited success rate in making rescues and suffered losses in personnel and equipment due to inaccurate situational awareness information.

Existing survival radios are only effective if friendly forces are within line of sight. They can easily be monitored and located by the enemy, and can be rendered ineffective by even elementary jamming or deception efforts. CSEL will "revolutionize" combat search and rescue, according to Lt. Col. Roger E. Robb, CSEL program manager for the Air Force.

"Rescue centers will be able to precisely locate, positively identify and instruct survivors/evaders rapidly and remotely before rescue forces go in harm's way," Robb said. Art Cohen, vice president for Boeing Advanced Technology Programs, agreed and said, "The government-led CSEL integrated product team (IPT) has demonstrated that an extremely challenging development program can be successfully executed while reducing the time to put vital equipment in the hands of our deployed forces."

Boeing won the competitive development program in February 1996.

The CSEL handheld units will be used for joint service training that commenced last week in Fort Huachuca, Ariz. CSEL will enter the operational assessment phase in Alaska in May. Initial production is currently under way. Authorization for full rate production is expected to occur in the summer of 1998.

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