Pilots Give Boeing SLAM ER High Marks

The Standoff Land Attack Missile Expanded Response (SLAM ER) successfully completed its first Development Test/Operational Test (DT/OT1) at Naval Air Warfare Center, Weapons Division, China Lake, Calif., test ranges June 2. This test follows five successful development tests.

"From the ground up, SLAM ER is a significant improvement over SLAM (Standoff Land Attack Missile) -- it's a totally different weapon in terms of capabilities," said Lt. Cdr. Wade Knudson, pilot of the F/A-18 control aircraft.

Lt. Rich Burr, an F/A-18 Strike Fighter pilot from the Navy Test Squadron, was at the controls of the Hornet that launched the SLAM ER. According to both Lt. Burr and Lt. Cdr. Knudson, SLAM ER's mission planning is a vast improvement over earlier methods.

"Mission planning for the SLAM ER has improved over baseline SLAM," said Lt. Cdr. Knudson. "We still have the concept of the SLAM smart checklist, but it's been vastly improved over the old days of spending hours using templates and charts. Now the system is faster, easier and more accurate," he said.

"Perhaps the most significant improvement in SLAM ER over SLAM is the man-in-the-loop capability," said Lt. Burr. "With SLAM ER the pilot uses the stop-motion aimpoint update feature to precisely control the missile all the way into the target."

An initiative incorporated in the F/A-18 Operational Flight Program 13C provides a 70 percent commonality in software among the SLAM ER, the Joint Standoff Weapon (JSOW) and the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM). This commonality among weapon systems eases the pilot's workload and makes the pilot more efficient.

"When the pilot gets into the cockpit, he sees controls and displays that are as common as possible among the three new weapons -- SLAM ER, JSOW and JDAM," said Lt. Cdr. Knudson. "There's no need to become an expert in one weapon or another. This software commonality allows pilots to get in and shoot either weapon effectively."

DT/OT1 demonstrated the SLAM ER's ability to attack a land-based target of opportunity. The SLAM ER's target-of-opportunity mode allows the launch aircraft pilot to send target coordinates to the missile on the wing of the aircraft prior to launch. After launch, the missile flies toward the target location and provides infrared seeker video back to the control aircraft for standoff and man-in-the-loop terminal control. This quick-reaction target-of-opportunity land attack feature of the SLAM ER can be used to redirect missions against unexpected targets such as missile launchers, or against secondary targets after primary targets are destroyed.

The target for this mission, a simulated command and control bunker, and its location were programmed into the SLAM ER just prior to missile launch, simulating real-time targeting and a quick-reaction launch.

The U.S. Navy's inventory of approximately 700 SLAMs will be upgraded to the SLAM ER configuration.

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