Comanche Prototype No. 2 Completes First Flight

The Boeing Sikorsky RAH-66 Comanche Prototype No. 2 has successfully completed its first flight at the Comanche Team's Development Flight Center here.

The flight was the culmination of an exhaustive series of system installations, inspections and tests to move the aircraft safely and efficiently to flight status. After performing several run-ups and ground runs, Prototype No. 2 took to the air at 12:35 p.m. EST, accumulating more than 30 minutes of flight time. The aircraft performed basic maneuvers, forward flight up to 80 knots, and climbed to about 500 feet to evaluate digital flight controls and basic handling qualities compared to Prototype No. 1.

Comanche Team test pilot Reggie Murrell and Army chief test pilot CW4 John Armbrust conducted the flight. Armbrust set a personal milestone, becoming the first Army test pilot to have completed a first flight in a prototype aircraft. Murrell and Armbrust reported that the aircraft performed within expectations and noted no significant problems during the initial run.

"This prototype handles just as smoothly as Prototype No. 1 did on its early flights," said Murrell. "Congratulations to everyone affiliated with the program for giving the flight test crew such a smooth platform."

Prototype No. 2 will continue flight testing in April to evaluate the aircraft's flight control system and to support Milestone II exit criteria.

The aircraft will serve primarily as the test platform for the Comanche Mission Equipment Package (MEP), the integrated targeting, communication and navigation system that forms the "brain" of the U.S. Army's 21st century combat and reconnaissance helicopter. Under the current funding plan, flight tests for MEP evaluation will begin in 2001. In the meantime, Prototype No. 2 will serve as the backup for Prototype No. 1. After completing its initial flights, Prototype No. 2 will be on display at the Army Aviation Association of America annual meeting in Nashville, Tenn. In June, the aircraft will be on display at the Paris Air Show. If additional funding is made available in fiscal year 2000, Prototype No. 2 will remain operational and conduct additional flight tests.

"The successful completion of this flight test milestone is another indication of the capability and professionalism of the Comanche Team," said Arthur W. Linden, Comanche Joint Program Office director. "Comanche flight test has been an especially robust, productive and efficient aspect of the program, and our people in West Palm Beach, as well the hundreds of team members who made this achievement possible, deserve much credit for meeting our program objectives."

The RAH-66 Comanche, the U.S. Army's 21st century combat helicopter, is being developed by U.S. Army Aviation and a team of leading aerospace companies headed by The Boeing Company and Sikorsky Aircraft Corp., a subsidiary of United Technologies Corp.

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