Boeing SLAM-ER Successful in Automatic Target Acquistion Launch

The U.S. Navy last week successfully launched a SLAM-ER missile on a test range at the Naval Air Warfare Center at China Lake, Calif. The launch marked the first developmental flight test of the SLAM-ER's automatic target acquisition (ATA) capability.

The missile was launched from an F/A-18C and flew a predetermined flight path that included seven different waypoints. At each waypoint the SLAM-ER changed course, avoiding terrain hazards. Several miles from the target, the ATA system automatically acquired the target and began providing real-time targeting cues to the pilot in a second F/A-18C standoff control aircraft. The SLAM-ER guidance system also used ATA measurements to guide the missile to the target. Just prior to impact the pilot in the second F/A-18C selected the exact hit point using SLAM-ER's Stop Motion Aimpoint Update feature. The SLAM-ER scored a direct hit on the selected target aimpoint.

"Automatic target acquisition greatly reduces a pilot's workload during a mission," said Jim O'Neill, Boeing general manager of Navy Missile Systems. "This successful ATA launch of SLAM-ER is another step in the ongoing Boeing and U.S. Navy product improvement plan for this highly capable and fleet-proven precision strike weapon."

In full-rate production and deployed with the fleet, SLAM-ER provides the U.S. Navy with surgical strike capability against high-value, fixed land targets, ships in port, or ships at sea. Designed for deployment from carrier-based and land-based aircraft, SLAM-ER can easily be adapted for ship launch. SLAM-ER can be launched from safe standoff ranges of more than 150 nautical miles.

The ATA system, which adds a small, internal hardware module to the missile, provides the pilot or weapon system operator with real-time target cueing in a complex environment on the F/A-18's cockpit display, aiding in finding the desired target aimpoint.

SLAM-ER's ATA pattern-matching algorithms compare the on-board reference image generated during the mission to the missile's infrared seeker image, and automatically locates the pre-planned aimpoint in the target scene. With ATA activated, the control pilot retains all of SLAM-ER's precision, man-in-the-loop terminal control capability. If the pilot chooses not to intervene, ATA is capable of providing automatic terminal guidance to the target.

All SLAM-ER missiles produced and deployed today contain the ATA capability. Earlier production missiles are being retrofitted. Boeing is currently under contract with the U.S. Navy to produce 346 SLAM-ERs, with production expected to continue beyond 2004. Approximately 700 SLAM missiles in the U.S. Navy arsenal will be retrofitted with the SLAM-ER upgrade.

Boeing produces the SLAM-ER in St. Charles, Mo.

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