

Boeing Demonstrates Advanced Technology on Super Hornet Platform

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Boeing [NYSE: BA] has demonstrated a breakthrough in close air support capability by transmitting digital imagery with targeting information between warfighters on the ground and in the air.

The demonstration included an F/A-18F Super Hornet and a forward air controller communicating over existing radio links. The demonstration, which took place at Naval Air Station Fallon, Nev., is another example of the leading role Boeing has taken developing network-centric warfighting capabilities.

In the demonstration, a forward air controller, equipped with the advanced close air support system, or ACASS, provided rough target coordinates to the pilot of the F/A-18. The pilot used the Boeing Gateway to Airborne Tactical Data Exchange avionics system to capture a sensor image of the target, and transmit the image back to the controller for target confirmation. Newly developed ACASS software enabled the controller to view the image, annotate it with critical information and transmit it back to the pilot to complete the air strike. This information exchange ensures that both the warfighter on the ground and in the air share a common picture of the target.

"What this demonstration really boils down to is improved situational awareness; the timely, accurate exchange of information and greatly enhanced target identification," said Tony Parasida, vice president and general manager the Boeing F/A-18 program. "Today's warfighting environment requires up-to-the minute information that is seamlessly exchanged among a number of platforms, people and sites. This demonstration further reinforces the Super Hornet's position as the U.S. Navy's workhorse in the network centric warfare environment."

Boeing plans to conduct additional testing in 2003 to further demonstrate the Super Hornet's ability to share targeting imagery among multiple aircraft.

The test aircraft is managed by Boeing under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Navy for demonstrating promising technologies and transitioning them to the Navy warfighter.

The Boeing Gateway to Airborne Tactical Data Exchange system installed on F/A-18F1 is an avionics prototype box that allows Boeing designers to test new software and hardware without affecting the mission systems already on the aircraft. It has made low-cost, low-risk experimentation possible and has opened new doors for "fast-tracking" solutions to the fleet.

ACASS, under development at the U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, is a portable device designed to automate the target hand-off process between the FAC and the pilot in the cockpit.

The tactical sensor used in this demonstration to generate high quality imagery was a training version of Raytheon's AGM-65H/K Maverick missile. In production, the imagery function will be performed by Raytheon's Advanced Tactical Forward Looking Infrared sensor.

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