Boeing Demonstrates Latest in Network Centric Operations with F/A-18F

Boeing [NYSE: BA] has taken another successful step in demonstrating the network-centric capabilities of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet.

A demonstration held September 4 showed connectivity between the Super Hornet pilot and ground troops, resulting in increased warfighter situational awareness and the ability to share vital information among all combatants quickly and accurately.

In the exercise, an F/A-18F demonstrator aircraft pilot, a Forward Air Controller, and a simulated Command and Control node communicated using network-centric technology to execute a pop-up mission. This demonstration furthered a December 2002 demonstration in which an F/A-18F pilot and Forward Air Controller shared imagery to enhance Close Air Support operations.

During the September exercise, the pilot was flying Combat Air Patrol when a simulated Command and Control platform re-tasked the F/A-18F to provide close air support to a Forward Air Controller on the ground. As the Super Hornet approached the target area, the simulated Command and Control platform transmitted imagery of the target area to the aircraft using the J16.0 message standard format for Link 16. The pilot then re-transmitted the imagery to the Forward Air Controller, using Variable Messaging Format. The Forward Air Controller used the Boeing Advanced Close Air Support System to view and annotate the image with critical information.

The Advanced Close Air Support System, under development by the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, is a portable device designed to automate and enhance the target assignment process between the Forward Air Controller on the ground and the pilot in the cockpit. Using this system, the imagery, annotations and digital data sufficient to generate a standard 9-line attack brief were transmitted back to the Super Hornet pilot to complete the strike. This information exchange ensures that both the warfighters on the ground and in the air share a common picture of the target for a safe and accurate target attack.

After a simulated target attack based on this information, the F/A-18F pilot sent bomb hit assessment imagery back to the Command and Control platform.

"This is another success in a series of planned demonstrations showcasing the Super Hornet's capabilities that enable it to operate in a Network Centric Operations environment," said Tony Parasida, vice president, F/A-18 program, for Boeing. "The Super Hornet is the newest aircraft in the fleet. Those of us in the Super Hornet program are now focusing on advanced technologies with the Block 2 configuration. Our team is committed to helping the Navy customer and the Joint Warfighter achieve their network centric operations vision."

Boeing will continue the series of demonstrations later this year and into 2004. Future demonstrations will analyze the Super Hornet's ability to share targeting imagery among multiple aircraft and ground forces and to serve as a key contributor in the integrated battlespace. The test aircraft in this series, F/A-18F1, is managed by Boeing under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Navy for demonstrating promising technologies and transitioning them to the warfighter.

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