Boeing, AATD to Study UAV Challenges During Weapons Tests Aboard Unmanned Little Bird

When Boeing [NYSE: BA] begins testing weapons on its Unmanned Little Bird in the coming weeks, company engineers will be focused well beyond the aircraft's ability to launch ordnance.

The goal of a new $1.6 million joint program with the U.S. Army's Aviation Applied Technology Directorate (AATD) will be to further refine the requirements for safe and accurate unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) weapons deployment.

"The Unmanned Little Bird is perfectly suited for doing high risk prototype testing to benefit future UAV systems," said Waldo Carmona, director/general manager of Advanced Army Systems for The Boeing Company. "The research will enhance the aircraft'ss ability to perform a wider range of missions suited for UAVs."

Data gathered during testing also will allow Boeing and AATD to better understand a variety of technical challenges associated with communicating with UAVs. Weapons being considered include the Hellfire and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System missiles, and the GAU-19A gun.

The Unmanned Little Bird, a modified MD 530F helicopter, is a fully instrumented UAV test-bed aircraft. The unique air vehicle combines the advantages of a UAV with a combat-proven manned helicopter and qualified weapon systems that have been used effectively on Little Birds over the years.

Carmona said the Unmanned Little Bird demonstrates the unmatched advantages of combining a cost-effective, proven airframe with emerging manned-unmanned network-centric operations technologies for the 21st century.

"The Unmanned Little Bird would add a new dimension to the already-proven capabilities of Mission Enhanced Little Birds flown by the U.S. Army's Special Operations forces," Carmona said, noting that the aircraft could be configured to carry a variety of payloads.

The weapons-related testing is scheduled to be completed over the next several months. Boeing engineers expect this testing to also demonstrate the simple integration of existing qualified systems for Little Bird aircraft onto the UAV, which would also include auxiliary fuel tanks and sensors.

The Unmanned Little Bird is uniquely suited for precision re-supply; communications relay using large, heavy packages; airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; downed pilot recovery, and weapons delivery.

The Boeing Unmanned Little Bird aircraft had flown nearly 100 hours as of January 2005. Flight testing began in September 2004. The prototype aircraft, which will continue to demonstrate unmanned capabilities in 2005, is validating the autonomous flight control system that could easily and cost-effectively be added to a manned aircraft.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis , Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $27 billion business. It provides network-centric system solutions to its global military, government and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; the world's largest military aircraft manufacturer; the world's largest satellite manufacturer and a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense and Department of Home land Security; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in launch services.

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