Boeing Begins First EA-18G Integration Following Successful Navy Reviews

The U.S. Navy has approved Boeing's [NYSE: BA] test plans and processes for integrating several key subsystems into the EA-18G Growler aircraft weapons system. Successful completion by the EA-18G program of its first two test readiness reviews (TRR) allows Boeing to begin developing and integrating the systems at Boeing labs in St. Louis.

These TRRs, one in November 2005 and one in January, focused on several key areas of the aircraft's software: mission computer, electronic attack unit, the stores management system, interference blanking unit, the ALE-47 countermeasures system, EA-18G instrumentation system, mission planning and integration of the digital memory device. During the review, the Navy evaluated the plan Boeing established for integrating the software with hardware systems in its Electronic Systems Integration Laboratory, or ESIL, and in hardware simulators, and examined the processes that make up the plan.

"This is a major first step in our weapons system integration test plan," said Bob Feldmann, EA-18G program manager for Boeing. "This integration is vital to the success of the program, and the Navy has given us a vote of confidence in moving forward."

With full system integration in the EA-18G lab underway, the engineers will focus on integration of EA-18G Build 1, the first of two builds of the airborne electronic attack aircraft software. The integration test team will verify more than 2,400 test points before the AEA avionics suite will be installed in the flight test aircraft for its initial flight, scheduled for fall 2006. The beginning of verification marks the first time the entire EA-18G weapons system avionics suite, including elements from Northrop Grumman, Harris, Naval Air Systems Command and Boeing will be integrated.

The EA-18G lab offers several state-of-the-art features that will enable engineers to meet the integration schedule. It features the Facility Automated Set-up and Test, or FAST architecture, which makes it possible for the team to setup and test the full avionics suite from a central user console using automated test scripts. This will save hours of labor during the test phase of the program and produce higher quality and more repeatable tests. The lab also provides the team with the capability to support high-speed links to suppliers and government sites, thus enabling sharing of data and real-time monitoring of tests in the integration lab.

The Navy will conduct a final TRR in late spring, followed by a build readiness review this summer.

The EA-18G Growler industry team is led by Boeing, the weapons system integrator and prime contractor. Northrop Grumman is the principal subcontractor and airborne electronic attack subsystem integrator. The EA-18G, a derivative of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, will be produced on the Hornet Industry Team production lines at Boeing, Northrop Grumman, General Electric and Raytheon. The System Design and Development (SDD) program concludes with an Initial Operational Capability in 2009. Naval Air Systems Command PMA-265 is the U.S. Navy acquisition office for the EA-18G.

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