Boeing Begins Mission System Flight Testing of Upgraded AWACS Aircraft

The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] has conducted a successful first mission system test flight of an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft upgraded under the Block 40/45 program, the largest enhancement in the history of the U.S. Air Force E-3 AWACS fleet.

During the seven-hour flight on April 5 from Boeing Field in Seattle, the crew -- composed of Boeing, U.S. Air Force and subcontractor personnel -- conducted functional tests of the aircraft's enhanced navigation, communications, radar and mission computing subsystems.

"The flight was a significant milestone because it confirms that development of the mission system suite is on track to support our flight testing plans," said Stu Oliason, Boeing U.S. AWACS Integration and Checkout manager.

In future flights, Boeing will further calibrate the upgrades and measure their performance. The mission system flight test program is scheduled for 62 flights over the next several months.

Under the Block 40/45 program, Boeing outfitted the Test System 3 (TS-3) AWACS aircraft with new mission computing hardware and software, upgraded radar equipment, and navigation and communications systems.

These enhancements are designed to increase the aircraft's capability through improved automation, human computer interface and reliability as well as lowered lifecycle costs. These upgrades make AWACS a prime catalyst for network-enabled battle management and command-and-control capability and an extraordinary force multiplier across the entire operational theater.

Based on a Boeing 707-320B airframe, the E-3 AWACS provides wide-area surveillance, command-and-control and communications functions for all airborne assets in any theater of operation. In service with the U.S. Air Force since 1977, it is also used by NATO, United Kingdom, France and Saudi Arabia. Japan's E-767 AWACS utilizes the same basic mission computing system as the current U.S. Air Force E-3 AWACS.

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