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LONDON, Jan. 24, 2011 -- Boeing [NYSE: BA] and its Boeing Defence UK subsidiary today announced that the Boeing UK Rotorcraft Support team has begun flight testing the first Chinook Mk4 helicopter for the Royal Air Force (RAF). The first flight took place on Dec. 9 in Hampshire, England.

"Project JULIUS, as the Mk4 program is known, will modernize the current Royal Air Force Chinook fleet – essentially giving us new aircraft," said Chris White-Horne, Mk4 project team leader for the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence.

Project JULIUS will modify 38 Mk2/2A Chinooks into the Mk4/4A configuration and eight Mk3 Chinooks into the Mk5 configuration. All the aircraft will be delivered to RAF Odiham in Hampshire.

A major part of the modification for both the Mk4/4A and Mk5 aircraft is the Thales TopDeck cockpit. Thales UK is under contract with Boeing to supply its Cockpit Display System/Mission Avionic System, which will provide improved situational awareness, increased safety and options for capability enhancement. The upgraded and integrated cockpit display includes four multifunction displays, two stand-by flight displays, updated communications interfaces, and two new air data computers.

"The first of the modified JULIUS Chinook helicopters is expected to be available to commanders before the end of 2011," said David Pitchforth, managing director, Boeing UK Rotorcraft Support. "The entire Mk2 fleet will be fitted with the JULIUS cockpit by early 2015, followed by Mk2A and Mk3 modifications by 2015 and 2016, respectively."

The modifications also include the addition of a third crew-member seat and an update of Airworthiness & Safety Certification and Qualification for the modernized Chinook. The aircraft are being modified at the Gosport Fleetlands facility operated by Vector Aerospace, Boeing's principal subcontractor for deep support of the RAF Chinook fleet. Vector Aerospace has established a dedicated production line at Fleetlands to support the JULIUS program, with specialist component manufacture provided from its Almondbank facility near Perth, Scotland.

"Vector Aerospace is delighted to be associated with this significant milestone. It is a testimony to the skill and dedication of our teams in Fleetlands and Almondbank, who have worked in a spirit of true partnership with our customer Boeing and the key equipment suppliers," said Tim Rice, managing director, Vector Aerospace UK.

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Boeing Company and a business unit of Boeing Defense, Space & Security, Boeing Defence UK Ltd. currently has employees at 20 locations throughout the UK supporting Ministry of Defence and U.S. military programs.

Boeing UK Rotorcraft Support, working with Boeing Global Services & Support's Rotorcraft Support business, is focused on providing increased capability to the United Kingdom's military rotorcraft fleet. Supported by Boeing Defence UK, UK Rotorcraft Support has employees in Afghanistan, the UK, and the U.S., supporting Royal Air Force Chinooks and British Army Air Corps Apache fleets.

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Note to editors:

Thales UK's TopDeck cockpit suite includes an onboard mission planning system providing crew with extensive tactical flexibility and the capability to optimize the mission profile to suit real-time circumstances. A ground mission support system completes the tactical mission capability and a fully secure data transfer system guarantees security. Human Machine Interface is centralized and critical flight data, including primary flight and tactical data, is continuously presented on the four main 6" x 8" displays, easing cockpit workload and allowing a significant increase in situational awareness.

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