Boeing Demonstrates Autonomous Ship-based Capability of Unmanned Little Bird Rotorcraft

MESA, Ariz., Aug. 7, 2012 -- The Boeing [NYSE: BA] Unmanned Little Bird H-6U successfully performed 14 autonomous takeoffs and landings from a ship during flight tests in July, a significant milestone for a medium-size vertical-takeoff-and-landing unmanned airborne system (UAS).

For the tests, conducted from a private ship off the coast of Florida, Boeing integrated a commercial-off-the-shelf takeoff-and-landing system with Unmanned Little Bird's automated flight control system. Two safety pilots were aboard the optionally piloted aircraft to maintain situational awareness and to be able to take control of the aircraft, though that was not required. The aircraft accumulated 20 flight hours with 100 percent availability.

"Unmanned Little Bird performed flawlessly, proving not only its reliability as a mature platform but its adaptability for various missions and continued innovation," said Debbie Rub, Boeing vice president and general manager of Missiles and Unmanned Airborne Systems. "By successfully demonstrating this maritime capability, we are able to provide warfighters with a critical unmanned solution to meet their missions."

Introduced in 2004, Unmanned Little Bird is a variant of the highly successful MD-500 series helicopters, which have accumulated 14 million flight hours over five decades. Unmanned Little Bird benefits from this legacy, demonstrating numerous capabilities on a platform that is affordable to own, operate and maintain.

The aircraft's missions include intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; precision cargo resupply; weapons delivery; and manned-unmanned teaming. In addition, Unmanned Little Bird continues to be used as a technology demonstrator, rapidly prototyping new capabilities for multiple platforms. Unmanned Little Bird is one of Boeing's many C4ISR capabilities that provide a seamless flow of information -- from collection to aggregation to analysis -- for customers' enduring need for situational awareness.

Boeing is spotlighting Unmanned Little Bird and other unmanned systems today through Aug. 9 at the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI) Unmanned Systems North America 2012 conference and exhibition in Las Vegas. Boeing Unmanned Airborne Systems Director Rick Lemaster will give reporters an overview of Unmanned Little Bird today from 11 a.m. to noon Pacific time in the Boeing exhibit at Booth 3646.

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