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Flight paves the way to aerial refueling and Milestone C testing

EVERETT, Wash., Sept. 25, 2015 – The Boeing [NYSE: BA] and U.S. Air Force team successfully completed the first flight of a KC-46A tanker aircraft today, taking off from Paine Field at 1:24 p.m. (PST) and landing four hours later at Boeing Field in Seattle.

This was the first flight of a KC-46A tanker-configured aircraft, following ongoing flights of the program's first test aircraft, a 767-2C. During the flight, Boeing test pilots performed operational checks on engines, flight controls and environmental systems and took the tanker to a maximum altitude of 35,000 feet prior to landing.

"This first tanker flight is a key milestone for the program and we'll now begin free air stability tests and flight controls of the boom and wing aerial refueling pods (WARPs) before conducting aerial refueling tests where the KC-46 will make contact with other military aircraft down the road," said Col. Christopher Coombs, U.S. Air Force KC-46 System program manager.

"Today's flight reinforces that we are moving in the right direction and are on track to begin planned Milestone C testing later this year," said Tim Peters, Boeing KC-46 tanker vice president and program manager. "This is an aerospace industry first and the culmination of a lot of hard work by the team, including Boeing, our suppliers and the U.S. Air Force."

The Boeing team now will conduct a post-flight inspection and calibrate instrumentation prior to the next series of flights, during which the tanker boom and WARPs systems will be deployed. Before the end of the year, the KC-46 will begin conducting aerial refueling flights with a number of U.S. Air Force aircraft. Those flights, along with the mission systems demonstrations and a recently completed ground cargo handling test, will support the planned Milestone C decision in 2016.

As part of a contract awarded in 2011 to design and develop the U.S. Air Force's next-generation tanker aircraft, Boeing is building four test aircraft – two are currently configured as 767-2Cs and two KC-46A tankers. The KC-46s will fly as fully equipped tankers through the FAA and military certification process, while the 767-2Cs enter flight test prior to receiving their upgrade to the KC-46A configuration and the addition of their aerial refueling systems.

The program's first test aircraft (EMD-1), a 767-2C, has completed more than 150 flight test hours to date since making its first flight in December 2014.

The KC-46A is a multirole tanker Boeing is building for the U.S. Air Force that can refuel all allied and coalition military aircraft compatible with international aerial refueling procedures and can carry passengers, cargo and patients. Overall, Boeing plans to build 179 KC-46 aircraft for the U.S. Air Force.

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