



A true alliance

Upgrade effort for NATO AWACS unites capabilities of transoceanic team

A NATO AWACS aircraft flies over Mount Rainier, Wash. Boeing recently turned over to NATO the first production configuration of 17 upgraded AWACS aircraft.

By DAVE SLOAN

Delivering an extraordinary new mission capability and implementing it through a complex project structure is never an easy job. But imagine accomplishing it when you are leading a team of 15 subcontractors spread over 12 countries in two continents.

That's exactly what happened recently when Boeing turned over to NATO the first production configuration of 17 upgraded Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft as part of the \$1.32 billion Mid-Term Modernisation Programme. The enhancements will transform NATO AWACS into the premier airborne surveillance and command-and-control system in the world.

Lee Strom, Boeing NATO AWACS production and retrofit program manager, said none of this would have been possible without a great working-together spirit between Boeing and its partners. "You're dealing with different cultures, processes and time zones," he said. "The best way to address those challenges is to establish trust by getting to know the people, not just the com-

pany. E-mails and phone calls are important, but they alone don't make the difference."

Strom said Boeing employees worked side by side with the subcontractors to help them better understand and apply the program and technical information being flowed down through e-mail, engineering drawings or on the phone.

"The companies involved with NATO Mid-Term range in size and experience, so you can't treat them all the same," he said. "For example, EADS out of Germany or General Dynamics out of Canada are much more in tune with our perspective and way of doing things than a smaller company in Spain that's working with Boeing for the first time."

Tim White, director of Boeing NATO AWACS programs, said Boeing as prime contractor not only manages the program and subcontractors, but in doing so spends a lot of time with the NATO customer.

"NATO is pragmatic and willing to work together to make sure we do the right thing for the program," he said. "Their way of doing business is unique with a different organizational structure and acquisition process. We needed to learn how to adapt

to that, as well as to the U.S. Air Force's role as agent for NATO. It's different than a U.S.-only program."

White said the Boeing team has done a great job dealing with suppliers, defining the work packages, completing site-survey qualifications and getting export approvals. He said the team is applying Lean principles to streamline production and retrofit processes. "This is good for the NATO operator because it takes their planes out of service for less time and delivers the new platform system capability sooner," he said.

Strom said he believes the Mid-Term Programme is a prototype for international cooperation—and that it delivers to the customer the most advanced AWACS capability in the world. He said the mission computing, with its Windows-based architecture, is more operator-friendly, reduces operator workload and offers flexibility in current and future mission tasking. The enhancements also vastly improve the AWACS situational-awareness and battle-management capabilities.

Retrofit of the entire fleet is on track to be completed on schedule in 2008. ■

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