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Drone Aviation WASP System Successfully Participates In Army NIE

By Ann Roosevelt

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Drone Aviation Holding Corp.'s - Drone Aviation Corp. (DAC) said Wednesday aerostat systems successfully completed operations in the Army's Network Integration Experiment NIE 14.2 at Fort Bliss, Texas and White Sands Missile Range, N.M.

"It enabled the exercise across the board," Felicia Hess, president and CEO of Drone Aviation Corp., told *Defense Daily*. The company now awaits further action by the Army.

The Army Brigade Modernization Command (BMC) requested that the two Winch Aerostat Small Platforms (WASP) return to NIE 14.2 as a carryover system following their successful evaluation at NIE 14.1 as a System Under Evaluation. The systems were provided to Army Space and Missile Defense Command (SMDC)/Army Forces Strategic Command.

The WASP is a mobile, tactical, turn-key aerostat system able to carry a variety of payloads in support of military operations in the field, giving troops a tactical edge by allowing them to communicate over greater distances.The WASPs were used as a robust platform to extend the aerial network by flying a **Harris** [HRS] PRC- 117G radio and antenna mounted to a DAC manufactured tactical aerostat tethered to a militarized WASP launcher system.

Multiple waveforms were supported and extended the communications ranges eight-to-10 times greater than achieved with Army issue OE-254 (30') retransmit antennas.

"By providing such a compelling platform to them, they (the Army) were able to put lightly trained personnel in the field who operated (the system) with very little vendor intervention in any of this," Hess said.

The WASP systems were operated solely by junior soldiers who received four days of training

before the NIE began.

What was compelling for the company, Hess said, was to see that after light training soldiers were able to “prove that the system could lift a 40 lb. radio,” and enabled exercises to run that could not have been done if the aerostat had not been flying."

In fact, she said, the systems showed that “without that equipment deployed (soldiers) did not want to continue with the exercise unless it was up there.”

Since the NIE, there has been some follow on work with SMDC, Hess said. "As a small company, a growing company, what we really want to show is that we're going to support them," where it be parts, integration or other activity.

Soldiers Prepare WASP
Photo: U.S. Army
The Army NIEs evaluate and integrate current and prospective systems thereby driving changing requirements, procurement, and field recommendations.

The WASP leverages aerostat technology to elevate network payloads to an advantaged height to enable persistent network connectivity while reducing risk to troops conducting missions.

The self-contained WASP systems are mounted to a compact trailer for use with various military or commercial vehicles.

WASP systems are engineered to provide significant benefits, including reduced acquisition, maintenance and overall operation costs, smaller footprint necessary for infrastructure and operations, reduced operators required to manage the aerostat, decreased time for inflation/deflation, faster launch and recovery, and a simplified process.

The NIE 14.2 evaluations examined joint force network capabilities; improving unified land operations with communications nodes based on aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles; integrating networking technologies into the armored brigade combat team; developing ways to deliver, collect and process integrated, multi-source intelligence to front-line warfighters; and make field command posts more mobile and efficient.

Additionally, the NIE 14.2 involved beyond-line-of-sight-communications; expeditionary signal brigade tropospheric scatter communications; network intrusion prevention; cellular communications; electromagnetic spectrum operation; condition based maintenance; and operational energy solutions.