Upgraded Apache helicopter OK'd for production

U.S. Army

WASHINGTON (Nov. 1, 2012) -- The Defense Acquisition Board decision regarding full-rate production for the Apache Block III helicopter program was announced Oct. 24, by Army officials at a briefing in Washington, D.C.

Additionally, Apache project manager Col. Jeffrey Hager confirmed that the Apache Block III is being re-designated as an AH-64E model.

The announcement event was attended by 20 media members representing national and industry related publications.

According to the Apache Project Office, the Defense Acquisition Board, or DAB, granted approval for full-rate production, or FRP, in August and the Air Force communicated the model designation change in a September memo to the Army. Actions are under way to begin implementation of the E model designation for subsequent use by the military and industry.

"The DAB's decision really secured Apache production for the next several years," Hager said. "We've got fiscal requirements, but securing that production through a full-rate production decision was just huge for this program. It's probably the single largest decision that we've had since Block I's and Block II's went into production. It's that monumental."

One of the other key components, Hager said, that resulted in the DAB decision is the fact that the Block III had been designated an ACAT C program.

"We're no longer a D program and therefore don't need DOD oversight. Our Army acquisition executive, Ms. Heidi Shyu, is in charge of the Apache program and the development production that we have for Block III as we go forward from this point. So that was a big designation for us," Hager said.

The designation of the E model, he added, accurately recognizes the aircraft's advancements including an Improved Drive System, increased engine capabilities, technologically advanced composite main rotor blades and sensor enhancements.

"At the end of the day, the only real measure of how well a system is performing falls to the user and how easy or difficult the aircraft is to maintain," said Col. John Lynch, Attack/Reconnaissance TRADOC capabilities manager. "Basically, the Block III exceeded expectations that were laid out on the sustainment side."

Upgrades to the aircraft over previous models include advanced rotor blades and significantly increased aircraft handling, performance and agility at higher altitudes. Situational awareness is enhanced with electro-optical and infrared sensors for the operational benefit of aviators and battlefield commanders.

"The Apache fleet continues to do very well in Afghanistan and Kuwait," Lynch said. "It's has maintained an over 80 percent readiness rate while averaging over 60 flight hours per month. We're almost at one million combat flight hours with the Apache."

First delivered in October 2011, Apache Block III helicopters are in production at the Boeing Company in Mesa, Ariz. Fielding of the AH-64E will occur over the next decade.

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