Balloon test conducted for new air traffic control tower

By Christine Trent
NAWCAD Webster Outlying Field
Communications

A balloon test was conducted at Webster Outlying Field (WOLF) in St. Inigoes Sept. 3 in support of a new air traffic control tower (ATCT) to be built in 2023.

Soaring 110-feet in the air, the balloon demonstrated the location and height of the future ATCT, providing an opportunity for public viewing of the tower’s placement from nearby historic locations.

The balloon test fulfills the requirement of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, which allows for public viewing of any large construction projects that may have an impact on sight lines from local historic sites.

The current ATCT at WOLF is more than 40 years old and no longer meets today's safety and flight standards. Construction of the new tower is slated to begin in 2021 with a completion date of 2023. It will support mission critical air operations and provide technical, professional, and construction services worldwide.

The WOLF organization provides “cradle-to-grave” rapid capability engineering to more than 30 military and federal agencies. It is a Government organic Lead System Integrator (oLSI), following a product-based model to develop organic solutions using a government-industry team. Nearly three-quarters of its projects are less than two years in duration.

WOLF is also home to Air Test & Evaluation Squadron (UX) 24, which provides Research, Development, Test & Evaluation (RDT&E) services for several Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) platforms.

Visible in the background from WOLF’s front entrance is the test balloon, showing the height and location of the proposed new air traffic control tower.

This military construction effort is a partnership between Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) and Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc., an American firm providing technical, professional, and construction services worldwide.

Behind the scenes of a successful sea trial for CH-53K King Stallion

By Victoria Falcon
Strategic Communications, PMA-261

Kristen Finnegan is the woman behind the scenes of the recently completed successful sea trial for the CH-53K King Stallion. Completed in June 2020, the aircraft’s first sea trial took 12-months of planning. Sea trials evaluate a state-of-the-art aircraft in a modern naval environment, and coordinating this vital test event with the surface Navy takes experience, flexibility, creativity and a lot of patience.

Flight test projects are co-led by a project engineer and project officer. As a graduate of Penn State’s Aerospace Engineering program, the Florida Institute of Technology and the U.S. Navy Test Pilot School Graduate Class 148, Finnegan was perfectly positioned to be the Lead Project Engineer. Maj Joshua Foxton was Lead Project Officer, and though he had never taken part in a NAVAIR shipboard test, he had deployed aboard an LHD 1 class ship during his time in the fleet, which made him a good fit to help lead the test effort. His knowledge of LHD procedures, personnel and overall operations was invaluable during test execution and contributed greatly to the success of the sea trial.

The CH-53K King Stallion lands aboard USS Wasp (LHD) for the first time at the beginning of sea trials in June.

Finnegan began training the team members working hard. "Coming over to the CH-53K program was a big change," she said. "It is a much bigger ITT than others I've worked on, is a very high-profile program and brought a lot of challenges with it.

The first challenge she faced was finding a ship for the trials. The ITT needed two weeks of dedicated operations to complete the tests and a lot of up-front preparation time. Navy ship assets are heavily tasked and testing is not always a priority. Most testing is performed with only a few months' notice of ship availability, so finding a suitable ship far in advance for that length of time was a big ‘ask.’ After months of discussions, Finnegan was able to secure USS Wasp (LHD) for the June 2020 tests.

The size of the test team was challenging, as well. "A typical helo ship test involves about 30 people on the test team," said Finnegan. "This test started with 120 people — only 15 of them had ever been aboard a ship before — and only seven of them had ever conducted this type of testing."

The CH-53K King Stallion lands aboard USS Wasp (LHD) for the first time at the beginning of sea trials in June.