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Boeing and Rheinmetall accelerate Germany's path to Collaborative Combat Aircraft capabilities – Mature platform available for capability development

Leading air forces worldwide are now initiating the practical introduction of Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA), also called strike-fighter drone in air-to-ground operations. They are thus moving from the concept phase to the concrete creation of this new military capability. The German armed forces also have corresponding plans.

With the MQ-28 Ghost Bat, a mature platform is already available today that enables this rapid capability build-up. Previous flight tests show that the MQ-28 can meet the German requirements with regard to both air-to-ground and air-to-air operations.

The high maturity level of the MQ-28 enables Germany to immediately build sovereign capabilities – including the integration of German sensors, weapons and mission software. Boeing is continuously investing in the further development of the MQ-28, including its air-to-ground capabilities. To ensure the accelerated build-up of CCA capabilities in Germany, Rheinmetall is contributing as system integrator.

Crucial is the high level of maturity that the MQ-28 Ghost Bat already has today: to date, the MQ-28 Ghost Bat is the first and only strike-fighter drone to have already participated in multinational exercises (for example in the US military maneuver Exercise Valiant Shield). Glen Ferguson, Boeing Defense Australia, Global Director of the MQ-28 program: "While many CCA programs worldwide are still in the concept, definition or early test phase, the MQ-28A Ghost Bat has already gone through these essential development steps."

At the same time, the MQ-28 Ghost Bat offers the German Air Force a realistic development and test environment to further develop procedures and tactics for cooperation between manned and unmanned aircraft. Glen Ferguson emphasizes: "If the goal is to achieve such a capability by 2029, this work must begin today with the development of tactics, training, definition of force structure and the integration of sovereign technologies."

Together with Rheinmetall, Rohde & Schwarz, Diehl Defence and HENSOLDT, Boeing is currently building an industrial ecosystem that will enable Germany in the long term to develop and integrate the required capabilities within its own country.

Rheinmetall is taking the first step by establishing an independent system integration for the MQ-28 in Germany. Mike Schmidt, CEO of the Business Unit Air, Uncrewed and Space:

"Germany does not have to choose between speed and independence. We offer a way to achieve both at the same time. The MQ-28 enables us to bypass the lengthy development phase of a new aircraft and go directly to the decisive task: making the capabilities of unmanned combat air systems available to the German Air Force."

Establishing an independent system integration is at the same time an investment in the German defense industry. Software development, mission integration and intellectual property remain within the German industrial ecosystem.

This allows national capabilities to be developed, tested and integrated immediately on the MQ-28. Future CCA platforms will then benefit from these experiences. With the help of a digital twin, the MQ-28 is continuously being further developed, also supported by extensive flight test data and insights from the test program with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

Glen Ferguson: "The MQ-28 Ghost Bat has been designed from the outset as an extremely adaptable platform. Experiences gathered in operational use to date show that the MQ-28's architecture can be quickly adapted to new mission requirements, including air-to-ground capabilities. This is not about a retrofit, but about using a modular design that is conceived from the ground up for continuous adaptations."

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