

Navy's Flight I/II DDGs Get UAS Capability with Textron's Aerosonde



The Aerosonde UAS has been deployed on a Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer in the 7th Fleet. *TEXTRON SYSTEMS*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Aerosonde unmanned aerial system has been deployed on a U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer serving in the U.S. 7th Fleet, giving the Flight I/II DDG – which does not have the organic helicopter facilities of the Flight IIA and subsequent versions of the DDG – an organic aerial surveillance capability.

Wayne Prender, Textron Systems' vice president for Air Systems, told *Seapower* March 31 the DDG – which he was not at liberty to name – deployed with an Aerosonde system on board in March. The system is being operated under a contractor-owned/contractor-operated arrangement.

Prender said a second DDG would deploy with an Aerosonde system later this year. He also said that for three years an Aerosonde system has been operational on board the Lewis B. Puller-class expeditionary sea base ship USS Hershel "Woody" Williams in support of the U.S. 2nd Fleet.

Prender said the deployments are "helping to set the calculus for real-world operations."

The Aerosonde can carry a variety of sensors including an electro-optical camera, an Automatic Information System receiver, and other special payloads. The UAS can perform wide-area search, expanding the search horizon of the host ship. The system is fully integrated into the ship's combat information center.

The UAS uses less fuel – about one pound per hour – than an MH-60 helicopter, which burns about 1,000 pounds per hour. The Aerosonde uses heavy fuel, the same fuel used by the ship's turbines, so no provision for a different fuel is needed.

An Aerosonde can be operated by a team of three contractor personnel. The fixed-wing version can be launched and recovered in Sea State 4 and is recovered by a net rigged on the host ship. A vertical takeoff and landing version, which carries a lighter payload but can be launched more quickly, will be deployed on a ship later this year.