UNITED STATES

Cessna Camerava
R

econnaissance was the first role
envisaged for military aviation and,
, as long as the machines did not
frighten the horses, military commanders
were glad to know what was on the other side of the hill. Military aviation has diversified since then, but aerial reconnaissance remains one of the most important contribu-tions to the successful outcome of any military venture.
But not everybody needs (or can afford) a reconnaissance capability based
on fast jets. There is a definite
market niche for a low-cost,
capable reconnaissance aircraft,
perhaps with some other capa-
bilities when recce is off the
menu, and this is the slot that
General Dynamics and its
subsidiary, Cessna, pinpointed.
GD had been working on a US
Air Force requirement to
replace the RF-4 Phantom, and
had test-flown a recce pod on an
F-16 at Edwards AFB. At the
same time, Cessna was produc-
ing its Caravan cargo hauler
with the option of a ventral
cargo pannier, and soon some-
one said, "Why don't we put the
recce pod on the military vari-
ant of the Caravan, the U-27A?"
The pod weighs between
1,0001b and 1,2501b, depending
on the mix of sensors fitted, and
is 173in long, 25in wide, and
28-5in deep, giving adequate
ground clearance on the U-27.

Cessna is marketing its U-27 Caravan derivative for low-

intensity conflicts. Mike Gaines and Janice Lowe report.

Above Although the mission equipment pod was designed for the F-16 its 28 • Sin depth still allows for adequate ground clearance on the U-27. Below The sensor operator's position

As it was designed for the F-16, the pod is stressed to 9g, much higher than the +3-Sg/-l-5g load limits of the U-27.
With the pod sensor console and video recorders the empty weight of the U-27 is 5,8001b, some 1,6001b more than the stan-dard Caravan. Add to this the pilot, copilot, sensor operator (SO), and internal fuel, and the aircraft has a useful 5hr endurance. The demonstrator has a roller-blind aft door, and up to six wing pylons can be fitted. On the demonstrator these are neither
wet nor wired, but Cessna says
that it is no problem to plumb
the 14in pylons into the fuel
system or adapt them for firing
or release circuitry.
The company envisages
several roles for the U-27. Apart
from pure reconnaissance,
Cessna says that the aircraft is
suitable for low-intensity
conflicts. A • 5in machine pun
can be mounted in the door,
either with a door gunner or
fixed side firing, and various
rocket pods or gun pods could
be put on the pylons. At last
year's Farnborough Air Show
the U-27A was shown with air-
to-air Stinger missiles. The four
inboard wing pylons are cleared
to 3001b; the outboard pylons
can carry 1001b each.
The U-27 is a natural for
covert insertion of special forces
parachute teams, says Cessna.
Apart from looking like a>

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