



## NH90 has first flight

THE FIRST OF FIVE Eurocopter NH90 prototypes had a successful 40min maiden flight from the company's Marignane site near Marseilles, France on 18 December. The first aircraft, PT1, was flown by test pilots Philippe Boutry and Guy Dabadie, and is the first of three NH90 prototypes to be built by Eurocopter France. A fourth tactical-transport version prototype is being built by Eurocopter Deutschland, while Agusta of Italy is responsible for the naval prototype. Fokker of the Netherlands is the fourth partner in the helicopter programme.

# Germany may bid for more EF2000s

ANDRZEJ JEZIORSKI/MUNICH

GERMAN DEFENCE minister Volker Rühle has gone public with a face-saving strategy opening the door for Germany to increase the number of Eurofighter EF2000s it buys.

Rühle has said that, while the air force's Eurofighter requirement up to the year 2012 — as far ahead as German budget plans go — remains at 140 aircraft, the current production workshare debate justifies looking beyond this time.

The minister says that there is a potential requirement for an unspecified number of additional aircraft to replace air force Panavia Tornado strike aircraft which will be retired from service. Germany is looking at increasing its assembly-line offtake to as many as 180 production aircraft.

Sources in Bonn view Rühle's statement as a means of testing the reactions of political opponents of the programme before committing himself outright to the number Germany will finally buy.

"He has not nailed his colours to any particular mast yet. He can

now judge the response and then decide his actions," says one Bonn source.

The German defence ministry has for some time been considering increasing its production offtake as a solution to the long-running debate over production workshare.

Under the terms of the Eurofighter programme, workshare is supposed to be linked to offtake, which would mean that industrial partner Daimler-Benz Aerospace would only receive 23% of the production work with a German offtake of 140 aircraft.

The German Government, however, has been wrestling with its partners for months in an attempt to maintain a 30% share of the production.

An increase in the number of aircraft Germany will buy is a simple solution to the problem, but presents both budgetary problems and the problem of how Rühle would put this to parliament without appearing to back down on his earlier decision to reduce the number of fighters for the air force from the original, pre-reorientation figure of 250. □

## CRASHES

### AMERICAN 757 CRASHES

An American Airlines Boeing 757 which left Miami for Cali, Colombia, on 20 December crashed into mountains at night, killing all but four of the 167 people on board. The aircraft was on its descent into Cali from the north, which requires a step-letdown procedure using VHF-omni-range/distance-measuring-equipment navigation beacons. The aircraft hit a 12,000ft (3,660m) mountain near the town of Buga, at about 9,000ft and around 18km (10nm) to the east of the letdown track. Cali is in a steep-sided, north/south-orientated valley, with its runway aligned for the terrain (01/19), and the letdown procedure almost straight. The Colombian Civil Aviation Authority says that all navigation beacons were serviceable, the flight-data recorder and cockpit-voice recorder readouts implied no technical problems, and that the crew reacted to a ground-proximity warning-system alert, but too late to save the aircraft. There is no indication as to why the 757 was off track.

## Lockheed Martin boosts C-130J orderbook with Australasian deal

LOCKHEED MARTIN stands to sell over 40 C-130J Hercules II transporters to Australia and New Zealand, with the former country placing a firm order for an initial batch of 12 aircraft on 21 December.

Deliveries of 12 stretched C-130J-30s included in the A\$900 million (\$660 million) contract will begin early in 1997. The aircraft will replace the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) 12 C-130Es.

The contract includes options for an additional 24 C-130Js for the RAAF, including aircraft to replace the service's 12 C-130Hs. The order could also fulfil pending requirements for airborne early-

warning and aerial-refuelling tanker aircraft.

Also included are options for eight C-130Js for the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). New Zealand has until the turn of the century to exercise these options, to replace the RNZAF's five C-130Hs, but is guaranteed pricing based on Australia's bigger order.

Under offset agreements signed by Lockheed Martin, Australia's Hawker de Havilland will produce composite inboard and outboard flap sections for the C-130, while Honeywell Australia will develop a lap-top maintenance computer and Aviall Australia will manufacture hydraulic hoses and connectors. □

## CAL places 737-800 order

CHINA AIRLINES (CAL) of Taiwan, after considerable delay, has finally placed an order for six Boeing 737-800s, plus nine options, to meet its requirement for a new 150-seat passenger airliner.

The aircraft will replace CAL's three early-build 737-200s and two wet-leased Airbus A320s due to be returned by the end of 1996. The airline will lease an interim number of 737-400s until the first of the new 737-800s is ready to enter service in 1998.

CAL opted for the Boeings after a lengthy evaluation of the competing Airbus Industrie A320/321 and McDonnell Douglas MD-90-30ER. The aircraft in the \$750 million deal will be delivered in the second half of 1998.

According to local sources, CAL had initially preferred a mix of A320/321s, but has come under political pressure to instead select a US aircraft. The move is understood to have been in response to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's controversial visit to the USA in June 1995.

Both CAL and its main competitor Eva Air signed letters of intent for four Boeing 777s during Lee's trip, which China strongly criticised. Taiwan has been trying to cultivate US political goodwill and overcome its international isolation.

"We won't deny there has been some pressure," says a senior CAL executive, "but there has been pressure from all directions and our decision was not affected by it." □