

## SIGINT P-3 joins East Timor force

A US NAVY EP-3C Orion has joined the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) to provide support for the monitoring of Indonesian Defence Force and pro-Jakarta militia communications, according to US defence officials in Australia.

The aircraft has been operating out of Royal Australian Air Force bases in northern Australia since 21 September and is supported by a 40-person signals intelligence analysis team. US officials say that it is normally based in Japan.

The USA has also begun deployment of airborne tankers to support air operations within East Timor by INTERFET forces. A Marine Corps Lockheed Martin KC-130 joined the operation on 20 September. Several USAF KC-135s are expected to be deployed to carry fuel into Dili and Baucau airports from eastern Australia and possibly Singapore.

The Baucau airhead was secured in an operation on 22 September that used 12 Australian Army Sikorsky Black Hawk helicopters operating from Dili.

The first 72h of INTERFET deployment, launched on 20 September, saw the Dili-Darwin air-bridge transport 2,500 military personnel in 85 return C-130 flights launched from Darwin and Tindal.

The airbridge is expected to sustain an average of 24 flights a day for the foreseeable future. INTERFET has also extended the airbridge to include a direct link between Dili and the RAAF base at Townsville on the Pacific seaboard of Northern Queensland. □

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### PRECISION SHELL

The UK Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and Rockwell Collins have completed a two-year development and test programme of a global positioning system receiver contained in a 155mm artillery shell.

# USA gives approval for South American attack helicopter buy

CHILE AND Colombia are set to become the first Latin American nations to deploy attack helicopters following recent US Government approval to supply both countries with pricing and availability data for the Bell MH-1W SuperCobra.

The US Navy foreign military sales office has responded after price and availability requests were cleared by the State Department. Requests for proposals are to fol-

low, with Colombia expected to be the first to decide early next year.

Colombia requires 12 machines and is also looking at the armed version of Sikorsky UH-60L Black Hawk for anti-drug and counter-insurgency missions. Peru is looking to purchase 8 to 10 machines, but is conducting a wider evaluation that includes the Agusta A129 Mangusta, Eurocopter Tiger and Denel CSH-2 Rooivalk.

Bell is planning to demonstrate

the MH-1W in Colombia this year. The helicopter is a multirole version of the US Marine Corps twin-turboshaft AH-1W, fitted with an upgraded forward looking infrared radar, but without the helicopter's precision targeting system.

Sikorsky, meanwhile, has sold six UH-60L helicopters to Colombia that had been completed for Venezuela, but which could not be financed. Colombia already operates 26 Black Hawks. □



USCG explores use of armed MD900 helicopters to catch drug runners

## USCG intercepts drug-run boats with armed Explorer

THE US COAST Guard is using armed MD Helicopters Explorers to intercept high-speed drug-smuggling boats in international waters, marking the use of the rotorcraft as a gunship for the first time.

The previously secret USCG project, dubbed Operation New Frontier, began in March and has led to the capture of 13 crew members from four boats, netting more than 3t of cocaine.

It involves the lease of an undisclosed number of twin-turbine MD900 Explorer helicopters (designated MH-90 Enforcer by the Coast Guard).

Flight International has learned, however, that the USCG will exchange two leased MH-90s for the same number of advanced

MD902s, which give performance improvements over the original MD Explorer.

The MH-90 is armed with a 0.50 calibre Robar hand-held bolt-action rifle, which is used by sharpshooters to disable the engines of fast-moving drug-running craft in the Caribbean, and a pintle-mounted 7.62mm machine gun at a door station.

Should the USCG run a procurement competition, MD Helicopters hopes to turn the lease into an acquisition programme for between eight and 12 aircraft.

The Mexican navy has taken delivery of two unarmed Explorers, and the European-owned, US-based, helicopter manufacturer is building two more for use on the Navy's frigates. □

## Technical problems put back US Navy CL-327 sea trials

US NAVY-sponsored sea trials of Bombardier Services' co-axial rotor CL-327 Guardian vertical take-off and landing unmanned air vehicle (VTOL UAV) have been delayed by at least a month because of technical problems, say USN project officials.

The decision to postpone the shipborne flight operations coincides with Bombardier Services' withdrawal from the race to win a multi-million dollar Navy VTOL UAV procurement contest. (Flight International, 22-28 September). At issue was the CL-327 UAV's readiness to conduct sea trials from a US Coast Guard cutter, beginning on 22 September. A key problem involves delay in data transfer between the UAV and the Sierra Research Common Automated Recovery System.

According to officials, the CL-327 shipborne demonstration will be useful, despite Bombardier's exit from the VTOL UAV contest.

"We will learn a lot from a technology standpoint, which is going to help us as we head into preliminary and critical design of a production VTOL UAV system," say the officials.

One of two CL-327s on lease to the Australian Defence Force from Bombardier has been destroyed in a crash at the Royal Australian Air Force base Tindal. □