NEWS IN BRIEF

■ DIGITAL AUTOPILOT

Lockheed Martin Control Systems is to design, develop and produce a digital autopilot for the Lockheed Martin S-3 Viking anti-submarine warfare aircraft. The work could be worth in excess of $20 million. The contract from Lockheed Martin Aeronautical Systems calls for 78 digital flight data computers for the four-seat, carrier-based aircraft. Follow-on purchases will be procured directly by the US Navy.

■ BEECH TRAINING SUPPORT

Beech Aerospace Services, Madison, Mississippi, has been awarded a fixed-price US Navy contract worth as much as $325 million for maintenance and logistical support services for T-34 and T-44 training aircraft based at Naval Air Stations located at Whiting Field and Pensacola, Florida, and Corpus Christi, Texas. If all options are exercised, the contractor maintenance work will run until July 2000.

■ HAWKEYE DELIVERY

Taiwan's air force has taken delivery of its first two Northrop Grumman E-2C Hawkeye airborne early warning aircraft. Designated as E-2Ts, they have been completed to the latest Group II configuration, including an improved AN/APS-145 radar. The final two E-2Cs are due to shipped to Taiwan by the end of September. All four aircraft will based at the Pingtung AB.

C-12 ORDER

Raytheon Aircraft has received a contract for almost $53 million for an additional 14 Beech C-12R utility aircraft (military King Air B200Cs) for delivery to the US Army Reserve between July 1996 and August the following year

JDA pushes for TFS-X

PAUL LEWIS/**SINGAPORE**

JAPAN'S DEFENCE Agency (JDA) has renewed its push for development of the tandem-seat TFS-X advanced trainer variant of the Mitsubishi FS-X support fighter as a way of extending aircraft production and cutting unit costs.

The agency has unveiled plans to order a total of 141 aircraft by 2007, of which 83 will be single-seat FS-X fighters. The remaining 58 aircraft will consist of TFS-X trainers and a small number of two-seat FS-X operational conversion aircraft.

It is unclear what, if any, design modifications the TFS-X will incorporate. Local sources suggest that the aircraft will be an austere version of the FS-X. The trainer is unlikely to require the fighter's Mitsubishi Electric integrated electronic warfare system or its weapon management system.

The TFS-X would fulfil the outstanding requirement of the Japan Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) for a new advanced trainer (AT-X) to replace the Kawasaki T-2. The JASDF operates about 80 of the supersonic trainers, many of which are old.

By purchasing more aircraft, the JDA hopes to progressively cut the FS-X's fly-away cost from the initial ¥10.9 billion ($113 million) per vehicle budgeted for 1996, to ¥9.9 billion by 2000 and ¥6.6 billion by the close of production. It has set an average price target of ¥8 billion across 141 aircraft.

Japan had originally planned to build 130 FS-X fighters, at a cost of ¥5.4 billion per aircraft. Escalating development costs, exchange rate fluctuations and the downsizing of the JASDF have led to a threat to cut this to as few as 70 fighters, and push up unit costs correspondingly.

As a result, the JDA has been pressing FS-X contractors and suppliers to reduce prices by up to 20% in return for a larger purchase of aircraft. Production of the FS-X is scheduled to begin in 1996, with delivery of the first aircraft in 1999. The JDA is requesting ¥147.6 billion as part of next year's defence budget to order the first batch of 12 aircraft and initial spares. A further 35 aircraft are planned for procurement by the year 2000.

The JASDF plans to cut between four and five McDonnell Douglas F-15DJs from each squadron by the year 2000. The surplus two-seat F-15s, together with excess F-4Js, will then serve as partial replacements for the Kawasaki T-2 advanced trainer. Additional F-15s will be released with the planned disbandment of 202sqn in 2004, reducing the JASDF's strength to nine fighter and three fighter-support squadrons. ❑

RAF signs Chinook deal

BOEING HELICOPTERS and the UK Ministry of Defence have completed contract negotiations for buying 14 HC Mk II CH-47D Chinook heavy-lift helicopters for the Royal Air Force.

The $365 million contract calls for deliveries to begin in 1997 and be completed by early 1999. The RAF will eventually operate a fleet of nearly 50 Chinooks, making it the largest operator of the helicopter outside the USA.

In March the UK elected to buy a mixed fleet of 14 Chinooks and 22 smaller Westland/Agusta EH-101s. The deal covers eight additional CH-47Ds, along with six attrition replacements. Boeing is already under contract to upgrade a total of 32 RAF Chinook HC Mk I helicopters to the Mk II configuration.

The sale assists Boeing Helicopters in stretching CH-47 production into the next century. The company is hoping for more foreign sales to keep the production line open so that another US Army Chinook modernisation programme may be possible. ❑

The RAF will be the biggest operator of Chinooks outside the USA

Dutch air force spends $14m on Israeli ACE

THE DUTCH air force is to equip its Lockheed Martin F-16s with the Israeli-developed autonomous combat manoeuvres evaluation (ACE) system. The $14 million contract is for 138 systems and was signed in Israel on 5 September. The Rada-developed ACE has already been selected by the Israeli and Chilean air forces.

The integrally mounted system records mission data for presentation on a personal-computer based ground station atsquadron level. The system selected by the Dutch also includes a fatigue control feature enabling the continuous monitoring of fatigue areas in the airframe.

Haim Nissenson, RADA's chairman, says that delivery of the ACE systems to the Dutch will be completed by the end of 1997. ❑