July 29, 2012

Navy conducts Pax River's first flight of X-47B unmanned aircraft

The X-47B tailless, unmanned aircraft launched from its initial Pax River flight, July 29. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md.— The Navy made Pax River history today after it conducted the naval air station's historic first flight of the X-47B Unmanned Combat Air System (UCAS) demonstrator.

At 11 a.m., the tailless, unmanned aircraft launched from Pax River and flew for a planned 35 minutes. The aircraft reached an altitude of 7,500 feet and an air speed of 180 knots during its flight over the Chesapeake Bay before successfully landing back at Pax River.

"This milestone event is the first of many flights at Pax River to demonstrate X-47B's compatibility with aircraft carrier flight procedures and launch/recovery equipment," said Matt Funk, UCAS lead test engineer. "The unique airspace and ship equipment at Pax River allow us to conduct the testing here before we land aboard the aircraft carrier next year."

The X-47B traveled from Edwards Air Force base, Calif., to Pax River in June to enter its next phase of testing. UCAS-D team members will utilize the specialized testing capabilities and facilities available at Pax River in the coming months to validate the X-47B's ability to perform in an aircraft carrier environment.

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One of the testing facilities at Pax River is a simulated aircraft carrier environment, which will allow team members to ensure the aircraft is ready to operate in testing at sea. Land-based testing will establish X-47B has the ability to conduct precision approaches and to perform arrested landings and catapult launches prior to actual aircraft carrier operations.

"The X-47B's flight today is another important step closer to the Navy's vision of operating tailless, autonomous, unmanned systems from aircraft carriers," said Capt. Jaime Engdahl, Navy UCAS program manager.

The X-47B landed safely at Pax River after a 35-minute flight over the Chesapeake Bay, July 29. (U.S. Navy photo)

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The X-47B flies over the NAS Patuxent River complex during its first East Coast flight, July 29. (U.S. Navy photo)