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Navy's X-47B program receives aviation honor

An unmanned X-47B on the flight deck of USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) in November 2013. The X-47B was the first unmanned aircraft to launch and recover from a modern aircraft carrier. The X-47B team was named as the recipient of the National Aeronatic Association's 2013 Robert J. Collier Trophy for developing and demonstrating the first unmanned air system operating from a modern aircraft carrier. (Photo courtesy of Northrop Grumman)

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. —The Navy's X-47B Unmanned Combat Air System Demonstration (UCAS-D) team received the 2013 Robert J. Collier Trophy at the U.S. National Aeronautic Association awards ceremony April 9 in Arlington, Va.

The combined Navy/Northrop Grumman X-47B team was one of nine aviation and aerospace finalists that competed for the annual award, which recognizes U.S. achievements in aeronautics or astronautics. The first trophy was presented in 1911 and previous recipients include Glenn Curtiss, Orville Wright, Chuck Yeager, Kelly Johnson, Apollo 11, and the Hubble Telescope.

"We are honored the X-47B program was selected to receive the most prestigious award in the aviation industry," said Rear Adm. Mat Winter, who oversees the Program Executive Office for Unmanned Aviation and Strike Weapons. "For the past five years, the X-47B team had dedicated a tremendous amount of time designing, building and testing the

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X-47B, which culminated in the demonstration of the first-ever launch and recovery of an unmanned aircraft from a carrier at-sea."

In 2013, the X-47B demonstrated a number of significant firsts for unmanned air system (UAS) operations: completing eight catapult launches from an aircraft carrier; 30 touch-and-goes; and seven arrested landings aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) and USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71).

"[X-47B UCAS is] a breakthrough technology that will impact naval aviation for years to come," Winter said. "It's a unique opportunity to be part of something that changes history and I can proudly say this team has done that."

"The success of the UCAS-D program provides a glimpse into the future of unmanned aviation," Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, said in a statement. "The air vehicle performance, testing efficiency, and safety technologies and procedures developed and tested throughout the program's execution have paved the way for the Navy's future carrier-based unmanned system capability. The development of a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier-capable unmanned aircraft system (UAS) solution is among the most important technology development programs in the Department of Defense today."

The Collier trophy will be formally presented to the X-47B team on May 29 when the eight foot high trophy will be brought over from the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum for this event.

The Navy's X-47B Unmanned Combat Air System team receives the Collier trophy, pictured, at the National Aeronatic Association's award ceremony April 9 in Arlington, Va. (U.S. Navy photo)