Airbus and Shield AI Accomplish First Autonomous Aerial Logistics Connector Helicopter Flight



WASHINGTON (August 19, 2025) – Airbus U.S. Space & Defense recently completed its first autonomous helicopter test flight utilizing Shield AI's Hivemind autonomy package.

The test flight, which took place in Grand Prairie, Texas, marks a significant step in the development of the MQ-72C Lakota Connector, in support of the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Aerial Logistics Connector (ALC) program.

The H145 helicopter was utilized as the test vehicle for the flight to help perfect the mission technology, drive schedule timelines, and reduce cost and technical risk. Integration of Hivemind into the aircraft was completed in under two months, demonstrating the benefits of its modular and platform-agnostic architecture.

During the test, the H145 flew under the direct control of Shield AI's Hivemind autonomy software, in collaboration with Airbus' Helionix. The integrated software served as the mission system control of the aircraft, performing an auto takeoff, landing, and other test points to illustrate the software's ability to direct the aircraft without pilot input.

The tested software will be incorporated into the future MQ-72C helicopter design to meet the USMC requirements for the ALC program.

"This flight test is a testament to the strength of our ALC team and opens the aperture on new mission possibilities to support the Marine Corps," said Rob Geckle, Chairman and CEO of Airbus U.S. Space & Defense. "We are bringing together the best across industry to deliver an aircraft that changes how unmanned operations can support missions across a wide range of logistics."

The MQ-72C Logistics Connector is currently being developed as an unmanned variant of the UH-72 Lakota, a proven multi-mission platform trusted to perform across a range of missions. The incorporation of Shield AI's Hivemind autonomy software expands the platform's mission capabilities through autonomy-enabled operations across a wide range of logistics

and operational scenarios.

“This flight marks an important validation of our approach to mission autonomy,” said Gary Steele, CEO of Shield AI. “Hivemind was built to enable adaptable, intelligent flight across a wide range of aircraft, and this milestone shows how quickly capable teams can leverage that foundation. The collaboration with Airbus is focused, professional, and effective—an excellent example of what can be achieved when both teams are aligned on mission and execution. We’re excited to build on this momentum in the flights to come.”

The MQ-72C’s level of autonomy will be scaled during more test activities and demonstrations to come, ultimately leading to unmanned operations in contested logistics environments. Airbus U.S.’ goal is that mission autonomy software can ultimately be leveraged to add autonomous capabilities to other helicopter variations, in addition to the MQ-72C.

Airbus U.S. is entering the second year of the Aerial Logistics Connector Middle Tier of Acquisition (MTA) Rapid Prototyping Program, which aims to provide the service with aircraft prototypes to demonstrate capabilities to the warfighter through a series of operational demonstrations and experiments.

In May 2024, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) awarded Airbus U.S. Space & Defense a Phase I Other Transaction Authority (OTA) through the Naval Aviation Systems Consortium, based on its unmanned UH-72 Logistics Connector concept, a variant of the proven UH-72 Lakota platform.

The Aerial Logistics Connector effort is one of several initiatives across the Department of Defense aimed at delivering logistical support in distributed environments during peer or near-peer conflicts.