U.S. Army Golden Knights Jump Team Flies C-27J Spartan

Three pilots from the U.S. Army Parachute Team, the Golden Knights, recently participated in a flight evaluation of the C-27J Spartan at Alenia Aeronautica's flight-test facilities in Caselle, Italy. Representatives from venture partners Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Co. and Alenia Aeronautica hosted the pilots.

Leading the Golden Knights' delegation was Aviation Detachment Commander, Maj. Thomas C. Kelley, along with pilot and maintenance officer, CW4 Kenneth Breeden, and instructor pilot, Allen Aber.

"This airplane (C-27J) was made for the Golden Knights' mission," Kelley said. "The avionics were unbelievable. They were laid out well, big, easy to read and extremely user friendly. And the aircraft had a lot of power; the time-to-climb was very impressive, and for our mission that's a huge plus."

The Golden Knights are evaluating several aircraft as part of a program to replace the team's Fokker F-27s. Other aircraft evaluated have been the De Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otter, the Pilatus PC-6 and the CASA C-295.

The pilots received a full technical, logistic and programming briefing from Alenia engineers, followed by the flight evaluation consisting of three flights over two days. Some of the flight activities included basic familiarization, radar performance, maneuverability, single-engine takeoff, and in-flight engine shutdown and startup.

"The aircraft performed perfectly," said Bill Sarno, business development director for Lockheed Martin. "The C-27J fully meets the requirements for the Golden Knights and will provide a level of performance and versatility that no other aircraft in its class can match."

The C-27J Spartan was jointly developed by Lockheed Martin Aeronautics and Alenia Aeronautica S.p.A., a subsidiary of Finmeccanica S.p.A. of Rome, Italy. First flight of the C-27J was on Sept. 24, 1999, at Alenia Aeronautica's flight-test center in Turin, Italy. The C-27J was Civil Type Certified to JAR 25 in June 2001 and received Military Type Certification by Italy's Ministry of Defense in December 2001.

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