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World first: DCNS achieves automatic UAV landing on frigate

On 9 and 10 October 2008, DCNS successfully landed a rotary-wing unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) in automatic mode on French Navy frigate Montcalm while the ship was under way in the Mediterranean.

Until now, unresolved challenges involving UAV recovery by ships at sea have limited their deployment for safety reasons. The experimental solutions available to date have only worked reliably during daylight and in calm seas; two severe limitations for systems that are required to operate round the clock and in poor weather.

To overcome these shortcomings, DCNS developed the SADA automatic deck landing and take-off system. SADA takes less than 2 minutes to land a vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) UAV on a moving flight deck up to sea state 5. SADA uses an infrared sensor to accurately track the UAV while generating flight commands to adjust the trajectory until the UAV is positioned to ensure that its harpoon engages the centre of the landing grid. Tracking accuracy is 30 cm which is far better than that achieved by GPS-only systems. Overall safety and reliability are thus assured.

SADA features an open architecture and can be readily and unobtrusively integrated with any VTOL UAV and any type of ship.

This success is the result of close cooperation between DCNS and Austrian company Schiebel, manufacturer of the Camcopter S-100 UAV that performed the demonstration.

Thanks to this innovation, DCNS can now offer client navies an integrated solution for UAV deployment from mission planning to launch, execution and recovery. The components are thus available for the operational integration of VTOL UAVs with naval vessels.

UAVs promise to improve the air/sea surveillance capabilities of naval vessels. Key benefits include excellent endurance and loitering, danger-free for crews, low cost per flight hour, stealth and flexibility.

About DCNS

The DCNS Group is one of Europe's leading players on the world market for naval defence systems. To meet customer demands for more comprehensive and integrated systems, DCNS acts as prime contractor for naval shipbuilding, integration and support by combining its own development, marketing and production capabilities with those of selected partners. To manage the complexity of such projects, the Group draws on in-house expertise in naval architecture and systems engineering, ship assembly and integration and equipment design and production, as well as through-life support. The DCNS Group employs 13,000 people and generates annual revenues of around €2.8 billion.

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