Merlin Awarded Contract for U.S. Africa Command Autonomous Casualty Evacuation Technology Challenge

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Merlin was awarded a contract that funds the challenge to demonstrate a mature solution that addresses AFRICOM's casualty evacuation gap

Merlin Cessna Caravan



Merlin Cessna Caravan

BOSTON, Nov. 11, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Merlin, Inc., an aerospace and defense technology company building the operating system of record for autonomous flight, today announced it has been awarded a U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) contract to demonstrate capability in the initial phase of its Autonomous Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC) Industry Technology Challenge. Merlin received a $500,000 contract, which will fund a demonstration of Merlin Pilot™ autonomously executing a CASEVAC mission using a Cessna 208B Grand Caravan. Planned for early U.S. government fiscal year 2027 in Morocco, the demonstration will encompass the full mission, from initial tasking and flight planning continuing through autonomous departure and enroute flight to an austere casualty collection site. Following simulated patient loading, the aircraft will conduct its return mission, autonomously completing the flight and landing back at the designated location.

AFRICOM's area of responsibility spans vast distances, and security threats can prevent access to nearby medical facilities, often forcing longer and more dangerous patient transport. In these conditions, transporting a wounded noncombatant or service member to medical care is both time-critical and logistically complex. Conventional casualty evacuation relies on crewed aircraft, while remotely piloted systems require persistent command-and-control links that may be unavailable in austere or contested environments. The challenge set forth by AFRICOM seeks autonomous solutions that can accelerate access to a higher level of care while reducing the number of personnel exposed to risk.

Merlin's demonstration is planned to show how Merlin Pilot can bring onboard autonomy to aircraft supporting CASEVAC missions, managing flight planning, navigation, contingency response and mission completion without relying on a remote ground station or flight crew. The system is designed to plan the optimal route from an operator's tasking, replan dynamically around hazards, communicate with air traffic control using natural language processing, and continue safely along its authorized plan if a communications link is lost. The aircraft's large cargo door and flat-floor cabin will allow ground level litter loading without rotor wash, winching or special equipment, and its cabin will be configured with an air ambulance medical module providing oxygen, power, and mounting for patient monitoring equipment.

"Casualty evacuation is ultimately about getting wounded noncombatants and service members to surgical care as quickly and safely as possible: a mission made more difficult by long distances and unreliable communications. Onboard autonomy could help overcome those constraints by accomplishing the CASEVAC mission from end to end, even when communications are disrupted," said Matt George, CEO and founder, Merlin.

Merlin Pilot's aircraft-agnostic architecture is designed to allow its autonomous capabilities to be extended across airframes. Merlin believes there is a clear follow-on path to operational scale using a King Air variant, which would provide twin-engine redundancy, greater payload capacity, and additional cabin space for multiple litter patients, medical equipment, and an in-flight attendant. The same architecture could also support autonomous logistics and personnel movement across dispersed operating locations.

This demonstration builds on Merlin's work on Department of War autonomy programs, including its C-130J program with U.S. Special Operations Command. Merlin Pilot has completed hundreds of autonomous flights across multiple fixed-wing aircraft, including a recent flight demonstration at Alliance Airport as part of the kickoff event for the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) Electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing (eVTOL) Integration Pilot Program (eIPP). The flight demonstration was witnessed by the Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy and Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Cruz, along with many senior transportation and congressional leaders at the federal and state level.

About Merlin

Merlin is an aerospace and defense technology company building the operating system of record for autonomous flight. Through a first-principles approach, the company is redefining what's possible across aviation, aerospace, and defense with the goal of delivering full-stack autonomy for any aircraft, military or civilian, from takeoff to touchdown. The Merlin Pilot system powers a growing range of aircraft and mission profiles, proven through hundreds of autonomous flights from test facilities across the globe. With $100M+ total in IDIQ contract ceiling value under its C-130J autonomy program with USSOCOM, Merlin is advancing American leadership in autonomous aviation. To learn more, visit www.merlinlabs.com or follow us on X @merlinaero.

Cautionary Statement Regarding Forward-Looking Statements
This press release contains forward-looking statements within the meaning of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. All statements other than statements of historical fact should be considered forward-looking statements, including without limitation statements regarding the timing, location, and scope of the planned AFRICOM demonstration; the ability of the Merlin Pilot system to complete autonomous CASEVAC missions; Merlin's expectations regarding potential follow-on opportunities, or expansion of its relationship with AFRICOM or other government customers; the potential extension of Merlin Pilot's autonomous capabilities to additional aircraft platforms; and the potential future applications of Merlin's technology across other combatant commands, allied forces, civil operators, and disaster response or medical transport missions. These forward-looking statements are based on our current expectations, assumptions, and projections about future events and trends. These forward-looking statements are neither promises nor guarantees, but involve known and unknown risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results to differ materially from those expressed or implied by the forward-looking statements, including without limitation the risks and uncertainties detailed under the section entitled “Risk Factors”; of our final prospectus, dated May 13, 2026, filed with the SEC on May 13, 2026, and in our Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q filed with the SEC. Except as required by applicable law, we undertake no obligation to update any of these forward-looking statements after the date of this press release.

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A photo accompanying this announcement is available at https://www.globenewswire.com/NewsRoom/AttachmentNg/91e87bc3-aae5-4389-88bf-8942ad64a2ac