

# Geneva, RealSims see future in UAV project

## Two companies to build cutting-edge control systems for unmanned aerial vehicles

BY MARGARET ALLEN | STAFF WRITER

A Carrollton maker of unmanned aerial vehicles for the U.S. military expects a new research venture to launch the company into the law enforcement, homeland security and border and harbor patrol markets.

Privately held Geneva Aerospace Inc. is partnering with Fort Worth-based RealSims L.L.C. to build control systems for the so-called UAVs that can be mounted in helicopter cockpits. The purpose: to enable the UAVs to be controlled from aircraft, rather than from the ground by a remote operator.

Cockpit control could make it safer for helicopters to operate in the same air space with UAVs and give pilots a greater sense of security. It also multiplies the reach of a helicopter's mission, said Bob McGraw, president and CEO of RealSims.

For example, a law enforcement helicopter that also controls three UAVs carrying sensor payloads would triple its search and rescue capability, McGraw said. In addition, data gathered by the UAVs could be transmitted to a ground control unit for additional analysis, taking a lot of the burden off the manned crew, he said.

UAVs, which date as far back as the 1920s, are seeing increased use all over the world. Outfitted with cameras as well as radar, infrared and electronic sensors, UAVs have largely been used for surveillance and reconnaissance, but they also are being weaponized. The Department of Defense has said that this decade it's spending \$10 billion on UAVs — some already in use in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars — up from \$3 billion during the 1990s.

"We see that in the very short future there's going to be a need in homeland security and border patrol to use more UAVs to do the work that they're now using manned vehicles to fly," McGraw said.

Geneva, an 8-year-old company with revenue in 2004 of \$7 million, is investing \$20,000 this year to develop the system, said Vince Longhi, vice president of sales and marketing.

Geneva makes a UAV called "Dakota," which is now out of the research, design and testing phases and in early production for the military. The UAV could see commercial uses in the future for mapping, surveying and pipeline and power line inspection. The U.S. Navy is Geneva's largest current customer, but details of specific contracts are classified.

### 'Significant' business

Privately held RealSims, which posts minimal revenue at this point, expects to invest as much as Geneva. The company — founded four years ago in Orlando, Fla. — had been self-funded but now is seeking venture capital.

RealSims builds rotary wing and fixed wing cockpits for flight training. The portable trainers are modular and reconfigurable to various aircraft. Its product contrasts with rigid, \$30 million, built-in-place simulators that have high-fidelity systems very realistic to aircraft.

In contrast, RealSims trainers have low-to mid-range fidelity and cost up to \$50,000 each and are used by the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy aboard ships, in confined spaces and where pilots need fundamental procedures training and mission rehearsal.

RealSims recently relocated its business to the offices of TechFortWorth, a nonprofit business incubator that brought the two companies together.

Geneva, which has 35 employees, and RealSims, which has four, will begin integrating the UAVs and the trainers in March. The two companies expect to have a demonstrator up and running by the third quarter, McGraw said.

In the 50-50 venture, RealSims will market the console package. Geneva will sell the control station software and the UAVS that would go with that, Longhi said.

"If this were to be successful, it would be a quarter of our business," Longhi said. "I think it could be pretty significant."