


# First Flight Test for the YFQ-42A: The U.S. Air Force's “Wingman” Drone Takes to the Sky

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August 27, 2025 marked a milestone when the **YFQ-42A**, a prototype of the Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) developed by General Atomics, made its first flight in California, representing a crucial step towards a new era of autonomous aerial warfare.

The YFQ-42A, designed and developed by **General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI)**, is now undergoing flight tests in coordination with the US Air Force. This is a historic achievement that confirms the company's ability to rapidly create new unmanned jet platforms, designed for large-scale production at sustainable costs.

The aircraft focuses on semi-autonomous air-to-air operations and is based on the “genus-species” concept introduced with the XQ-67A Off-Board Sensing Station (OBSS) demonstrator. Thanks to digital engineering and the expertise gained with the **MQ-20 Avenger®** jet, GA-ASI

has accelerated the program by integrating a **core of autonomy trained over more than five years of flight testing**, capable of providing decisive advantages to future combatants.

## Institutional Reactions

David R. Alexander, president of GA-ASI's aeronautical division, called it an “extraordinary moment” for the company and the Air Force.
The Secretary of the Air Force, Troy Meink, celebrated the achievement as proof of what can be accomplished “when innovative acquisition meets motivated industry.”
Chief of Staff Gen. David Allvin emphasized the importance of “going fast and learning quickly”: CCAs promise to extend range, flexibility, and lethality in combat, optimizing human-machine collaboration.

## Capabilities and Production Goals

The Air Force's CCA program aims to acquire at least **1,000 modular aircraft**, capable of performing attack, reconnaissance, electronic warfare missions, or acting as decoys. The acronym **YFQ-42A** reflects the nature of the project: “Y” for pre-series aircraft, “F” for fighter, “Q” for unmanned. Once production begins, the “Y” will be removed.

GA-ASI, which has already developed over twenty types of drones and delivered more than 1,200 units, produces over 100 aircraft annually at its 5 million square foot facility in Poway, California. Its systems have accumulated nearly **9 million flight hours**, with over 50 drones flying every minute worldwide.

The program focuses on open standards (modular open systems architecture), supplier competition, and continuous updates of autonomous systems and missions — an agile and iterative approach that reduces risks and allows for rapid improvements.

By the **fiscal year 2026**, the USAF will decide which of the two designs — General Atomics' YFQ-42A or Anduril's YFQ-44A — will proceed to production.

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**News link:** https://www.defensenews.com/air/2025/08/28/first-flight-tests-begin-for-air-forces-drone-wingmen/https://www.defensenews.com/air/2025/08/28/first-flight-tests-begin-for-air-forces-drone-wingmen/