Operational Evaluation Under Way For First Production Bell Boeing V-22

Its revolutionary technology has placed the Bell Boeing MV-22 Osprey in a class by itself. Now in initial production, the tiltrotor aircraft, which has undergone extensive testing here, has entered a critical Operational Evaluation test period that will evaluate its suitability and effectiveness for operational use.

The MV-22's OPEVAL began this month and will continue through the spring of 2000. The Multi-Service Operational Test Team, comprised of U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Air Force pilots, aircrew, maintenance personnel, operations analysts and flight engineers, will evaluate the MV-22's readiness to join the fleet against established requirements for this evaluation period. This squadron of independent testers will use the first four low rate initial production aircraft for about 700 flight hours during 350 sorties to conduct extensive operationally representative missions from air capable ships, airfields, remote sites, confined areas, and major range and test facilities.

OPEVAL of the V-22 will take place at Marine Corps Air Stations in North Carolina and Arizona, Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field, Fla., Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, China Lake, Calif., and air capable ships located on each coast. According to Lt. Col. Jim Shaffer, deputy director for the MOTT, these sites were chosen because they have diverse climates, altitudes, and have supporting assets that will allow the test team to evaluate how the MV-22 interoperates with other platforms to include the CH-46, CH-53, the F/A-18, AV-8, and Marine and Air Force tankers.

The test team will begin one of its most intensive evaluation periods in November at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C. During this phase, they will conduct land and shipboard operations to include launching mock amphibious assault missions with Marines moving from ship to shore. Part of this will include over-water operations, night vision goggle tests, low level navigation, external loads lifting on single and dual hooks, and in-flight refueling with a C-130 tanker.

Early next year, the test team will conduct survivability tests on the range at China Lake and continue with additional shipboard testing. Other tests will include fast roping, hoist operations, and flying multi-aircraft formations from ship to land to evaluate the effectiveness of the troop assault mission. Portions of the Special Operations Force mission also will be assessed during OPEVAL of the Marine MV-22. The CV-22 Air Force variant, although not yet in production, is 90 percent common with the MV-22. At Hurlburt Field, the test team will evaluate the Osprey's interoperability with special operations personnel and its compatibility with airfield assets, resources and special equipment.

"At each of these sites, the Osprey will be evaluated on many levels," said Shaffer. "People tend to place emphasis on what the pilots think about how the aircraft handles and performs its mission, but we also have to evaluate how reliable and maintainable it is, how often it needs repairs and how long the repairs take."

After OPEVAL is completed and the data is gathered, the Multi-Service Operational Test Team will prepare a report with an evaluation of the MV-22's suitability and effectiveness for operational use. The Commander, Operational Test and Evaluation Force, and the Commander, Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center, will review the report and make a decision about whether the MV-22 successfully completed OPEVAL. Successful completion is required to support the full rate production decision scheduled for FY 01. Plans call for the Marine Corps to purchase 350 MV-22s and the Air Force to buy 50 CV-22s.

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