

U.S. Marines Parachute Into V-22 History

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U.S. Marines from the 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion II MEF, Camp Lejeune, N.C., jumped into the history books of V-22 developmental testing in January for the first ever parachute operations from a tiltrotor aircraft. They were the first personnel to deploy from an MV-22 in free fall from 10,000 ft.

These Marines, who are experienced static line and free-fall jumpers, made 24 jumps from engineering, manufacturing and development aircraft No.10.

"We flew at 120 knots in the conversion mode (engine nacelles tilted only slightly forward from horizontal, partly in airplane mode, partly in helicopter mode) and it was a pretty spectacular site to see," said Bill Leonard, one of the V-22 developmental test pilots who flew these tests. "The aircraft handled well and with the inertial navigation system, the jumpers were able to assess the dynamics of leaving the aircraft and returning to the same drop zone on another jump.

"The jumpers also were pleased with the V-22's ability to get them into the desired zone and the access to getting on and off the aircraft," said Leonard.

The V-22 integrated government/contractor test team at Pax River conducted the developmental flight tests to determine whether the Osprey is a suitable platform for the personnel parachute operations mission. Under the supervision of senior jumpmasters from the U.S. Army Operational Test Command and the Marine Corps Systems Command, 24 successful jumps were recorded to qualify the V-22 for parachute service, according to Lt. Col. M.G. Mannella, V-22 government flight test director.

The jumpers landed in a surveyed drop zone at Fort AP Hill, Va., a nearby Army base. "This site was selected because of its size and proximity to Patuxent River. Also, for military jump operations, the drop zone must be surveyed and safety certified; there are no drop zones here or at Webster Field that meet this criteria," said Mac Brown, senior V-22 Integrated Test Team engineer.

The Army is the designated proponent agency for personnel parachute operations from new aircraft and envelope expansion of existing aircraft. They are now in the process of issuing a clearance for free-fall operations from the V-22.

Prior to deploying jumpers, the V-22 ITT had to collect a series of buildup points to ensure that the V-22 was ready to conduct these tests. According to Brown, the aircraft was evaluated for operations off the cargo ramp, ability to safely and accurately "spot" the drop zone, and other aircraft characteristics such as cabin size, seating and internal communications.

"This was a real team effort involving the Marines, Navy and Army," said Mannella. "We not only accomplished our goals but got to observe 2nd Reconnaissance Marines record a flight test first in the process."

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