MV-22 Operational Evaluation Concludes

The MV-22 completed operational evaluation in July at Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., after eight months of extensive flight testing to evaluate whether the Osprey will be effective and suitable for operational use.

During this time, the Multi-Service Operational Test Team (MOTT), composed of Marine and Air Force pilots, aircrew, maintenance personnel, operations analysts and flight engineers, put the aircraft through rigorous tests in order to evaluate the MV-22's readiness to join the fleet. This squadron of independent testers, lead by Marine Lt. Col. Keith Sweaney, used the low rate initial production aircraft to conduct extensive operationally representative missions from air capable ships, airfields, remote sites, confined areas and major range and test facilities.

The MOTT tested the MV-22 at various locations including the Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Md., Marine Corps Air Stations in North Carolina and Arizona; Air Force Bases in Florida and New Mexico; the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, China Lake, Calif., and U.S. amphibious ships located on each coast.

"These sites were chosen because they had diverse climates, altitudes and supporting assets," said Air Force Lt. Col. Jim Shaffer, deputy director for the MOTT. "This allowed the MOTT to evaluate how the MV-22 interoperates with other platforms including the CH-46, CH-53, the F/A-18, AV-8, and Marine and Air Force tankers."

Since November 1999, when OPEVAL began, tests conducted include self-deployment, land and shipboard operations, amphibious assault missions, over-water operations, night-vision goggle flights, low-level navigation, external loads lifting on single and dual hooks, inflight refueling with a C-130 tanker, aerial delivery of personnel and cargo, austere landings, fast roping, hoist operations and flying multi-aircraft formations from ship to land to evaluate the effectiveness of the troop assault mission.

While this evaluation was for the Marine MV-22, portions of the Special Operations Force (SOF) mission also were assessed. Since the CV-22 Air Force variant, although not yet in production, is 80 percent common with the MV-22, the MOTT used this evaluation period to assess areas that are specific to the SOF. These CV unique areas included evaluating the Osprey's interoperability with special operations personnel, and its compatibility with airfield assets, resources and special equipment.

With OPEVAL completed, the low rate initial production aircraft that were used for this critical test phase have now been turned over to VMMT-204, the new MV-22 training squadron. This squadron is located at the Marine Corps Air Station New River, Jacksonville, N.C., and will train both Marine and Air Force Osprey pilots.

Although the MOTT has finished the flight test portion of OPEVAL, it must now compile and analyze all the test data for use in a report with its recommendations about whether the Osprey is ready to join the fleet. Commanders from the Operational Test and Evaluation Force and the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center will review the report and make the decision about whether the MV-22 successfully completed OPEVAL. Successful completion is required to support the full rate production decision, also known as Milestone III, scheduled for later this year.

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