Admiral: Guam Weather ‘Challenging’ for Navy’s Triton UAV Operations

A U.S. Navy MQ-4C Triton assigned to Unmanned Patrol Squadron (VUP) 19 prepares to take off from the flightline at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Iwakuni, Japan, Oct. 5, 2022. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. David Getz*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The weather in Guam has proved to pose challenges to operations of the Navy’s MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle, a Navy admiral said. He also praised the value of the Triton as a targeting platform.

In a situation report late last summer to the maritime patrol reconnaissance community, Rear Adm. Adam “Kujo” Kijek, commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, said the “most impactful lesson” of the Early Operational Capability

deployment of the Triton to Guam was one “delivered by mother nature.”

Kijek said the “weather in Guam, and associated OP Areas [operations areas], can be very challenging for UAV operations. During ‘monsoon’ season, and with a stated goal of 16 missions per month, there were many days that Triton could not get airborne or access required operating areas due to adverse weather. However, when weather permits Triton has proven its operational worth.”

The admiral said that “to help combat these environmental anomalies, we executed a Seasonal Relocation Plan (SRP) to Misawa AB [Air Base] last summer, and Iwakuni [Marine Corps Air Station] this summer. Exercising these expeditionary muscles and harvesting lessons learned will pay huge dividends when Triton Multi-INT shows up in theater next year.”

Kijek noted that “there is tremendous value in providing the persistent ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] that Triton brings by establishing pattern of life and building a real-time Common Operational Picture for Fleet and Combatant Commanders. However, from a tactical perspective, I have been most impressed when Triton works as a targeting platform in concert with other aircraft and surface units.”

The admiral said he believed “the operational impact of Triton will grow exponentially” when the UAV’s Multi-Intelligence Integrated Functional Capability-4 upgrade is deployed in 2023.

“The ability of Triton’s SIGINT [signals intelligence] package to exploit the electromagnetic spectrum and the sheer volume of information harvested will present significant challenges to the Intel Community,” he said. “Simply adding a SIGINT Coordinator (SC) to every Triton aircrew is not enough. We are working closely with the C10F [Commander, U.S. 10th Fleet and NAVIFOR [Navy Information Forces] to ensure that Triton is

postured to take full advantage of Navy's Distributed SIGINT Operations architecture to realize its full potential. Achieving these linkages will be a primary focus during my tenure."