

MQ-25 IOC 'As Soon as Possible,' Navy's Unmanned Aviation Chief Says



Rear Adm. Brian Corey, head of Navy unmanned aviation, speaks at the Naval Air Systems Command booth at Sea-Air-Space on May 6. Lisa Nipp

NATIONAL

HARBOR, Md. – The Navy's admiral in charge of unmanned aviation said that the Initial Operational Capability (IOC) of the MQ-25A aerial tanking unmanned aerial vehicle is "as soon as possible."

Speaking May

6 to an audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space exposition here, Rear Adm.

Brian Corey, program executive officer for unmanned aviation and strike

weapons, said that the MQ-25A program does not have a set IOC date but that it was to be before 2026 "if we can."

The

Boeing-owned MQ-25 prototype was trucked earlier this week from the factory in

St. Louis to Mid-America airport in Illinois for more ground testing and, eventually, flight testing.

Corey said

the first flight of the prototype would take place later this year.

He also said that four

aircraft carriers initially will be equipped to operate the MQ-25A, but he declined to speculate which carrier, citing the flexibility of schedules.

Marine Corps Looking at Future Light Helicopter Replacement



The Marine Corps hopes to field the successor to the UH-1Y Venom, shown here, and the AH-1Z Viper in the late 2020s or early 2030s. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Sabrina Candiaflores

NATIONAL

HARBOR, Md. – The Marine Corps and the Army are running an analysis of

alternatives (AOA) to see whether the two services can meet the same requirements

for Milestone A or B start in fiscal 2021, a Marine helicopter acquisition

official said. The AOA is expected to be complete in the “next couple of months.”

Speaking May

6 to an audience at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space Expo in National Harbor,

Maryland, Marine Col. David C. Walsh, program manager for Marine light attack

helicopters, said the Marine Corps has begun studies for its Attack Utility

Replacement Aircraft to succeed the UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z

Viper helicopters.

The Corps

hopes to field the Future Vertical Lift Capabilities Set 3 by the late 2020s or early 2030s, Walsh said.

A key

requirement for the Marine Corps is an aircraft that can keep up with or even exceed the speed of an MV-22B Osprey, 310 knots.

Bell

Helicopter delivered the last of 160 UH-1Ys in April 2018 and has delivered 111 of 189 AH-1Zs to date. The last AH-1Z deliveries are scheduled for 2022.

Bahrain and Pakistan also have purchased AH-1Zs, while Turkey and Taiwan have procured the older AH-1W.

Walsh said

that there is considerable foreign military sales potential for the UH-1Y and AH-1Z. He listed potential for 88 AH-1Zs and 29 UH-1Ys in Europe, 129 AH-1Zs in the Asia-Pacific region, and 44 AH-1Zs and 24 UH-1Ys in the Middle East and North Africa.

Walsh also

said his office is working on capability upgrades to the Corps' H-1 fleet, including Link 16, full-motion video, the Joint Air-Ground Missile, and the AIM-9X Sidewinder air-to-air missile, as well as some navigational upgrades.

Milestone C Decision Expected in Late May for Presidential Helicopter



Marine Helicopter Squadron One (HMX-1) runs test flights of the new VH-92A over the south lawn of the White House on Sept. 22, 2018, Washington D.C. The Navy is projected to reach Milestone C for the VH-92A in May. U.S. Marine Corps / Sgt. Hunter Helis

NATIONAL

HARBOR, Md. – The Navy expects to reach a Milestone C decision in late May for the VH-92A presidential transport helicopter. Such a decision would mark approval for the helicopter to enter low-rate initial production.

Speaking to an audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space Expo in National Harbor, Maryland, Marine Maj. Gen Greg Masiello, the Navy's program executive officer for Air, ASW, Assault and Special Mission PEO (A), said the program team has three VH-92As, two of which it is running through Developmental Test, with the two alternating flights every other day.

Program

officials have a meeting scheduled May 30 with James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and

Acquisition, who has the milestone decisional authority.

The Navy is developing the Lockheed Martin/Sikorsky VH-92A as a replacement for the VH-3D and VH-60N helicopters flown in support of the president and other high-level government officials by Marine Helicopter Squadron One.

Last HH-60H Helicopters to Be Retired This Year



U.S. Air Force 320th Special Tactics Squadron combat controllers and U.S. Marine Corps 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion operators exit two U.S. Navy HH-60H Sea Hawk helicopters assigned to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron-85 (HSC-85), shown here following their extraction July 13, 2017, from Shoalwater Bay Training Area in Queensland Australia. U.S. Air Force / Capt. Jessica Tait

NATIONAL

HARBOR, Md. – The Navy will retire its last HH-60H Seahawk special operations support helicopters this year, an official said.

Speaking to an audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space expo in National Harbor, Maryland, Marine Maj. Gen Greg Masiello, the Navy's program executive officer for Air, ASW, Assault and Special Mission PEO (A), said the last seven of the

HH-60Hs in the inventory would be retired and replaced by the next-generation Seahawk, the MH-60S.

The HH-60H is flown by reserve Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 85 and deploys in support of Navy special warfare forces and other forces.

MH-60S helicopters for the squadron will be modified with the 7.62 mm GAU-17 six-barrel rotary machine gun used for fire suppression.

The HH-60H is the last of three Seahawk versions from the H-60's initial naval service: the SH-60B, SH-60F, and HH-60H. The MH-60R and MH-60S are the latest versions in the Navy.

Analysis Underway for E-6B Mercury Aircraft Replacement



A U.S. Navy E-6B Mercury airborne command post flies over Solomons Island, Maryland. An analysis is underway for a replacement for the E-6B. U.S. Navy photo.

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – An analysis of alternatives (AOA) is underway in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for a replacement for the Navy's E-6B Mercury strategic communications aircraft.

Speaking to an audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space conference here, Marine Maj. Gen Greg Masiello, the Navy's program executive officer for Air, ASW, Assault and Special Mission PEO (A), said that his office is supporting the AOA. PEO(A)'s portfolio includes the E-6B aircraft.

The E-6B is the legacy platform that relays strategic communications to and from the Navy's ballistic-missile submarines and national command authority, a program called TACAMO (Take Charge and Move Out). The E-6B also serves in the airborne command post (ABNCP) role for U.S. Strategic Command, flying with a battle staff onboard.

The AOA is for the NEAT program, which is a simplification of the terms NAOC (National Airborne Operations Center)/EA (ABNCP/TACAMO). The AOC mission is performed by the Air Force E-4B aircraft.

Pentagon Report Cites Rapidly Modernizing Chinese Navy



A Chinese Type 052C destroyer, the Changchun, in Malaysia in 2017.

ARLINGTON, Virginia

– China's first home-built aircraft carrier is likely to join the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) fleet this year, a highlight of China's effort to modernize its fleet with modern, farther-ranging platforms and weapons.

Construction

began on a second aircraft carrier in 2018, said a new report to Congress from the Defense Department, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019." This carrier, which should reach the PLAN fleet in 2022, is likely to be fitted with a catapult aircraft launch system, according to the report.

A coastal

defense navy during the Cold War, the PLAN is continuing a two-decade build-up with numerous blue-water platforms

"The PLAN is

rapidly replacing obsolescent, generally single-purpose platforms in favor of larger, multirole combatants featuring advanced anti-ship, anti-air and anti-submarine weapons and sensors," the report said. "This modernization aligns with China's growing emphasis on the maritime domain and increasing demands on the PLAN to conduct operational tasks at expanding distances from the Chinese mainland using multimission, long-range, sustainable naval platforms possessing robust self-defense capabilities."

“Modernization of China’s submarine force remains a high priority for the PLAN,” the report said. “The PLAN currently operates four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN) and 50 conventionally powered attack submarines (SS). The speed of growth of the submarine force has slowed and will likely grow to between 65 and 70 submarines by 2020.”

The PLAN also continues to modernize its surface warship fleet.

“The PLAN is rapidly replacing obsolescent, generally single-purpose platforms in favor of larger, multirole combatants featuring advanced anti-ship, anti-air and anti-submarine weapons and sensors.”

A new Pentagon report to Congress on China’s naval modernization

China has built new guided-missile cruisers (CGs), guided-missile destroyers (DDGs) and guided-missile frigates (FFGs) that “will significantly upgrade the PLAN’s air defense, anti-ship, and anti-submarine capabilities. These assets will be critical as the PLAN expands operations into distant seas beyond the range of shore-based air defense systems” the report said.

China has built four Renhai-class CGs over the last two years and has several more under

construction. The lead CG is scheduled to join the fleet in 2019. At least three Luyang-class DDGs joined the PLAN fleet in 2018, bringing the total to nine with at least four more under construction. A larger variant forthcoming, Luyang III, will be equipped with a vertical launcher system.

China also emphasizes small surface combatants, with 27 or more Jiangkai II FFGs and more than 40 Jiangdao-class corvettes, with more of both types under construction.

All new attack submarines and surface combatants are being armed with modern anti-ship missiles.

“The PLAN recognizes that long-range ASCMs require a robust, over-the-horizon targeting capability to realize their full potential,” the new Pentagon report said. “China is investing in reconnaissance, surveillance, command, control and communications systems at the strategic, operational and tactical levels to provide high-fidelity targeting information to surface and subsurface launch platforms.”

China also is building a fleet of amphibious warfare ships, adding three to the current five Yuzhao-class amphibious transport dock ships.

China also is expanding the PLAN marine corps from two brigades and 10,000 marines to

seven brigades and 30,000 marines by 2020. The Chinese marine corps also now has its own commander and a new central headquarters.

Navy's Heliborne EW Pods Set for Delivery at Year's End

ARLINGTON, Va. – Lockheed Martin is set to deliver to the Navy the first Advanced Off-Board Electronic Warfare AOEW pods at the end of 2019, the company's program manager said.

The first set of pods is on track for delivery in December 2019 or January 2020, said Joe Ottovanio, director of electronic warfare solutions for Lockheed Martin, speaking to reporters May 1 in Arlington.

Ottoviano also said the program expects a Milestone C decision for Low-Rate Initial Production of the AOEW pod in December.

The AOEW is a pod designed to be carried aloft by and MH-60R or MH-60S helicopter and function as an extension of a warship's SLQ-32(V)6 electronic warfare system.

Boeing's MQ-25 Prototype Will

Save the Navy 18 Months of Development

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The existence of a working prototype of the Navy’s MQ-25A Stingray carrier-based aerial refueling UAV will save 18 months of development time and could be a factor if the Navy decides to move up the date of the aircraft’s Initial Operational Capability (IOC), currently planned for 2024.

“Eighteen months of early learning is the biggest step” to pushing up IOC, said Dave Bujold, Boeing’s MQ-25 program director, speaking to reporters April 29 at Boeing’s facility in Arlington.

Boeing built its company-owned prototype, called T-1, for the canceled UCLASS (Unmanned Carrier-Launched Aerial Surveillance and Strike) UAV program and, unlike its competitors, had the prototype on hand for the MQ-25 competition. T1 has not yet flown but has participated in taxi tests and overnight on April 28 was transported from the St. Louis, Missouri, plant to Mid-America airport in southern Illinois for additional ground tests and eventually its first flight.

Boeing expects to fly T-1 later in 2019.

Bujold said that T-1 is a “very strong representation of the EMD [engineering and manufacturing development] aircraft” and that waiting for the first EMD aircraft to emerge from the factory would add 18 months to the program.

At Mid-America, T-1 will receive the aerial refueling system of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter and the Joint Precision Aircraft Landing System. The plan includes, in addition to more ground testing, a “couple hundred flight hours,” Bujold said.

Eventually, T-1 will be transported to participate in risk-reduction deck handling trials on board an East Coast aircraft carrier.

Testing is planned to continue through fiscal 2021, the year the first EMD MQ-25A is completed. Bujold said the design will be frozen sometime in 2020.

He said that a factor that could help speed up development is the fact that Navy program officials are embedded with Boeing officials in a common government maritime acceleration team. Rather than having to communicate with stacks of documents, Boeing and Navy officials operate through a shared network drive, a method that, he said, “speeds up acquisition,” using “rolling [program] reviews.”

Lack of Well Deck Seen as a Wash for LHA USS America



PACIFIC OCEAN (Feb. 1, 2018) An MV-22 Osprey helicopter assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 161 (Reinforced) aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) lands on the flight deck.

ARLINGTON, Va.— The transfer of the new amphibious assault ship USS America to the Forward-Deployed Naval Force (FDNF) next fiscal year will bring a change in capabilities to the 7th Fleet’s amphibious ready group, but the Marines that will go on patrol on America will be able to adjust to the changes and maintain a similar level of combat capability.

America (LHA 6) is scheduled to replace USS Wasp (LHD 1) as the “bog-deck” amphib deployed to Sasebo, Japan. The major

difference in the two ships is that America lacks a well deck, a feature on all earlier LHAs and LHDs that can float landing craft and amphibious assault vehicles.

The America and its soon-to-be commissioned sister ship Tripoli were designed to be more aviation-centric. The trend was reversed with the third ship of the class, the future Bougainville, which will have a well deck.

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the 31st MEU, which deploys on the ships of the Sasebo-based amphibious ships, differs from other MEUs in that it does not include M1A1 tanks in its load-out.

"I do not possess tanks, because we don't have tanks on Okinawa," said Col. Robert Brodie, commander of the 31st MEU, speaking April 23 to the Potomac Institute in Arlington of the 31st MEU's patrol in the Western Pacific in early 2019.

With somewhat of a lighter load, the 31st MEU will have less of a problem handling the unit's equipment of the America-centric amphibious ready group (ARG).

Brodie said his staff already is looking at the optimum way to configure the MEU's equipment load-out to best operate from the America. The ship's lack of a well deck means that three fewer landing craft – LCACs or LCUs – would be carried by the ships of the ARG.

Brodie is optimistic that the increased aviation capacity of the America could make up for the loss of a well deck. The America would more easily accommodate 12 MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft rather than the 10 that the Wasp typically carried. The two additional Ospreys would add to the overall airlift capability that could make up for some of the loss of lift by landing craft, especially without the requirement to accommodate tanks.

The America's increased aviation capacity also would enable

the America to deploy with perhaps as many as eight F-35C Lightning II strike fighters instead of six as on the Wasp. The additional MV-22Bs also would make the eventual installation of an aerial refueling hose on one or more of the MV-22Bs a plus for the range and endurance of the F-35.

The air combat element of the 31st MEU also normally deploys with four CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters on board the Wasp, in addition to the three Navy MH-60S armed helicopters. The four AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters and three UH-1Y Venom utility helicopters are normally staged on the amphibious platform dock ship and dock landing ship of the ARG.

Marines to Rebuild WWII B-29 Airfield on Tinian for Training Use

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The airfield that launched the B-29 bombers that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan in World War II is being partially refurbished for use as a divert field and refueling point for Marine Corps aircraft in training events.

The United States has “opened up a long-term contract to be able to utilize the north [air]field” on Tinian, agreed to with a 40-year deal with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to use the north airfield on Tinian, said Col. Robert Brodie, commander of 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), speaking April 23 to the Potomac Institute in Arlington of the MEU’s recent patrol in the western Pacific in early 2019.

One of the coral runways of the airfield will be improved, Brodie said. That runway currently is in condition to receive KC-130 aerial refueling/transport aircraft, but "it isn't user-friendly for a lot of jet airplanes," said Brodie, an F/A-18 Hornet pilot.

The runway refurbishment is expected to cost \$20 million.

The Mariana Islands and Guam are becoming increasingly important to the upcoming move of thousands of Marines and Sailors from Okinawa to Guam, forces who will need combat training sites for maintaining readiness.

Brodie took the opportunity to look at potential beach landing sites and live-fire training sites. He noted that two new hangars for aircraft have been built at Andersen Air Force Base on Guam for Marine Corps aircraft.

The 31st MEU was heavily involved in relief efforts in Tinian after Typhoon Mangkhut swept through the Marianas in mid-September 2018, when the rooves of most buildings on Tinian were destroyed. The MEU's Marines and the Sailors spent a month on Tinian rebuilding and relieving the suffering of the island's 2,500 residents.

Brodie said the Marines and Sailors were gratified by the opportunity to help fellow American citizens, telling the islanders, "We're here to support America!"

He said Tinian's mayor has asked for a Marine Corps recruiter to come to the island to "focus their high school kids" on considering service in the Corps.

"I can't tell you what a good feeling it is to have a great relationship with the leadership of the Northern Marianas," Brodie said. "What I think that is going to directly contribute to the Marine Corps in our path forward as we start to move forces down there."