Marine Corps Force Design Update Adjusts MV-22 Squadron Force Levels

An MV-22B Osprey assigned to the Aviation Combat Element from Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Africa 20.2, Marine Forces Europe and Africa, conducts deck landing qualifications aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5), June 28, 2020. *U.S. Marine Corps / Cpl. Tanner Seims*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 annual report has announced adjustments in the force levels of its Marine medium tiltrotor (VMM) squadrons that fly the MV-22B Osprey assault transport aircraft.

"We originally planned to divest three MV-22 medium tiltrotor squadrons from the Active Component, which would have resulted in a total of 14 squadrons of 12 aircraft each," said the report, released May 9 by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H. Berger. "However, detailed analysis demonstrated that 16 squadrons of 10 aircraft each better satisfies joint force requirements and better supports service needs to organize, train and equip. In particular, this force structure simplifies the formation of a Marine Expeditionary Unit's aviation combat element."

"Quite frankly, it was personnel-driven," said Lt. Gen. Karsten S. Heckl, deputy commandant for combat development and integration, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, and commanding general, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, speaking May 6 to reporters and amplifying the Corps' reasoning for the change in VMM squadron aircraft complement.

"There were many external factors to that primary factor of

personnel," Heckl said. "So, there a few levers the commandant can pull on to generate resources. The conclusion that the Headquarters, Marine Corps, staff came to was that manpower was the most appropriate because we were over-sized, we were at an unsustainable number, so that was the logical choice to make."

Heckl said the squadron size of 10 MV-22Bs would give the Corps the flexibility to add more F-35B Lightning II strike fighters to the ACE if it so chose. Currently the ACE typically deploys with six F-35B Lightning II strike fighters or AV-8B Harrier II attack aircraft.

"Right now, the MEUs are going out – and it depends whether it's 10 or 12 V-22s when the [MEUs] go out [on deployment]," he said. When we start making every deployment with [F-35Bs] and the possibility that the numbers [of F-35Bs] that would go out – those numbers changing – the 10- [V-22s per squadron] makes all the sense in the world.

"Quite frankly, when you take into the equation the attrition rate, pipeline aircraft, training aircraft, the numbers work out pretty well," he said.

The Marine Corps has cut or is cutting four MV-22B squadrons. The stand-up of VMM-212 was canceled in fiscal 2019. VMM-264 and VMM-166 were deactivated in fiscal 2020 and 2021, respectively. VMM-164 will be deactivated in fiscal 2022. The remaining force will include 14 active-component fleet VMM squadrons, one active-component VMMT fleet replacement squadron and two reserve-component VMM squadrons.

The Force Design annual report also called for an experiment in active-reserve integration of a reserve VMM squadron. The commandant directed the Corps to "perform Active Component/Reserve Component integration proof of concept in 2d MAW [Marine Aircraft Wing] by incorporating VMM-774 into an Active Component Marine Aircraft Group in [fiscal 2023]."

VMM-774 is based at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, also the base of two Navy helicopter mine-countermeasures squadrons that have been combined active-reserve squadrons.