

VAW-120 Completes First Fleet Hawkeye-F/A-18 Aerial Refueling



An E-2D Hawkeye prepares to land and be received by the Greyhawks of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 120 on Sept. 9 at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia. This was the first E-2D Hawkeye with aerial refueling capability to join the fleet. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Nikita Custer

NORFOLK, Va. – The “Greyhawks” of Airborne Command & Control Squadron (VAW) 120 successfully conducted on May 11 the first fleet aerial refueling dry-plug certification between an E-2D Advanced Hawkeye and an F/A-18F Super Hornet, according to a release from commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic public affairs.

“With contact between probe and basket, VAW-120 Greyhawks achieved the latest in a litany of significant milestones as Greyhawk 642 became the first Fleet E-2D Advanced Hawkeye to complete F/A-18 aerial refueling,” said Capt. Matthew Duffy, commander of the airborne command and control and logistics wing.

Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 211 aircraft from Carrier Air Wing One (CVW-1) embarked aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) participated in this refueling evolution, three years in the making.

“This ground-breaking achievement represented the culmination of more than three years of test and evaluation to include over 500 hours of evaluation flight time developing the Advanced Hawkeye airborne refueling capability,” Duffy said.

VAW-120, part of Airborne Command & Control and Logistics

Wing, has been tasked with initial qualification of aerial refueling for the E-2D fleet and is currently developing the techniques and procedures to train pilots in the new skill set.

“This milestone was the result of detailed coordination between an embarked Carrier Strike Group and a shore-based training command that truly exemplifies the ethos of teamwork that permeates across Naval Aviation,” said Cmdr. Aaron Rybar, commanding officer of Airborne Command and Control Squadron 120.

In September 2019, VAW-120 took delivery of the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye with an aerial refueling capability that allowed for the achievement of this initial operational capability. VAW-120 marked a second milestone in the E-2D legacy in April 2020, by achieving its 1,000th Aerial Refueling contact for the squadron.

Lt. Michael Harrigan and Lt. David Carroll represent the first two fully qualified E-2D fleet replacement squadron (FRS) instructors qualified in aerial refueling. They completed 39 refueling evolutions with both VFA-211 and VFA-81.

“This latest modification of the Advanced Hawkeye will allow for vastly improved on-station time and significantly increase the mission reach and influence of the world’s premier Command and Control platform,” said Duffy, who added that this month’s tested capability serves to increase the lethality for America’s Navy.

The aerial refueling-modified E-2D Advanced Hawkeye is another key component to the carrier air wing of the future. Currently, the squadron’s E-2D AR instructor pilot cadre are increasing proficiency and experience in preparation for training and transitioning the first fleet squadron later this summer.