

# Marines report Osprey has proven itself in Iraq

**Jim Garamone**

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – The MV-22 Osprey has proven itself in Iraq, and Marine officials are applying the lessons learned in the first operational deployment of the tiltrotor aircraft to current operations.

In late April, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 263, based in New River, N.C., returned from a seven-month deployment flying more than 2,500 sorties, with each of its 10 aircraft flying an average of 62 hours per month.

“We’re immensely proud of the Marines of Tiltrotor Squadron 263, who took on the challenging task of the first combat deployment of the Osprey,” Lt. Gen. George J. Trautman, deputy commandant for Marine Corps aviation, said here Friday.

Trautman, along with squadron commander Lt. Col. Paul Rock, MV-22 pilot Capt. Sara Faibisoff and crew chief Sgt. Danny Herrman briefed Pentagon reporters on the squadron’s deployment to Iraq. The unit deployed from Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., in September 2007 and returned last week.

The decision to send the MV-22 to Iraq was the right one, said Trautman. It gave the Marines and soldiers in Anbar province “the best assault support aircraft” ever made.

The tiltrotor aircraft was easier to maintain than the CH-46 helicopters it replaced. The CH-46 is 1950s-based technology, and mechanics put in 24 hours of maintenance on those aircraft for every hour in the air. The MV-22 took about 9.5 hours of maintenance for every hour of flight.

“On any given day, about seven aircraft were mission ready,” Rock said. “That was more than sufficient to meet our daily tasks.”

The biggest surprise for the Marines was the vastly increased payload and greatly increased range the Osprey brings to the mission. Herrman said that, in loading the aircraft, he would often run out of cubic space rather than exceeding the weight the aircraft could handle.

The range and speed of the aircraft also were pleasant surprises. Faibisoff told of flying a medical evacuation mission on Christmas Day. She picked up a Marine with a ruptured appendix in a remote base well south of Al Asad Air Base. The aircraft was able to launch and get the Marine to medical help in 56 minutes—well within the “golden hour,” a rule of thumb that gives an ill or injured person the best chance for survival if treated within the first hour of being stricken.

“We were off deck within 15 minutes of receiving the call and headed for a zone about 90 miles south of Al Asad,” she said.

Computer software makes the aircraft easy to fly, and it was able to handle the desert environment, Faibisoff said.

The aircraft flew raid operations and scout missions, and conducted tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel. The squadron also flew alert missions and casualty evacuations.

“The overwhelming majority of what we did was general support—taking people, gear, combat equipment all over the very large battle space,” Rock said.

The combat conditions in Anbar province had improved to such a degree that the aircraft never had to fly into a landing zone while hostilities were under way. Still, Rock said, squadron aircraft came



Photo by Cpl. Sheila M. Brooks

Sgt. Danny L. Herrman, a flight line crew chief with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 263, mans a machine gun on the back of a MV-22 Osprey while another Osprey taxis behind as they prepare for take off from Al Asad Air Base in Iraq Nov. 10, 2007. In late April, the Osprey squadron, based in New River, N.C., returned from the first operational deployment of the MV-22. During the seven-month deployment the squadron flew more than 2,500 sorties, with each of its 10 Ospreys flying an average of 62 hours per month.

under small-arms fire once and rocket fire once.

“Taking advantage of the aircraft’s performance (means that) somebody’s opportunity to engage us is very short,” he said.

The Marine Corps is looking at adding an all-aspect, all-quadrant weapon on the MV-22.

“The system we’re looking at now with the Special Operations Command is an all-aspect weapon that would be mounted in the belly of the aircraft,” Trautman said.

The weapon will fire in any direction and be controlled by a gunner inside the airplane.

Another MV-22 squadron is currently

operating at Al Asad.

The Corps will create two more squadrons each year.

“We’re on a journey to exploit a new and revolutionary technology,” Trautman said. “We’re going to continue to learn lessons and we’re going to continue to improve and we’re going to work hard to exploit the capability this aircraft.”

## Tighten up



Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Gabriel S. Weber

Lance Cpl. Josh Pavian, assigned to Yuma’s Marine Attack Squadron 513, works on one of the squadron’s AV-8B Harrier jets April 30 in the hangar bay of the USS Essex sailing en route to Thailand, where the unit will take part in Exercise Cobra Gold 2008. The VMA-513 Nightmares set sail from Japan with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit in January. Most recently, the 31st MEU visited Timor-Leste, formerly East Timor, in mid-April to participate in multiple civic assistance projects expected to affect more than 3,000 local Timorese people.

## DACOWITS visits station, talks to female Marines

**Lance Cpl. Laura A. Mapes**  
Desert Warrior Staff

Members of the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Service visited female service members on station April 29-30 to research issues women might have within the Corps.

Representatives from DACOWITS held focus groups and meetings with various demographics of the 250 service women on station to gather information and opinions for the issues the committee is researching.

The Department of Defense is looking into further initiatives it might consider to advance quality education and ease the impact of transitions and deployments for military youth.

DACOWITS provides the DoD with recommendations on matters relating to the well-being of women in the armed forces.

In order to supply tomorrow’s generation of female service members with a road map to success and to augment the information available to military planners, the committee seeks to gather lessons learned from current female service members regarding the strategies that have helped them to reach their goals in the military.

“We provide the recommendations to the secretary of defense of what needs to change,” said Torres. “We

base our recommendations off of the information we get from the young Pfc. and lance corporals.”

Each year the committee finds different issues to research and present their findings to the secretary of defense to find solutions.

“Last year, we looked at health care issues for women before, during and after deployment,” said Felipe Torres, a DACOWITS representative. “We have the highest number of women in the history of the United States in theater right now. We want to make sure they are getting taken care of.”

The committee also looked at spouses’ career opportunities last year.

“It is difficult, sometimes, for spouses to maintain a career because of the constant moving,” said Torres.

DACOWITS has been working with the DoD and the Department of Labor to make it easier for military spouses to eliminate the barrier of in-state tuition and to make it easier to transfer teaching certificates from state to state.

“What we do is incredibly important. We are letting women know that their service is valued,” said Denise Balzano, a DACOWITS representative. “Policy makers do value what women bring to the service, and we want to make sure they know that by providing an environment where they feel supported.”

“We don’t give surveys,” said Balzano. “We get out there and talk to the people and give a voice to those statistics.”

## Station Marine selected as candidate for astronaut

**Lance Cpl. Gregory Aalto**  
Desert Warrior Staff

A Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1 pilot was selected as a candidate for the chance to become a NASA astronaut.

Maj. Brian Cole, AV-8B Harrier instructor and aviation safety officer, is competing against 30 other Marines for NASA position in August 2009.

“Traditionally, zero to two Marines are selected per board to advance to the NASA program,” said Lt. Col. Timothy Hogan, Headquarters Marine Corps astronaut selection board member.

Selection boards are not always an annual event. The last board was convened in 2003 when one Marine was selected, said Hogan.

Heavy competition makes being selected even harder.

“Between 10 and 15 new astronauts should be selected from the thousands of applicants,” said Teresa Gomez, assistant manager of NASA’s Astronaut Selection Program.

“I know quite a few people with very strong credentials on the list. To be in that group is an honor,” said Cole, 41, a Franklin, N.Y., native.