VISITING VRM-40

The First East Coast CMV-22B Squadron

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ONE

17 Years Between Osprey Encounters at Naval Station Norfolk

I visited Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 40 the "Mighty Bison" on 29 October 2024.

As I walked to the squadron's temporary facility and looked at the location of where their new hangar is being built, I thought back to the last time I encountered an Osprey at Naval Station Norfolk.

And that is when I landed there on a USMC Osprey when returning from HMS Illustrious at sea off the Virginia coast.

That was 17 years ago, and much has transpired in the tiltrotor enterprise since that time, which I discuss in detail in my forthcoming book on the subject to be published next year.

17 years ago, we took off from the Pentagon to fly to the HMS Illustrious but when we were to return the weather was threatening and we landed just after a Hawkeye did at the airfield at Naval Station Norfolk.

This was I wrote earlier about that experience in *Military Logistics International* story published in September-October 2007:

In July of this year, the USMC assigned two Ospreys and fourteen AV-8B Harriers to operate aboard HMS Illustrious. The British aircraft carrier was participating in a joint exercise with the U.S. and other allied navies near the Virginia and North Carolina coasts. The exercise was an

unprecedented effort by the Marines and the Royal Navy, in which close coordination allowed the Marines to operate fully off the British ship….

For the USMC, the exercise provided an opportunity both to certify pilots and, more importantly, to develop coalition operational skill sets. The USMC is a flexible fighting force and sees its range of missions as requiring the ability to work with allies at sea and on land. The preparation for the exercise and the experiences of the exercise itself allowed the Marines to work closely with the Royal Navy.

And to thereby further develop coalition collaborative combat skills. It was not a technical exercise in interoperability: rather the Marines saw the exercise as an opportunity to develop an on-the-fly-division of labor skill sets so necessary for coalition operations. British procedures were mixed with Marine Corps procedures in crafting a blended coalition combat capability

Of course, the Brits and the U.S. Navy and Marines have gone on since that time to integrate the new UK carriers with U.S. fleet operations. And the Osprey has been a lynchpin to getting that process further advanced.

In the photo below, the Osprey we took to the ship and which we took from the Pentagon helo pad can be seen.

And in the next photo, the second Osprey which flew with us can be seen landing on HMS Illustrious.

But now Naval Station Norfolk has its own Osprey squadron, but one not yet envisaged 17 years ago, namely a logistics enabler for the fleet. This Osprey has been redesigned to add significant additional fuel capability for its fleet support mission, centered around support for the aircraft carrier.

Squadron patch and challenge coin given to me when I visited the squadron.

This is how its arrival was highlighted in a press release by the Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic Public Affairs published on 3 May 2024:

Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 40 the "Mighty Bison" held a change of command ceremony aboard Naval Station Norfolk, May 2. Cmdr. Matthew Boyce, who is from Spokane, Washington was relieved by Cmdr. Mason Fox, who is from Lemoore, California served as the executive officer before assuming the position as commanding officer during the ceremony.

The first East Coast-assigned Navy tiltrotor vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) CMV-22B Osprey aircraft, assigned to VRM-40,

arrived in Norfolk on April 5. The remaining VRM-40 aircraft will begin to arrive to Hampton Roads in the weeks to come…

The CMV-22B will provide the fleet's medium-lift and long-range aerial logistics capability, eventually replacing the C-2A Greyhounds of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VRC) 40 over the next several years. The squadron's relocation to Naval Station Norfolk is part of their permanent duty station change from Naval Air Station (NAS) North Island in preparation to provide fleet logistic aviation assets to the Atlantic Fleet beginning in 2025….

Naval Air Force Atlantic is responsible for seven nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, 55 aircraft squadrons, 1,200 aircraft and 52,000 officers, enlisted and civilian personnel with priorities focused on warfighting, people, and readiness by providing combat ready, sustainable naval air forces with the right personnel, properly trained and equipped, with a focus on readiness, operational excellence, interoperability, safety, and efficient resourcing.[1]

TWO

Visiting the First East Coast CMV-22B Squadron: October 2024

I had a chance to visit Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 40 the "Mighty Bison" on Oct. 29, 2024. Earlier, I visited West Coast squadrons at North Island, San Diego, but this was my first opportunity to visit the squadron at Naval Station Norfolk.

This squadron will be a key part in supporting the "contested logistics" environment now facing the U.S. Navy fleet, a major challenge in both the Pacific and the Atlantic.

I had a chance to meet with the following officers: Commander Mason Fox, VRM-40 commanding officer; Commander Brett Learner, VRM-40 executive officer; Lieutenant Sam Ector, VRM-40 assistant operations officer; and Aviation Electrician's Mate Chief Petty Officer Frank Schaeffer, VRM-40 maintenance chief.[1]

We had a broad ranging discussion regarding the squadron and its preparation for its core missions.

Touring the squadron with Commander Fox.

DURING THAT CONVERSATION, Fox indicated how they met an unusual challenge for a new squadron. As they were getting ready to go from North Island (San Diego) to Norfolk on Dec. 6, 2023 with their first Ospreys, the DoD grounded the Osprey fleet DoD wide. Obviously, this was a shock but one which the squadron and its support community found a way to respond.

According to Commander Fox, the squadron had received their flight simulators so the pilots could train in the absence of flying real airplanes while waiting for the grounding to be lifted. And he indicated that the maintainers worked with Bell in Fort Worth on training the maintainers.

This meant that when the grounding was lifted in March 2024, the squadron was ready to re-commence their stand-up effort.

The core mission for the squadron is to replace the C-2A in the carrier re-supply mission. But because the Osprey can operate on a variety of ships, or from a variety of locations, it can provide for fleet support in a contested environment.

As Commander Fox put it: *The aircraft is very capable, and the pilots and air crewmen can do whatever mission we're tasked with for distributed maritime operation logistics. And that's the key point. If a flag officer says that they need to get a [supply] part to a submarine, we'll be able to do that.*

I've done so many different mission sets in my career, from ASW to attack to SOF support. All of them come down to time, distance, fuel and hover capability. If you can do time, distance, and fuel math calculations

and understand your power margins, then really it's up to the people that task us with logistics to choose how they want to employ us.

What they have been focused on since the squadron has been activated is working with the carrier community on the logistics operations for East Coast based carriers, the Truman and the Ford. They worked with the Truman in June 2024 and the Ford in September 2024. They are planning to next continue their training with the Bush in the future.

The first East Coast-assigned Navy tiltrotor vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft CMV-22B Osprey lands at Naval Station Norfolk, April 5. The CMV-22B Osprey belongs to Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 40 the "Mighty Bison." U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Sylvie Carafiol

The focus according to Fox: "We want to integrate as tightly as we can with the carriers and the air wings on the East Coast so that they fully understand our capabilities."

They work with the CAG when onboard the carrier as does the C-2A. I noted when onboard the Ford that it has a significant design feature that will work well with the CMV-22B. The island on the Ford is not in the middle of the carrier flight deck but at the end which will allow the Osprey land on the carrier deck and be parked out of the way near the lift elevators onboard the carrier so not to get in the way of the launch and recovery operations going on the flight deck.

The C-2A has several parts in common with the Hawkeye,

but I asked how they will address parts issues onboard the carrier for the CMV-22B.

I was told that a footprint of support personnel will be set up on the carrier to deal with this need, somewhere in the vicinity of 15-20 people.

The CMV-22B is the Navy version of the Osprey but Fox discussed the importance of what I have called the tiltrotor enterprise for the joint fight and the contribution which Navy Ospreys can make as well.

According to Fox: *Our version of the Osprey has a little bit more gas that we can carry, and we have a primary mission that is different than the Marine Corps and Air Force Ospreys. But I think that if we're looking at a joint fight, we're looking at the 450 plus Ospreys that are part of the program record. They will all be contributing to distributed maritime ops, because that's the fight we are in.*

My final question was about how many aircraft are now in the squadron and what will be its eventual size. I was told that there were six planes currently in the squadron with a seventh to arrive the coming weeks. Dependent on final funding, they would have 12-15 Ospreys in the squadron.

Following our conversation, we all met in the squadron's temporary hangar. There is a new hangar being built nearby (two hangars down). The Ospreys rest already on the rebuilt tarmac next to the new hangar location.

THREE

The Perspective of Admiral Verissimo on the Coming of the CMV-22B to the Atlantic Naval Air Force

I had the privilege of visiting Norfolk in the recent past and discussing the coming of the USS Gerald R. Ford with the first commander of Ford and then the commander of Naval Air Force Atlantic, Rear Admiral "Oscar" Meier.

Last month, I had the chance to visit Norfolk once again and to meet with Meier's successor, Rear Admiral Doug "V8" Verissimo and discuss with him the coming of the first squadron of CMV-22Bs to Norfolk and the evolution of the fleet in the Atlantic, which now includes the Ford carrier.

Naval Air Force Atlantic is the aviation Type Commander (TYCOM) for the United States Naval aviation units operating primarily in the Atlantic under United States Fleet Forces Command. AIRLANT is responsible for the material readiness, administration, training, and inspection of units/squadrons under their command, and for providing operationally ready air squadrons and aircraft carriers to the fleet.

Both the CMV-22B and the Ford carrier bring new capabilities to naval operations in the Atlantic region, and we discussed both during our time together on Oct. 29, 2024.

We started by discussing the challenge of contested logistics and how the coming of the CMV-22B provides significant capa-

bilities to meet this challenge. Not only does the Navy need to deal with contested logistics, but consider this challenge in an environment where the Navy is focused on distributed operations.

There are benefits when the CMV-22 is combined with the Ford. The island on the Ford has been moved towards the end of the deck, freeing up space to which an Osprey can move when it lands for offloading of weapons or supplies, not blocking the EMALS catapults. And there is a fuel capability in that area of the deck which can refuel the Osprey for its departure from the deck as well.

Rear Adm. Doug Verissimo, commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic, speaks with Cmdr. Mason Fox, executive officer of Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 40 the "Mighty Bison," following the arrival of the first East Coast-assigned Navy tiltrotor vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) aircraft CMV-22B Osprey at Naval Station Norfolk, April 5, 2024. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Sylvie Carafio

Verissimo also correlated the coming of the Osprey with changes the Navy is working with in regard to its carriers. For example, he underscored that "the future will likely bring smaller more agile weapons to complement the heavier more difficult weapons to transport like TLAMs."

He then argued that this shift to a different weapons stockpile would augment the utility of the CMV-22 supporting weapons re-supply in a contested combat environment.

He argued that there are specific capabilities of the CMV-22B which have a significant impact beyond logistics, namely, personnel support, notably in a medical emergency.

He put it this way: "If I have a medical emergency, I'm not trapping and catapulting the human body that's already injured. I can softly land and softly take off so I can take care of my people in a medical emergency."

Throughout much of our discussion, the Admiral emphasized the evolution of the carrier for the new strategic situation and the flexibility it brings to the fight. The assets assigned to the Ford carrier, that contribute to the fight, will change as future payloads and platforms emerge.

He also underscored the unique features of the Ford design, notably the significant enhanced power generation capabilities which enable the ability to use future payloads, weapons and platforms which leverage that enhanced electrical power generation capacity.

The Admiral emphasized that the carrier brings unique capability to a blue water navy, and that the flexibility demonstrated through the life cycle of the Nimitz-class carrier and built into the Ford class is crucial for the fleet to adapt to evolving warfighting operations.

He argued: "The carrier and the carrier strike group is one of the only integrated forces which brings the core seven joint warfighting functions to the fight wherever it is operating. And with the Ford class, and its ability to generate electric power, it enhances those capabilities as well."

Rear Admiral Douglas Verissimo

Rear Adm. Doug "V8" Verissimo, is a native of Falmouth, Massachusetts. He is a 1987 graduate of Cape Cod Community College with an Associates in Arts and Science. Immediately following graduation, he enlisted with the Naval Aviation Cadet (NAVCAD) Program.

Upon completion of flight training, he earned both his commission and designation as a naval aviator in July 1989. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics from California State University, Fresno,

California and a Master of Science in Campaign Planning and Strategy from the Joint Forces Staff College. He is also a graduate of the Navy's Nuclear Power Program.

His operational assignments include Fist of the Fleet, Fighter Attack Squadron (VFA) 25, catapult and arresting gear officer aboard USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74); department head for the Blue Blasters of VFA-34, command of the Gunslingers of VFA-105; executive officer aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), and commanding officer of USS New Orleans (LPD 18) and USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70).

Verissimo's shore duty assignments include instructor duty at VFA-125, a demonstration pilot for U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, Blue Angels; executive assistant to Commander, Naval Air Forces Atlantic and Joint Staff J3, where he served as joint force coordination/strategic plans division chief.

Verissimo's flag tours include deputy director for operations, Operations Team 2 (J3), Commander Carrier Strike Group 9, Director Assessment Division (N81), and Director, Maritime Operations, U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

He assumed his duties as Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic on Aug. 17, 2023.[1]

Notes

1. 17 Years Between Osprey Encounters at Naval Station Norfolk

1. https://www.airlant.usff.navy.mil/Press-Room/News-Stories/Article/3765300/vrm-40-welcomes-new-leadership-during-may-change-of-command-ceremony/

2. Visiting the First East Coast CMV-22B Squadron: October 2024

1. https://www.airpac.navy.mil/Organization/Fleet-Logistics-Multi-Mission-Squadron-VRM-40/Leaders/Commanding-Officer/; https://www.airpac.navy.mil/Organization/Fleet-Logistics-Multi-Mission-Squadron-VRM-40/Leaders/Executive-Officer/

3. The Perspective of Admiral Verissimo on the Coming of the CMV-22B to the Atlantic Naval Air Force

1. https://www.navy.mil/Leadership/Flag-Officer-Biographies/Search/Article/2236433/rear-admiral-douglas-verissimo/