HATERS, SHHHHH! THE V-22 OSPREY IS AN UNBELIEVABLY ACCOMPLISHED AIRCRAFT

News / Manufacturer

The V-22 Osprey was once considered a true “ugly duckling”, one of a number of platforms and systems that were too costly, performed badly and even posed a danger to their users.

Without question, designing, building and operating a platform that could fly like an airplane and take off and land like a helicopter was a challenging endeavor.

So much so that it took several decades from the time the V-22 first flew to work out the kinks and learn the Osprey’s unique aerodynamic features and flight characteristics.

Not surprising for a platform so radically different than anything that had flown before, the V-22 had to undergo extensive modifications and refits.

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Image Sgt. Michael Needham/The National Guard

It took a long time to work out the kinks with the Osprey.

Unfortunately, in this gestational period there were several mishaps that cost the lives of a number of contractors as well as uniformed Marines. It was only as a result of the firm commitment of the Marine Corps to the Osprey and the investment of time, money and skilled personnel by the Bell-Boeing team that the V-22 has transformed into an elegant swan.

Over the past decade, the V-22 has transformed tactical transportation, search and rescue, aeromedical evacuation and even airborne logistics.

The Osprey demonstrated its worth in Afghanistan, one of the most stressing environments on earth. With few airfields, great distances between bases and sparse landing fields, the V-22 proved its versatility and value.

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US Marine Corps Photo

A Marine directs an MV-22 Osprey aircraft for support Marine Helicopter Support Team during slingload operations on Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif., Aug. 18, 2014.

The Osprey could cover great distances, moving across rugged mountains and blazing deserts at high speed like an airplane but by tilting its wings, land and take off like a helicopter.

The V-22 provided a degree of tactical mobility and responsiveness superior to both light aircraft and existing military helicopters.

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PhotoUS Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Zachary Eshleman

The V-22 combines the best parts of an airplane and a helicopter.

The combination of speed and maneuverability also made the V-22 an ideal platform for special operations missions, combat search and rescue and aeromedical evacuation. Air Force Special Operations Command has found the CV-22 variant particularly useful for deep insertion missions in complex terrain. The Osprey's speed allows for deep penetration missions under cover of darkness.

The ability to operate the MV-22 from large deck amphibious warfare vessels provides the Marine Corps with the option to conduct landing operations in three dimensions.

The Marine Corps have developed a unique teaming relationship between V-22s and KC-130 tankers that extend the Osprey's operational range by thousands of miles. Shipborne and land-based V-22s have served a critical role in searching for downed US pilots, providing rapid evacuation of wounded personnel and reducing the vulnerability of logistics operations by moving critical supplies by air.

As the US military continues its pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, the V-22 in its various incarnations is proving itself particularly useful. The Western Pacific is vast and the ability to move rapidly over long ranges between large and small land masses and from ship to shore has unique value.

The latest example of the V-22's value is its new role delivering cargo to Navy ships at sea. Traditionally, the Navy used the C-2 Greyhound to move cargo and personnel to and from aircraft carriers where they were re-transported on helicopters for delivery to other ships in the battle group.

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Recently, the Navy decided to do away with this two-step process and make a V-22 variant, the CMV-22B, the sole platform for the carrier onboard delivery mission. This was eminently logical since the Marine Corps had a well-established process for using the MV-22 to move material and people between ships. The CMV-22B can take advantage of this training and sustainment infrastructure.

Photo Lance Cpl. Clarence Leake/USMC

Despite the critics, the Osprey has a bright future.

Future roles and missions for the V-22 could include light attack and even countering rockets, artillery and mortar rounds with an onboard directed energy weapon. It is clear that what was once viewed in the halls of the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill as an acquisition failure has turned out to be a remarkable success.

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