

VMM-263: FIRST OSPREY SQUADRON ACTIVATED

Story and Photos by LCpl. Samuel D. White

The future of Marine Corps aviation took a large step forward as the first operational MV-22 Osprey squadron was activated on 3 March at MCAS New River, N.C. “Commissioning [Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 263] is a historic day for the Thunder Chickens, for our Corps, and for our nation,” said Maj. Gen. Thomas L. Moore, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing commanding general. “We have introduced a transformational aircraft into our nation’s forces with the Thunder Chickens.”

The Osprey capitalizes on the best aspects of both a rotary-wing and fixed-wing turboprop aircraft. It is more survivable than the CH-46E Sea Knight because of its range and speed, “and it’s a much more capable aircraft and we expect it to perform excellent in battle,” Moore said.



The aircraft has been in the making since the early 1960s, but “waiting for something this good has been worthwhile,” said Gen. Robert Magnus, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps. “This is a tremendous aircraft. While we are at war, it is a tremendously more survivable platform for the Marines who are in the fight.”

VMM-263, home to more than 150 Marines and the successor to Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 263 which cased its colors in June 2005, will carry on the



Lt. Col. Paul J. Rock, Jr., Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 263 commanding officer, speaks to the crowd gathered at MCAS New River, N.C., as the first MV-22 Osprey squadron is activated. The Thunder Chickens of VMM-263 expect to be deployed within the next year.

proud name, Thunder Chickens, and also the legacy of the former CH-46E Sea Knight squadron.

Honored to carry on the Thunder Chickens name, the Marines of VMM-263 are thrilled by the chance to become the first operational Osprey squadron, said Sgt. Maj. Grant VanOostrom. “They are very excited because they see it as a culmination of those who have gone before them,” VanOostrom said. “They just happen to be the chosen ones who get to bring it into its current existence; we get to reap the rewards of others.”

And VMM-263 can be expected to reap the almost countless rewards, such as being able to travel at speeds of nearly 300 mph—twice the speed of any current helicopter—and have up to five times the range of travel while carrying three times the payload. “The Osprey will allow us to self-deploy from New River, or Miramar, across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, to anywhere this great nation wants to plant its flag within two to three days,” Magnus said.


Gen. Michael W. Hagee, 33rd commandant of the Marine Corps, said during his visit to MCAS New River on 24 February that there are two things to know about this aircraft. “One, it will change the way we fight; it’s faster, larger, air refuelable and the technology is state of the art. Two, it’s the safest aircraft in our inventory. It has



VMM-263 CO Lt. Col. Paul J. Rock, Jr., and Sgt. Maj. Grant VanOostrom salute the national and squadron colors during the Thunder Chickens’ activation ceremony on 3 March.

been tested and proven ready to perform.”

Moore expects the squadron to be deployed within the coming year. And though the Thunder Chickens will have to make tremendous efforts before becoming the first Osprey squadron to deploy, they will be able to move forward knowing the Marines, families, and friends of the program sacrificed so much to get to where the stand up could be possible, Moore said.

“We are bringing forth the new capability to replace what has been the backbone of Marine aviation in the CH-46,” Moore said. “With that capability, we take rotary-wing assault support, now tiltrotor wing assault support, ahead into the future and assure the success of Marines in battle. We are committing the Osprey to the gunfight.” 

Background Osprey photo by PHAN Zachary L. Borden