

Australia Announces Formation of MQ-4C Triton UAS Squadron



Australia's first MQ-4C Triton autonomous maritime patrol aircraft poses for its first official portraits after emerging from the Northrop Grumman Palmdale paint booth.

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Royal Australian Air Force has re-activated a historic squadron to operate its forthcoming MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aircraft systems (UAS).

Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles announced at the Avalon Air Show last week that 9 Squadron is “being re-formed after a break of 34 years,” according to a release from the Australian Department of Defence of a March 3 transcript of an interview with Australian officials at the air show.

“There’s a lot of lineage to this Squadron,” Marles said. “9 Squadron was originally formed in 1939. It did maritime surveillance during the Second World War. It saw service during the Vietnam War and for the keen military historians among you, you will have noticed that 9 Squadrons insignia is on the tail of the Triton. And 9 Squadron will be reformed to operate this capability the Triton uncrewed aircraft. It will be based at RAAF base Edinburgh although the airframes that you see behind me will actually operate out of Tindal.”

Marles said the Triton “will be able to provide the persistent reconnaissance and surveillance, of our northern maritime approaches which is so important in terms of the defence of our nation. It’s also going to be really useful in terms of surveilling illegal fishing both in our own waters, but also the waters of our Pacific neighbours. So, it’s a really exciting capability.”

Air Marshal Robert Chipman, chief of the Royal Australian Air Force, noted that 9 Squadron saw operational service in World War II with the Navy, “flying from our cruisers, HMA Ships, Hobart, Perth, Sydney, Canberra and Australia from the Arctic all the way down to the Southwest Pacific. And 22 servicemen lost their lives in World War II serving with 9 Squadron. In Vietnam, the Squadron was involved in some of the most iconic battles with the Australian Army, including the Battle of Long Tan, and two crewmen lost their lives in the Vietnam War. So, it is a Squadron that has a lot of history. On the emblem, you’ll see an Australian native bird- it’s the black browed albatross. The black browed albatross is renowned for spending a long time on in overwater flights, which makes it the perfect symbol, for the perfect Squadron for us to establish the MQ-4 Triton capability.”

Australia has three Tritons – built by Northrop Grumman – on order. The first is scheduled for delivery in 2024. Chipman said that the Air Force has had personnel training to operate and maintain the Triton for “a number of years.”

“Congratulations to the Royal Australian Air Force on the reactivation of the historic No. 9 Squadron,” said Jane Bishop, vice president and general manager, global surveillance, Northrop Grumman. “We’re honored the squadron will be operating Australia’s MC-4C Triton uncrewed aircraft for their most demanding maritime ISR missions, and we look forward to delivering the first RAAF Triton in 2024.”