

Collaboration Boosts E-6B Pilot Readiness with New Training Asset



E-6B aircrew celebrate a successful first Public Air Operations training flight, showcasing the Navy's commitment to innovative solutions for maintaining peak readiness.

Pictured left to right: Cmdr. Nathaniel Whitman, Fleet Air Reconnaissance Squadron SEVEN (VQ-7) executive officer; Marc Thomason, AAR E-6B In-Flight Trainer chief pilot; Senior Chief Jake Perry, VQ-7 flight engineer; Chief Charles Breen, VQ-7 flight engineer; and Capt. Zach Brown, SCW-1 prospective deputy wing commander. U.S. Navy photo.

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NAS PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – E-6B Mercury pilots from Strategic Communications Wing One (SCW-1) and subordinate commands have successfully completed their first Public Aircraft Operations (PAO) training flight, a significant milestone in maintaining readiness for the critical Take Charge and Move Out (TACAMO) mission. The flight, which occurred on May 30, 2025, was the culmination of fast-paced collaboration and contract award to address an urgent fleet need.

The TACAMO community required an in-flight trainer (IFT) solution that enables pilots to meet hands-on training requirements.

The Airborne Strategic Command, Control and Communications Program Office (PMA-271) entered into an agreement with the Adversary and Specialized Aircraft Program Office (PMA-226) in January 2025 to provide flight hours on a Boeing 737 Next Generation (NG) aircraft.

“PMA-271 and PMA-226 teammates maintained a fleet focused perspective throughout the entire acquisition process to meet the fleet requested ‘North Star’ milestone of having an in-flight trainer solution for TACAMO pilot training as expeditiously as possible.” said Capt. Greg Sutton, PMA-226 program manager.

PMA-226 subsequently awarded an Undefined Contract Action to KALS, LLC, a joint venture between AAR Corp. and KIRA Aerospace, on March 3, 2025, to provide the Contractor Owned Government Operated (COGO) Contracted Air Services (CAS) under a PAO framework.

PMA-226 CAS executed its first-ever COGO contract, working daily with KALS to continuously review documentation and flight clearance requirements. PMA-226, PMA-271, and SCW-1 also met on a weekly basis to ensure all identified requirements and deadlines were being met. This collaboration enabled the transition from contract award to training flight operations in less than three months.

“This first PAO training flight demonstrates the Navy’s commitment to finding innovative solutions to maintain the readiness of our E-6B pilots,” said Capt. Roger Davis, PMA-271 program manager. “This collaborative effort, from contract award to first flight, reflects the dedication and ingenuity of the entire team.”

“The phenomenal speed of contract award and execution of the

first flight is very much appreciated.” said Capt. Britt Windeler, SCW-1 commander. “My utmost thanks go out to the entire team behind this effort.”

This new training program represents a significant step forward in PMA-271’s ongoing commitment to deliver a timely, affordable, and effective IFT for the E-6B. In June 2021, the Navy purchased an E-3D aircraft from the Royal Air Force for \$15 million, planning to convert it into a TE-6B IFT. However, a subsequent assessment determined that the cost of converting the E-3D and restoring its airworthiness no longer provided a positive return on investment. The Navy issued a stop-work order on the contract with Northrop Grumman Corp. in November 2023. The aircraft is now slated for parts harvesting and disposal by Northrop Grumman, where valuable parts, with an estimated value exceeding the initial \$15 million purchase price, will be recovered and can be inducted into the supply system for use by the current E-6B fleet.

“I’m excited and looking forward to the bright future of continuing to train E-6B pilots as we start improving the flight experience in the community,” said Capt. Zach Brown, SCW-1 prospective deputy wing commander and primary SCW-1 lead for this effort.

PMA-271 is headquartered at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland. Its mission is to deliver and support survivable, reliable and endurable airborne command, control and communications for the president, secretary of defense and U.S. Strategic Command.

PMA-226 is responsible for life cycle cradle-to-grave management of several legacy and out-of-inventory aircraft and engines, assigned by NAVAIR and contracted air services. Assigned platforms and services include: adversary aircraft (F-5, F-16); contracted aircraft services; U.S. Naval Test Pilot School / Naval Postgraduate School (T-38, H-72, X-26, U-6, NU-1B, O-2, OH-58C); and foreign military sales out-of-

active Navy inventory aircraft (T-2, H-2, H-3, and A-4).