

Marine Corps Makes First Operational MQ-9A Flight in Middle East

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Marine Corps pilots and sensor operators from Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1 (VMU-1) conducted their first operational flight of an MQ-9A Reaper unmanned aircraft system in the Middle East on March 20, according to an Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI) release.

The multisensor reconnaissance-equipped MQ-9A UAS produced by General Atomics has provided crucial support to Marine forward operations on the battlefield.

With oversight from the GA-ASI team, VMU-1 “Watchdog” crews took control of a company owned/company operated (COCO) MQ-9A supporting forward-deployed Marines. This achievement comes shortly after surpassing 7,000 hours of COCO flight operations since September 2018.

“This achievement represents a unique milestone and example of the Marine Corps’ legacy of innovation,” said David R. Alexander, president of GA-ASI. “As a partner with the Marine Corps, we look forward to expanding the role of medium-altitude, long-endurance UAS in support of maritime littoral missions.”

VMU-1 leases MQ-9A Reaper aircraft to fulfill its urgent needs request for persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) in Afghanistan. GA-ASI has been working with VMU-1 as the Marine Corps transitions its COCO MQ-9A contract to a government owned/government operated (GOGO) contract in the coming year.

The GOGO capability fulfills the commandant’s directive for USMC Group 5 persistent ISR capability with strike. VMU-1 will

be the test bed and incubator to provide crucial information, lessons learned, requirements, tactics, techniques, and procedures that will aid in the Marine Corps efforts for the successful acquisition and fielding of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force Unmanned Aircraft System Expeditionary Group 5 capability.