Navy to Stand-Up 2 Fleet MQ-25 Squadrons to Deploy Detachments

The Boeing MQ-25 T1 test asset transfers fuel to a U.S. Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet on June 4, marking the first time in history that an unmanned aircraft has refueled another aircraft. The MQ-25 Stingray will assume the carrier-based tanking role currently performed by F/A-18s, allowing for better use of the combat strike fighters and helping extend the range of the carrier air wing. THE BOEING CO. / Kevin Flynn

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The U.S. Navy plans to establish two MQ-25 squadrons to deploy detachments of the MQ-25A Stingray unmanned aerial refueling aircraft on board aircraft carriers. Later this year, the MQ-25A fleet replacement squadron will be established to train operators and maintainers for the Stingray.

The fleet replacement squadron, Unmanned Carrier-Launched Multi-Role Squadron 10 (VUQ-10) is slated for establishment on Oct. 1, 2021. It will be based at Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California.

Speaking Aug. 2 at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space expo in National Harbor, Maryland, Capt. Chad Reed, the Navy's program manager for Unmanned Carrier Aviation, said that the two fleet squadrons will be VUQ-11 and VUQ-12.

The VUQ squadrons will operate under the administrative control of commander, Airborne Command & Control Logistics Wing – also based at Point Mugu – which also controls the Navy's E-2 battle management aircraft.

The two fleet VUQ squadrons will deploy detachments to the E-2 squadrons to operate the Stingrays. Each detachment will

deploy with five MQ-25As.

The Navy plans to procure 72 Stingrays. A Boeing-owned prototype, T1, is being test-flown by the company. Boeing is building four Engineering and Manufacturing aircraft, two ground test articles, and three system demonstration aircraft. The Navy is scheduled to receive it first production fleet MQ-25A in 2024.

T1 made its first flight in September 2019, and first flew with an aerial refueling store in December 2020. On June 4, it made history as the first unmanned aircraft to pass fuel to an aircraft in flight.

“T1 has just been tremendous,” Reed said.

The MQ-25A will be the “first unmanned aircraft intended to connect with a manned aircraft,” he said.

Reed said he is looking forward to taking T1 and the ground control station to a carrier deck for the critical trials in handling control on the deck.

The MQ-25A is scheduled to achieve initial operational capability in 2025.

Reed affirmed that there is “no requirement in the current plan for armament [for the MQ-25A], but in the future it certainly could [carry armament].”

Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance is a secondary mission for the Stingray.

Four aircraft carriers are being modified with Unmanned Aviation Warfare Centers (UAWC) to control the MQ-25 missions, Reed said, with four more in planning for the modification.

The MQ-25A and the control system are being integrated in the planning for the Joint All-Domain Command and Control concept.