

The Navy's Carrier Airwing Flies Further With Hercules' New Tanker Approval



A U.S. Navy Reserve KC-130T refuels an EA-18G Growler in the skies over Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland during testing that enabled the service's fleet of Hercules aircraft to aerially refuel a significantly expanded number of aircraft in early 2025. The testing led by the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division significantly expands Hercules' mission, as well as the mission of the U.S. Navy Reserves which exclusively operates the aircraft. (U.S. Navy photo by Erik Hildebrandt)

From Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Feb. 24, 2025

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. -- The Navy Reserve's KC-130T Hercules fleet, upgraded with the NP200 propeller system, is cleared to aerially refuel a significantly wider range of aircraft across the carrier airwing following envelope expansion testing at the [Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division](#) (NAWCAD) which

concluded in early 2025.

The test effort expands Hercules' mission – and that of the Navy's fleet reserve, which exclusively operates the aircraft – beyond its primary focus on logistics and cargo transport.

“Prior to this testing we only had a single aircraft cleared for refueling from the upgraded KC-130T,” said [NAWCAD's developmental test wing](#) Commodore Capt. Elizabeth Somerville. “This advanced capability gives us flexibility in any future conflict.”

Naval aviation's F-35B/C, F/A-18, EA-18. CH-53K, CH-47, H-60s and AV-8B were cleared for air-to-air refueling from KC-130T after testing by NAWCAD federal government engineers, testers, and military test pilots from [Air Test and Evaluation Squadron \(VX\) 20](#) along with industry partners who worked to make sure Hercules could safely refuel the aircraft with its upgraded NP2000 propeller system.

“If we look forward to any future fight, it's going to take intense collaboration between all of the forces: Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Army, Coast Guard,” said Somerville. “Any resource that provides fuel airborne is going to be invaluable to all assets that are flying.”

The test effort significantly increases naval aviation's operational reach and flexibility, as well as several international allies, following a request by U.S. Pacific Fleet.

The KC-130T Hercules is a multi-role, long-range, land-based tactical aircraft that provides logistical support to fleet operating forces.

Check out a video of the test effort here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=triR4w1lyR4>

NAWCAD employs more than 20,000 military, civilian and

contract personnel. It operates test ranges, laboratories and aircraft in support of test, evaluation, research, development and sustainment of everything flown by the Navy and Marine Corps. Based in Patuxent River, Maryland, the command also has major sites in St. Inigoes, Maryland, Lakehurst, New Jersey, and Orlando, Fl