

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT GENERAL GEORGE
TRAUTMAN, DEPUTY COMMANDANT OF THE MARINES FOR AVIATION VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM
IRAQ SUBJECT: THE COMBAT DEPLOYMENT OF THE MV-22 IN IRAQ TIME: 10:30 A.M. EDT
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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of
Defense's Bloggers' Roundtable for Wednesday, May 6th, 2009. My name is Petty
Officer William Selby at the Office of Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and
I will be moderating the call today. A note to our bloggers online -- please
remember to clearly state your name and blogger organization in advance of your
question.

Respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct and to the point.
Today, our guest is Marine Lieutenant General George J. Trautman, III, the
deputy commandant for Aviation. And sir, General Trautman, if you have an
opening statement you can get on with that.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Thanks, Petty Officer Selby, and good morning,
everyone. It's -- it's really great to join you today. I wanted to take this
opportunity to talk with you, offer you an after-action report, if you will,
about the first three combat deployments of the MV-22 Osprey aircraft into Iraq.

First of all, the Marine Corps views these first three deployments of
the Osprey into combat as marvelously successful. I know that may surprise some
of you because I've seen some of the things that you've written. But there
really is no better way to describe how this aircraft performed for our combat
leaders in Iraq. You know, we had high expectations that the aircraft could
perform the way that it did, and we took a quiet professional stance and
tempered our public comments to reflect that attitude.

This was done for no reason other than the fact that we felt that the
performance of the aircraft should be the measure by which it's tested, not
conjecture of expected performance or past challenges. The performance thus far
tells us that the -- the aircraft completed every assigned mission and it did so
flying faster, farther, and with safer flight profiles than any other assault
support aircraft in the history of military operations.

Second, the cat is out of the bag among my operational commanders. The
way the Osprey collapsed the battle space in al Anbar, in fact, indeed
throughout all of Iraq is really something that -- that amazed those who saw it
perform. You know, it took some of our operational planners and staffs a while
to understand just what this new capability meant to their operations. The

aircraft has tremendous range and the speed with which it moves around the operational commanders' area of influence, the best way I can characterize it is a quote that was given to me by one of the commanders of Multi National Force - West when he -- when he said to me that when the Osprey arrived in Iraq it turned his battle space from the size of Texas into the size of Rhode Island.

As an aviator, that means a lot to me. We don't exist on our own. We're not off by ourselves. Marine Aviation exists to support the warfighter, the Marine on the ground, the soldier in distress, and the Osprey offers that warfighter a tremendous asymmetrical advantage over the enemy and it also offers an incredible increase in capability for our commanders.

Last thing I'd like to say is that although the -- the Osprey is relatively new we need to keep in mind that, for example, 80 percent of the Osprey's flight hours have occurred in the -- in the last four years. So we're still learning about the -- the aircraft. These first deployments, which were a total of 19 consecutive months, provided us with some real world data from which we're going to refine our logistical footprint for future deployments.

Also contributing to the learning experience is the fact that we will soon have a squadron leaving on a global deployment in the company of the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit. This will allow the Osprey for the first time to get its legs on a long amphibious-based deployment lasting longer than days and weeks and moving into months. We're going to learn what the effect of salt water and sea air have the -- have on the aircraft over time, and although we don't anticipate any problems whatsoever there's always learning to be done.

While I'm talking about the Marine Expeditionary Unit deployment, I really reflect on -- on what I would do if I was a MEU commander getting Ospreys as part of my aviation combat element for the first time. Imagine how this airplane changes the responsiveness and the capabilities of our forward deployed Marine Air-Ground Task Force operating from ships anywhere around the globe. If there was a U.S. embassy in central Africa that needed a military presence, the MEU would now have the capability to deliver a sizeable portion of America's 911 Force or Marine Special Operation capable force halfway across the continent in a matter of just hours.

Of course, this is a hypothetical scenario that I'm laying out for you but you get the point. No MEU has ever had the operational reach that the 22nd MEU is going to have on this upcoming deployment, and as the transition from our legacy CH-46s to MV-22s continues, every subsequent MEU from the East Coast is going to deploy with V-22 Ospreys, and this is going to have a very important effect on those combatant commanders that we support, first on the West Coast -- East Coast, pardon me -- then from the West Coast and later for our MEU based with III Marine Expeditionary Force in Japan.

I know that someone's probably going to ask me about Afghanistan and -- and the V-22s and when they'll arrive in Afghanistan so I might as well state up front that we are planning to send an Osprey squadron to Afghanistan later this year. We think this aircraft is exactly the type of capability that is going to make the (distributor ?) operations of our Marines in that part of Afghanistan far more capable than they would be otherwise.

We understand that Afghanistan is a harsh environment, especially a harsh environment on the aircraft, because we've been working there in smaller ways in the recent past. But we're incredibly confident that having the Osprey in that environment is going to pay dividends for our forces and that's why

we're intently focused on getting the airplane into -- into that theater in the fall.

With that, I'll take your questions.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir, and Bob, you are first on the line. So if you want to go on with your question.

Q Thank you. Good morning, General Trautman. Bob Cox here at Fort Worth, Texas.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Hey, Bob, good to hear from you again.

Q Good -- good to hear from you. It's been a while. Hey, we'll start right there -- Afghanistan. I'm sitting here reading -- just now reading online about helicopters and altitude issues and I know that's an issue. V-22 -- what's -- what -- where -- where can you take a -- how high can you take a load and land in Afghanistan? I understand that aircraft will -- you'd at least be very limited, more like 8,000, 7,000 feet.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Well, it depends. You're a -- I know you're an expert on tilt rotor and rotary wing and aerodynamics so you understand that as you go up in density altitude every -- every rotor- equipped airplane decreases in performance and it becomes a function of payload but it also becomes a function of the type of takeoff and landing that you're -- you're able to -- to make.

If -- for example, I'd be confident taking the Osprey into a 13,000-foot runway if I could do a rolling landing and a rolling takeoff. On the other hand, I wouldn't -- wouldn't attempt that at typical gross weights if I had to hover. So you're right. Above 8,000, 9,000, 10,000 feet we either have to start reducing the payload that we're willing to carry or find a place where we can transition to rolling landings and takeoffs rather than vertical takeoffs and landings. The good news about the location of our forces in the south is that those mountains down there top out about 8,000 feet so it's the perfect operating environment to introduce the Osprey into -- into Afghanistan. Right now, I mean, every one of our helicopters in the Marine Corps struggle as we get up above the -- the 9,000-, 10,000- foot mark. The CH-47 has probably the best capability in -- in the inventory as far as vertical takeoffs and landings above those altitudes. Altitudes are a challenge and -- and we know it.

Q Okay. Can I have a follow-up here or do I --

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Well, actually, let's --

Q -- (inaudible) the line?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: -- let's try to get through everybody's --

Q That's fine.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: -- first round and then we'll come back for follow-ups. And Andrew, you were second.

Q Thank you. General, Andrew Lubin here from Military Observer. Thank you for taking the time, sir.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Good morning.

Q Sir, can -- (inaudible) -- continuing on Afghanistan and the Osprey, what are the plans to arm the Osprey? Because when you're looking at some of those hills and some of those mountains -- (inaudible) -- you've got the insurgents higher sometimes in -- (inaudible) -- with helicopters.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Great question, and that's something that's been in the forefront of my mind over the last year as I've contemplated the opportunity to put the Osprey into Afghanistan. You're exactly right. It's a different operating environment than we've had in Iraq. I was quite satisfied with the -- the ramp-mounted weapon system and the small caliber that we had in Iraq and it did indeed prove to be the right weapon for that initial deployment into combat. But what we want to have for Afghanistan is -- is twofold. One, we're going to increase the ability of the ramp-mounted weapon system to take up to a 50-caliber machine gun for some heavier firepower should we need it, and we're in the process right now of getting those flight clearances and I'm very confident we'll achieve those prior to deployment.

Secondly, and probably most importantly and maybe the reason you asked the question, is that we've been working with the Air Force Special Operations Command and BAE Systems to look at a -- an interim defensive weapon system that's -- that's an all-aspect weapon system, relatively small caliber but a system that can provide all 360-degree quadrant coverage of the Osprey in the event that -- that it encounters unexpected threat in an objective area.

The thought would be to use this as a fire suppression weapon, put out tracers, put the enemy's head down, and then use the incredible speed and power and -- and acceleration of the Osprey to -- to leave the -- the threat area. As most -- as all of you know, assault support airplanes are not offensive platforms. They take a defensive posture when they encounter a threat, and I think this -- this interim defensive weapon system is going to be precisely what -- what makes sense in the Afghan environment.

Now, where are we in that process? The -- the developmental test has been completed by the Air Force Special Operations Command, and the Naval Air Systems Command had their people right aligned with the DT effort throughout. So we have a clearance right now to do operational tests and we're starting that with VMM-261 later this month. The first thing we'll do is a quick assessment by the operational testers.

They'll probably fly two sorties -- one dry sortie, one -- one live sortie. And then we're going to put the system into the hands of the squadron to get familiarization training with some pretty strict restrictions on what they can and can't do, the profiles that they'll fly. They'll do that for about two months and then we'll double back on the system in July and VMX-22 will come in and do a full-blown operational test of the system, and they'll do that in July and August. And so everything's lining up if time goes well and we have a little bit of white space if we get delays to deploy this system with the -- the squadron that goes to Afghanistan in the fall.

Q (Great ?). Thank you very much.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay. And let's see who's -- Sean, you were third on the line?

Q Yes, I am. Hey, sir. Coming from an infantry background, I'm going to have to ask you how the -- the guys on the ground have responded to

riding in the new birds as opposed to the 46s that they were so accustomed to. GEN. TRAUTMAN: Well, I hope -- I hope some of you get a chance to talk to these young men and women who have had a chance to be in the Osprey. You know, I was over there twice in the early stages of -- of our deployment, and, of course, you know, they read what you all write and they read what the press says and they know some of the history. So, you know, in about one-quarter of the Marines there's probably a little trepidation. Another quarter are typical Marines and are very gung-ho.

The middle of the pack, they get on the airplane, and they're excited any time they get a helicopter ride because sometimes Marines don't get many exposures to helicopters or tilt rotors. But 100 percent of the people when they get on this airplane and they feel the acceleration coming out of that zone, rapidly climbing to three (thousand), four (thousand), five (thousand), six (thousand), 10,000 feet, and then transitioning from the nacelles down into full flight mode and you get that extra kick, I mean, it's just wonderful to see their faces.

Their expressions are -- are amazing to watch. The commanders, the platoon commanders, the -- the squad leaders, they love the fact that their Marines are fresh and ready to go after -- after very short times inside of an airplane. So they like it from that perspective. But the challenge that we've had have been probably twofold.

Number one, we have a cabin situational awareness capability in the back of the Osprey but I want to improve that, and we didn't have enough exposure by a wide enough range of ground leaders to get complete familiarity with it because we -- we didn't get it deployed until we actually got into Iraq. As we learn more about the -- the needs of the folks in the back I think we're going to just, you know, close -- close the loop and you're going to find nothing but -- but high praise for the machine.

At the highest level, I mean, one of the things that Major General Kelley said -- he was the -- he was the second Marine -- I mean, Multi National Force - West commander who -- who led an Osprey- equipped force, and basically he said that he -- he could dominate the al Anbar Province because he had V-22s and he couldn't have done that with just helicopters. So from the highest levels, the two-star (around the ?) force all the way down to the PFC, who maybe had some trepidation, lots of high praise.

Q (Inaudible) -- thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And David Axe, you were next on the line. David, you there?

Q Yeah. (Inaudible.) Sorry.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right. Yeah. Q Hi. This -- this is David Axe with Warisboring. So, General, just the other day you told Aviation Week that you weren't -- (inaudible) -- use the exact words -- not meeting my full expectations yet regarding the -- the V-22's mission capable rates. Can you comment on that?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: I will. We actually -- we actually did fine in Iraq but -- but we had put -- we'd put a lot of resources in Iraq with our supply. But we encountered some challenges that we didn't anticipate. One, was the

effect of the dust. Now, we anticipated the dust would cause us to change prop-rotors at a higher rate than normal, and so we put a lot of prop-rotors there.

What we didn't anticipate was the effect of the fine dust in Iraq, which actually caused us to have trouble with some of our wire bundles instead. But, the fine dust in Iraq was different than the dust in the Southwest U.S., and so I use that as one example of how your predictions and your predictive analytical models can kind of lead you astray.

So, we had a lot of prop rotors. We didn't experience prop-rotor failure. We didn't have a lot of wire bundles and we experience wire- bundle challenges, and not necessarily failures but maintenance man- hours required to -- you know, to keep the avionics operating the way that we wanted it to operate.

So, it's not atypical for every new airplane to have the kinds of readiness struggles that we're having. So, "concern" might be an overstatement. Maybe an impatient -- an "impatience" with stepping out to get the spares right.

And those of you that follow aviation, you know how we spare new airplanes. We use predictive models. We estimate mean times between failure.

We do our best to spend just enough money -- not too much and not too little, to get the parts in place that will enable us to have sustained readiness rates that are good, that are satisfactory.

If you miss on a few of those things -- which you inevitably do, and the mean time between failure is less than anticipated, and you haven't bought the spares -- and there's a lead-time for the spares, you end up getting yourself potentially in a small hole.

And that's the hole that I was talking about with Aviation Week, we're in that hole. And I'm very aggressively engaged with both BellBoeing, Naval Air Systems Command, and the rest of the supply chain to (make sure ?) that we're doing everything we can to get this airplane adequately resourced with parts.

Q Okay, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Bryan Mitchell.

Q Yeah, General Trautman, thank you so much for your time this morning.

I want to speak a little more specifically about this weapons system being affixed to the Osprey. Can you talk about how it'll be manned -- whether there will be a separate Marine or a fire control operator inside? And can you talk about how that will work, in terms of affixing the actual unit to the airplane; and the number of those that you guys are going to procure; and how they're going to be fielded -- a little more specificity?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: I can.

The system is very clever. And, you know, there's a reason that we haven't put an all-aspect weapon on the Osprey in the last decade -- although many people have wondered, and including some of the folks on this phone call, who I've seen write very intelligent things about the need for a defensive, all-aspect weapon on the Osprey -- it's a tough technical challenge.

It's a hard -- it's a hard thing to do. And it's taken us awhile to figure it out in an affordable way. But, BAE Systems came to the fore and, thank goodness, Air Force Special Operations Command and we, were able to work together to move forward. The gun itself is mounted underneath, on the belly of the Osprey in the rear hell-hole. And then the forward hell-hole has a EO/IR clear that is tied to a weapons systems operator inside the Osprey. And this is a kit, so it can go on or off in a matter of four to six hours. So, if you choose to have the system in, you could have the system. If you choose not to have it in, you can take it out.

The weapons systems operator will be a trained air crewman -- so, a crewman with air crew wings, who will go through training and learn the tactics, techniques and procedures that we developed during operational test in July and August. And what I anticipate, although I don't want to prejudge what the operational testers will -- in Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One subject matter experts will develop, but I suspect we'll use very similar techniques to the current crew-served weapons that we have in our helicopters, whereby the pilots up-front tend to have the best visibility -- forward, anyway, where the threats typically, the most challenging threats may emerge, and so the pilots would use verbiage and standard SOP language to talk to the crewman, and talk the crewman onto the threat until he has it, and then the crewman would take over from there.

We'll do the same thing with this system. It'll be a little more complicated and a little more difficult because the operator in the back will be looking through a EO sensor instead of a direct field of view.

Now, remember what I said, this is a fire suppression weapon. I wouldn't expect to kill a lot of people with these -- with this system. I have a lot of experiences shooting guns from the air in Cobras and in other helicopters. It's a very difficult challenge without sophisticated fire control technology to be precise in your targeting.

So, we're talking about fire suppression, where you put out tracers and you put out rounds, and then you egress the threat as rapidly as you can. So, we'll see -- we'll see how it goes in the training, but the developmental testers who have looked at it are fairly confident.

I think we've -- I think it's nine systems that we procured. We went out -- we went out ahead of (surety ?) and bought nine systems, I think, so that we can get these into Afghanistan. And then the next step will be to decide how many we need or want, and if it proves as successful as I hope it will, we'll go forward and we'll ask to be allowed to buy enough for the whole fleet.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And did somebody -- okay. I believe somebody might have dropped off. But, Bob, we're going to go back around to you.

Q All right, good. Thank you.

General, I guess we have a budget finally coming out tomorrow, and you guys, the Marines, seemed to have fared better than -- (inaudible) -- services with Mr. Gates last round. But, there's been a lot discussion -- (audio break) -- some of the think-tanks and interest groups back there in Washington -- including CSBA, among others, who seems to have some influence now with the

Gates and Obama administrations about the Marines' need to buy fewer V-22s and more helicopters going forward.

Is that something that you guys have given any thought to at this point?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Petty Officer Selby, I was cut off momentarily. I think -- this is --

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Oh.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: -- General Trautman. I think I'm back.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sorry about that, sir. Yeah --

GEN. TRAUTMAN: -- (inaudible) -- the next question. I was off for about 30 seconds.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right.

Go ahead again, Bob.

Q Okay.

General, in the budget process, going forward, a number of think- tanks -- some of whom seem to have, you know, ties to the Obama administration, with Secretary Gates, CSBA for one, Lexington, I think, for another -- have talked about, going forward, the Marines should buy fewer V-22s and more helicopters. I think your plan is like -- something like 350 V-22s, and people are saying, scale that back to 150, or some number, and buy helicopters as well. Is that something the Marines are giving any thought to at this point?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Actually, I think our objective is 360 V-22s. I'll comment on the think-tank commentary, because I've seen that. But, it can't -- or won't comment on the budget deliberations, if you understand where they in time and space.

So, with regard to the think-tank things I think you're referring to, yeah, I've seen those things. The Marine Corps is -- I mean, we're blessed in that we spend a lot of time planning for our future. So each and every year the deputy commandant for Aviation, with the commandant's blessing, puts out an aviation plan which lays out our future, going out as far as we can adequately project. And so each and every year we revisit things like, you know, how many V-22s should the Marine Corps procure to accommodate its evolving CONOPS, and maybe the changes in the needs of the Joint Force.

I'll give you an example. Two years ago we decided that it would be wise to have more light helicopters, attack helicopters and heavy- lift helicopters, as well as unmanned aerial vehicle squadrons. So, as part of the growth of the Marine Corps to 202,000, we made a decision to increase from six to nine active Marine light-attack helicopter squadrons; and from six to nine active heavy-lift helicopters; and from three to four -- or, correction, two to four UAS squadrons.

It's interesting that we made that decision two years ago, and then subsequently, in the last year there was quite a bit of consternation among the Joint Force and OSD leadership regarding the lack of helicopters in the current

fight. So, we're a thoughtful, learning organization, and we are very open-minded to learning about, and thinking through how many V-22s we ultimately want to have. Part of that learning is getting experience in places like Iraq, in places like the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, and in places like Afghanistan.

And it's not just -- our thinking is not just limited to what the MV-22 is doing. As we see more and more about what the UH-1Y is doing -- and they're currently deployed with the 13th MEU for the first time on the West Coast, we look at capability and capacity across the range of the aviation combat element. And we're less wedded to specific numbers of platforms than we are to ensuring that that capacity and capability suits the requirements of our operational warriors. So, in the near-term, we are in a multi-year procurement contract that gets us 30 per year, and we'll buy that out, and we still have three or four more years to go on that. So, I don't think that this is an urgent question that we'll even be asked to comment upon, but we're prepared to have that dialogue inside the Quadrennial Defense Review if that's one of the topics that comes to the fore.

I know I didn't answer your question, but I just wanted to let you know that we're thoughtful, and we listen to everybody's ideas and don't discount any of them out of hand.

Q I think that was a reasonable answer.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All rightie.

And, Andrew, are you still on the line?

Q Yes, I am.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay, if you have a follow-up.

Q General, Andrew Lubin again.

Watching the news last night and this morning that the civilian, and the women and children killings in Farah Province, allegedly called in by the Marine Corps. Even though the Osprey is a primarily transport, any plans, when they go over in the fall, (for) putting a FAC-A on-board and kind of keeping this to a minimum -- for using a FAC-A to kind of control the battlefield?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Well, we make extensive use of forward air controllers-airborne. I think the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Aviation prides itself on having the most -- I mean, the tightest and most respected level of integrated fires in the battlespace.

The V-22 is not, in my mind, an ideal candidate for what you're describing. We would far prefer to use AH1-Zulus or UH1-Yankees in the objective area if a loiter was required, low level. And we train our AV-8 and F/A-18 pilots, and weapons systems operators, to be forward air controllers-airborne for other scenarios. So, I don't think the Osprey is part of that equation, but I certainly am a strong advocate of having fires discipline and fire control using the forward air controller-airborne concept. That's something that we've pioneered and have done quite well with.

Q Okay, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right, and Shaun (sp).

Q Yes, sir. Actually, if you don't mind going to the future again, about the Harvest Hawk that I've read about, if you don't mind heading that way, sir.

Does the Marine Corps plan to use it in the similar fashion that the Specter is used? Again, as an infantryman, the call for fire asset is like none other, and having a Specter overhead is a comforting feeling, and does the Marines plan to implement this in the short-term future for their guys on the ground for call?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: I'm glad you're -- glad you asked that question, because in the question you give me a chance to clarify two things: one that I fully support, and one that I want to make a distinction on.

The first is that -- the distinction, and that is we're not building an AC-130.

Q Roger, sir.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: We're not going to build a platform that has that kind of precision capability, where they can go into urban areas and, perhaps, you know, pick the exact individual or individuals, or stationary targets that they want to destroy.

What we're building is a roll-on, roll-off capability that can be put on our existing KC-130s. And the "K," in KC-130 stands for "aerial refueling." So, we use our Hercules airplanes in a multi-role fashion. Their primary mission is aerial refueling. They have secondary missions of aerial delivery, cargo and passenger transport. And we're just addition another mission set to them, which is this "Harvest Hawk" system that you asked about.

Harvest Hawk will take advantage of systems weapons and ISR systems that are already operational on other C-130s around the world. The soul of the system will be an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability, tied to a targeting system mounted on a wing station, and then tied into a weapons control station inside the airplane.

This will go on and off in a palletized fashion, and the wing -- (inaudible) -- will go on just like any other wings door -- on or off rapidly. And the objective is to be able to put this on or off in four hours, and the threshold is eight hours. The weapons that we're considering are the Stand-off Precision Guided Munitions off the ramp of the KC-130, which has been used successfully elsewhere; and the Hellfire missile, which has also been successfully fired off of other C-130s.

The third weapon we may consider is the 30mm cannon. And here's where the testers will decide if we can attain the level of accuracy that we desire to put the cannon on. We may limit ourselves to just the first two precision weapons that I described.

We learned that we needed something like this when we first went into Afghanistan about a year and a half ago. We sent a small force into a large area, and these forces dispersed out with the Afghan police and the Afghan national army Kandaks, or battalions, in small groups.

And they didn't meet much resistance over time, but it was sporadic resistance. And when resistance came, because of the different terrain in Afghanistan that we mentioned previously in the conversation, they were sometimes taken by surprise. And because of the dispersed nature of our forces, we suffered some casualties in the early stages of that initial deployment into Afghanistan.

One of the things that we think would be most valuable would be to have persistent ISR available over time, indeed even onboard airplanes that are doing aerial refueling. And these airplanes will be able to do both at the same time, aerial refuel air delivery and also carry ISR and weapons.

So having that persistent ISR on station for long periods of time and then being able to put ordnance down range against what is typically a fairly undetermined foe. These enemies out in the hinterlands don't typically master forces and come in large concentrations. If they do, our broader ISR lets us know about it, and we'll create an asymmetrical disadvantage for them of another nature, different than the KC-130.

(Inaudible) -- would be to field this system as soon as we can because we're in the process now of increasing the footprint of our forces in southern Afghanistan. And I'd like to see this system in theater before the end of the summer, and that's our objective. We're leaning forward with Naval Air Systems Command and Lockheed Martin to install the first systems, get them through developmental operational tests very rapidly and then field them into the theater as soon as we can.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you.

And David.

Q I have no follow ups, thanks. PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay.

Brian, did you have any follow ups?

Q Yes. On that Harvest Hawk, will the guys on the ground be able to call for (it to call for fire ?)? Will they be able to use it in --

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off, Brian.

General, are you still there?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Oh, absolutely, yes.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Okay. I wanted to make sure you didn't fall off again. Sorry about that.

Go ahead, Brian.

Q Yes. Two parts.

Will that Harvest Hawk be used to call in support? Or will it just be like an on-the-spot, if-we-need-it-when-we're-here type of weapon? And secondly, I was hoping you could talk a little bit about the delays in the JSF testing as well.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: I'm not sure I understand your question about the ability of Marine forces on the ground to call for fire. The answer is yes, they absolutely will. And the call for fire to the Harvest Hawk-equipped KC-130 would be no different than to call for fire to a Cobra or a Huey or an AV-8 or an F-18 that was in the battlespace. And so we could use it in various ways. I mean, we could tether it to a specific small unit and have comms established in advance if we thought that that made sense. But I think the more typical use would be to put it at a high-orbiting altitude well-above the battlespace where line-of-sight communications are easily transmitted and received and then respond to call for fire among various dispersed units if and when the need arose. So that would be the typical CON-Ops that I would see. And I don't see any challenges to that that are not capable of being overcome.

With regard to the JSF, I'm not sure what you mean in the delays in testing. I mean, it's pretty much on track. We're very pleased with the work on the hover pit. (Inaudible) -- has been there now (this ?) month. They learned some things they have to fix, but they know how to fix them. They'll fix them quickly, and we'll be within 30 to 60 days of being on track. It's not like the testing stopped, though. These are not sequential events. Testing is going forward, all in parallel. And everything that I know in talking to the PEO just yesterday is that we're still very much on track for the kinds of things that we need to do to ensure we get our initial operational capability by December of 2012. Maybe you know something I don't know.

Q No, I was just -- I heard there had been problems with the (lift van ?) and (putting in ?) too much heat.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: The (lift van ?) has produced exactly the right amount of thrust. When they tried to bring the -- the hover pit is a big hole, and that's what it's designed to do. And the big hole is to make it appear like there's nothing underneath it. That all went very well. It proved more thrust than anticipated and certainly adequate thrust. They tried to expand the test arena and bring the plate of the hover pit up in order to gather some data about heating and about airflow. When they did that and they moved up to high burner on the pad, the airplane was still chained down. And so if you ever did that with a real airplane, the airplane would go into the air. Because it's chained down, it didn't go into the air, and so the heat that came out, the sustained heat that came out, caused them to wave off of that part of the test.

That's a sort of anecdotal explanation. I'd encourage you to go over to the PEO to get a more technical explanation. The way I described it anecdotally as a pilot is sort of indicative of the fact that it's not a relevant challenge because if it was I would have been, you know, more rapidly engaged by the leadership over there.

Q Thank you for the explanation. That's very helpful.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And we have time for maybe one more question. And I guess that would have to be -- or, let's see, Bob, are you there still?

Q I'm still here.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Do you have any other follow-up questions?

Q Sure, real quick. Well, I hope they're quick. General Trautman, you had some issues, there was talk, and I guess this was several months ago, surprised at engines wearing out. How is that going? And then my other question real quick is also I understand you're still having de-icing issues or that you even had to completely switch off the de-icing systems. Back to your reliability, I guess.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Sure. Well, let me take the ice protection system first. We have not been pleased with the ice protection system and we're still not. But the good news is that we know how to fix it and NAVAIR and the program office and Bell Boeing are engaged to make it right. It's a complicated system that when it works it works well. The challenge has been its reliability.

When you look at full-mission-capable rates on the Osprey, you'll see that they're low. And the primary reason they're so low is the ice protection system. Now, you have to understand that, like helicopters, I mean, you don't fly prop roter or conventional rotary wing into icing conditions. As we move into Afghanistan and winter months, though, this could become a bigger concern for us. So we're leaning in hard on the ice protection system.

The engines have actually been a good-news story. With increasing time on wing each and every month that the airplane's been in Iraq, you know, sometimes low-tech solutions are as good as the technical ideas that we come up with. And basically, we changed pressure-wash procedures in that harsh environment. And pressure washing was a new procedure. And we immediately gained 100 hours on the engines than we were getting previously.

So the issue of time on wing is still a concern among government (enrolled?). And we'll looking for opportunities to look at the whole system of systems to enhance that. And the engineer particle separator system is front and center of where we're looking. And so we'll make incremental improvements over time. And eventually, we'll get the time on wing exactly where we want it.

The good news is because of our (fire-by-the-hour?) relationship and (rolls?) ability to stand by that relationship, we never go without an engine in the Osprey, unlike some of our other -- (inaudible) -- in the Navy, Army and Marines where we have bigger challenges.

Q All right. Thank you so much.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir. And thanks to everybody on the line here. Great questions and comments today.

And General Trautman, do you have any final comments?

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Well, I agree with you, Petty Officer Selby. This was a good range of questions. And I appreciate the attentive listening, and it's good to talk with you all. I look forward to talking to each of you separately or together again sometime.

Q General Trautman, Bob Cox here. I just want to say thank you. Good talking to you again, sir.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Thank you, Bob. Thanks, everybody. I appreciate it.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Yes, sir. Thank you.

Thanks again, General. That was a great call today.

GEN. TRAUTMAN: Right, thank you.

END.