

The P-8A Poseidon Adventure: Preparing for a First Deployment

Part 1 of 3



Written by: [Eric Tegler](#) on April 9, 2013

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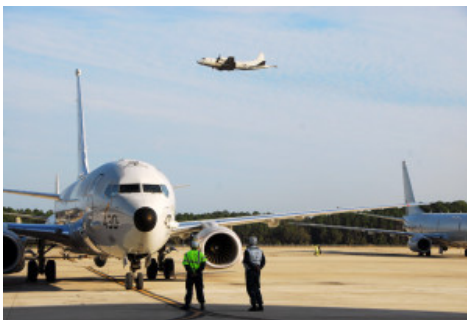
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A P-8A Poseidon assigned to Patrol Squadron (VP) 16 is seen in flight over Jacksonville, Fla., Feb. 6, 2013. U.S Navy photo by Personnel Specialist 1st Class Anthony Petry



By the time the parody-worthy screen thriller *The Poseidon Adventure* was released in 1972, the Navy's P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft had been on duty for a decade. Last year, as the Orion celebrated its 50th anniversary, its replacement, the Boeing P-8A Poseidon began fleet introduction at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. By the end of this decade, all 12 Navy maritime patrol squadrons will have converted to the P-8. And by December of this year, VP-16 will take the P-8 on its maiden deployment to the western Pacific, beginning a decades-long Poseidon adventure that won't feature Gene Hackman or Ernest Borgnine.



Patrol Squadron (VP) 16 prepares to launch the command's first P-8A Poseidon 430 at Naval Air Station Jacksonville as a P-3C Orion passes overhead, Jan. 14, 2013. The P-8 will replace the P-3, which has been in service more than 50 years. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Gulianna Dunn

It's about time. At its Cold War peak the maritime patrol community boasted 24 active VP squadrons and more than 240 P-3s. Today there are half as many squadrons and approximately 85 Orions available for operations. The average P-3C has logged more than 17,000 flight hours and one aircraft – Bureau Number 158919, or "Nine Inch Nails" as it's affectionately referred to in the fleet – has racked up more than 26,000 hours. Both numbers significantly exceed the original design life of the airframe, with much of the flight time accrued at low level. In the early 2000s, the P-3 fleet underwent necessary wing structural repair/refurbishment to keep it airworthy until a successor came along. In 2007, a fatigue-life crisis grounded 39 P-3s, and the plan to

transition to the P-8 went into gear.

Rear Adm. Sean S. Buck, Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, maintains that despite the Orion's age, it remains a capable national asset.



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“Even though the size of the MPR force is less than half of what it was during the height of the Cold War, it remains as relevant today as at any time, with 32 aircraft currently forward deployed.”

An NFO with 30 years in the Navy, Buck understands maritime patrol aviation intimately. His father flew the P-2V Neptune. His son also flies the P-3 and will transition to the P-8. The Poseidon, Buck says, [has performed as expected through developmental and operational testing](#).

“We’ve had the opportunity to fly the aircraft in a wide variety of operational environments and mission scenarios. By all accounts it’s performing very well.”

Defense Media Network caught up with Rear Adm. Buck at [Joint Base Andrews](#) outside Washington, D.C., where one of the first two LRIP 1 P-8As delivered to VP-16 had flown up from Jacksonville. The P-8 has already completed detachments to Australia, Hawaii, Guam, Japan, Alaska and Scotland, during which its anti-submarine warfare capabilities were tested against U.S. and allied nuclear and diesel submarines. The detachments and concurrent developmental/operational testing showed the aircraft on track to meet its 2013 IOC, but also turned up software obsolescence and deficiencies.

The Navy acknowledged the deficiencies last fall, awarding [Boeing](#) an \$8.5 million contract in October to update the P-8’s electronic support measures (ESM), electronic warfare (EW), and ASW systems. [Northrop Grumman](#) and subcontractors supply the systems, which will be upgraded via software fixes according to Buck.

“Through the developmental and operation testing we identified a set of deficiencies ... and we were able to either make software fixes on the fly or begin to build the software fixes to address the deficiencies most pertinent to the mission sets. Our plan is that when [VP-16] deploys on 1 December, a significant number of those deficiencies in a priority order will have been addressed.”



As of late February, the P-8 program had amassed over 6600 hours – the bulk of which have been flown by three developmental test aircraft and three operational test aircraft at [NAS Patuxent River](#). Six LRIP Lot 1 P-8s have been delivered to [NAS Jacksonville](#) ahead of schedule. Boeing is slated to deliver seven LRIP Lot 2 aircraft in 2013. [When all 117 P-8As on order are delivered by 2020](#), each squadron will have a complement of seven aircraft and twelve aircrews. Initially, transitioning squadrons will have two aircraft.



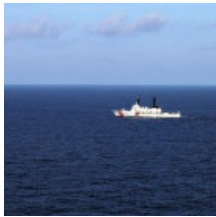
Cmdr. Molly Boron, commanding officer of Patrol Squadron (VP) 16, and Rear Adm. Sean Buck, commander of Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, receive the keys to a P-8A Poseidon while celebrating the War Eagles' successful transition to the P-8A Poseidon, Jan. 30, 2013. U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Gulianna Dunn

The P-8A Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS), VP-30, commenced training instructors in April 2012 at [NAS Corpus Christi](#), Texas. The VP-16 War Eagles began fleet introduction at NAS Jacksonville in July of 2012, and in late February the VP-5 Mad Foxes became the second squadron to begin transitioning. When VP-16 makes its WESTPAC deployment in December it will take six jets on the road. The mission will be largely the same, but the weapons system will be different.

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