



AIR COMBAT COMMAND

PEOPLE FIRST - MISSION ALWAYS

P-9A PALE ALE

Current as of February 10, 2023



MISSION

The P-9A PALE ALE is an advanced Detection and Monitoring (D&M) Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) that uses a heavily modified De Havilland DHC-8 ("Dash 8") Q202 airframe. The system is owned by Air Combat Command (ACC) and used by United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) to mitigate the gaps in their D&M area of responsibility. The Government Owned, Contractor Operated (GOCO) asset detects and monitors illicit trafficking while flying over 7,200 hours per year. Its main operating base is the U.S. Navy's Counterdrug Cooperative Security Location in Liberia, Costa Rica. In addition to operating from its primary location, typically two to three aircraft are forward deployed approximately 730 total days each year throughout the Caribbean and Central/South America.

BACKGROUND

The four PALE ALE aircraft are assigned to the 612 Theater Operations Group, 12AF (AFSOUTH) at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona. The Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) 645 Aeronautical Systems Group contracts the maintenance and aircrew to fly the USSOUTHCOM missions for the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S). 12AF (AFSOUTH) A3 fulfills Government Flight Representative (GFR) and Government Ground Representative (GGR) responsibilities associated with the operation of GOCO aircraft.

Originally sponsored in 2013 by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counter Narcotics and Global Threats (DASD CN/GT) as a Contractor Owned, Contractor Operated (COCO) asset, 100% of the PALE ALE program's costs are paid using Department of Defense's congressionally appropriated counterdrug funds. The 2015 National Defense Authorization Act authorized the purchase of the three PALE ALE aircraft as long as the Air Force provided support in executing the procurement. In January 2016, the Air Force General Counsel agreed with the arrangement and the Office of Secretary of Defense proceeded with a new start notification to Congress. In September 2016, the Air Staff designated ACC as Lead Command for the PALE ALE aircraft converting from a COCO into a GOCO mission. USSOUTHCOM received funding and purchased a fourth PALE ALE aircraft which delivered early in FY2021.

The success and effectiveness of the program is unquestionable. The P-9A PALE ALE GOCO mission continues to be a sought after capability and is directly responsible for seizing and disrupting tens of thousands of kilograms of illicit drugs destined for the United States each year, taking billions of dollars in product out of circulation.

FEATURES

The P-9A aircraft carries a crew of four; two pilots and two sensor operators along with host nation riders (with U.S. escorts), when required.

The P-9A aircraft is equipped with a SELEX Seaspray Multifunction Maritime Search Radar, automatic identification system, MX-15HD electro-optic/infrared sensor, beyond-line-of sight communications providing an unprecedented dedicated MPA capability in direct support of JIATF-S in the USSOUTHCOM AOR.

Characteristics

Primary Function: Maritime Patrol Counterdrug Detection and Monitoring

Contractor: Sierra Nevada Corporation

Power Plant: Two Pratt & Whitney PW123D turboprops

Thrust: 2,380 shaft horse power at 1,200 rpm

Wingspan: 90 feet

Length: 73 feet

Height: 24 feet, 7 inches

Weight: 25,700 pounds

Maximum Takeoff Weight: 37,300 pounds

Fuel Capacity: 9,940 pounds

Speed: 289 knots

Range: 2,000 nautical miles

Ceiling: 25,000 feet

Crew: Four (two pilots, two sensor operators)

Unit Cost: \$30M

Initial Operating Capability: 2013

Inventory: Approximately four

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