



A P-8 Poseidon makes a training flight April 11 at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. The aircraft is the replacement for the Navy's P-3 Orion.

"We have been focused on building our initial instructor cadre of P-8A pilots, [naval flight officers], weapons and electronic warfare officers," Stevens said.

But the most challenging part of the training so far has been finding aircraft to fly. They received their second P-8 in July.

"We have had a single P-8A aircraft available to conduct flight training events [since March]," Stevens said. "We have flown over 150 hours a month on the first P-8 aircraft in order to prepare our instructors."

Jacksonville will receive four more P-8s by January, Stevens said. Seven more are slated to begin delivery in April.

When VP-16 deploys, it will do so with six aircraft and 12 certified combat aircrews, Stevens said.

Training the crews

What's helped the P-8 trainers is that across the street from the squadron's hangar is the P-8A

Integrated Training Center, a simulation facility opened in December. Like other training efforts, the sim center is gradually expanding, but it already has a baseline of simulators up and running and now training fleet aircrews.

Fleet squadron training begins with two weeks of lectures and computer-based classroom work to give a basic familiarization of the aircraft. Then crews migrate to the training facility.

For the pilots, the simulation comes in a "full motion trainer" that replicates the total experience, from what pilots see out their windows to the noises they hear while flying.

The pilots can simply fly the "aircraft," or they can link up with another simulator called the weapons tactics trainer, designed for flight, electronics and weapons officers. The tactics trainer includes a mock-up of all the stations lined up in the aircraft's fuselage port side. When hooked together, they can simulate complete mission systems.

The next training step is to

take those new skills and work them in the air, something that VP-16 began doing the week of Aug. 13. Stevens said the arrival of more aircraft over the remainder of this year should make training easier.

The enlisted maintenance crews are also making the transition to the new aircraft, attending classes at the Jacksonville Air Technical Training Unit — which also conducts advance training for P-3 and helicopter maintainers onboard NAS Jacksonville.

Since the P-8 airframe is similar to other commercial aircraft made by Boeing, the maintainers from both VP-30 and VP-16 are learning this new aircraft together, under the tutelage of experts provided by the manufacturer.

The maintenance classroom training, Stevens said, is peppered with visits to the VP-30 hangar to get "hands on" with the actual aircraft — visits that can be tough to schedule.

"The aircraft doesn't spend much time on the deck," Stevens said. "When it is on the deck, maintainers or [ordnance crews] are training on it." □



Cmdr. Gordo Wilson, above, leader of the P-8 Poseidon Fleet Introduction Team, goes over the P-8's flight controls April 11 in Jacksonville, Fla. At left, Lt. Mike Steffers instructs Lt. Scott Hodson on the finer points of his display at his station inside the P-8. The first fleet squadron, VP-16, began its transition from the P-3 Orion to the P-8 Poseidon aircraft in July and will finish in December.