

FTCN Replay: Rolling Out Advanced EW Systems for the Navy

Host Ken Miller recently sat down with Captain David Rueter, call sign Roto, to discuss the current state and future trajectory of PMA234, Navy Airborne Electronic Attack. With decades of history and a forward-looking mission, PMA234 balances legacy systems and cutting-edge technologies to maintain readiness and effectiveness in an evolving threat landscape.

“Our Granddaddy System: The ALQ-99”

Captain Rueter began by acknowledging the extensive portfolio under PMA234’s management. “Our two large ACAT1 programs are the Next Gen Jammer Mid Band, the ALQ-249, and the Next Gen Jammer Low Band. But honestly, one of the things that takes most of my time is the ALQ-99, the tactical jamming system that’s been supporting the Joint Force since 1971,” said Rueter. Despite its age, the ALQ-99 has undergone continuous upgrades for maintainability and capability.

“The ALQ-99 today is not the same thing that fielded in 1971.”

While the ALQ-99 remains critical, Rueter made it clear that the system is nearing the end of its service life. “The capability and capacity that NGJ Mid Band and Low Band will bring far exceed what the ALQ-99 can do.”

Intrepid Tiger ALQ-231: The Marine Corps’ EW Workhorse

Another key element in PMA234’s portfolio is the Intrepid Tiger ALQ-231. “It’s a family of systems that provides electronic warfare for the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF),” explained Rueter. The Intrepid Tiger’s adaptability

has been instrumental in evolving to meet the Marine Corps' needs.

"The Marine Corps mission changed," Rueter said, describing how the system's pod-based architecture has allowed it to be repackaged for platforms ranging from the Harrier to the V-22 Osprey. The V5 version, designed for the KC-130J, is now in its critical design review phase.

"As the Marine Corps mission evolved, we've been able to use the same building blocks to provide what they need."

Meeting Modern Challenges with Next Gen Jammer

The Next Gen Jammer (NGJ) is central to the Navy's future electronic attack capabilities. The Mid Band variant has already achieved significant milestones. "We've recently delivered another software build to the fleet and are challenging the system to keep pace with the adversary," Rueter said.

Rueter emphasized the importance of frequent software updates. "Why can't our weapon systems be like our cell phones? I want a new software build for the pod on a quarterly basis."

"When the NGJ Mid Band works, it is eye-watering."

As for the Low Band, Rueter confirmed the program's contract with L3Harris, with a focus on delivering incremental capabilities in the near term. "If we need this system, what can it provide more than the ALQ-99 in three years? That's the challenge we're working on now."

Future Directions and Industry Collaboration

Looking ahead, Rueter highlighted the need for a broader vision. "If we just build jamming pods for the Growler, we'll go away when the Growler goes away," he said. Instead, PMA234 aims to position itself as the Navy's center of expertise in offensive electronic attack.

Rueter also called on industry to support the mission by

advancing open architectures and solving power-generation challenges. “How do I generate more RF power using less electrical power and generating less heat? That’s the physics problem we need to solve.”

“We’re challenging industry to provide open architectures and innovative solutions for tomorrow’s threats.”

Closing Thoughts

Captain Rueter’s insights underscore the complexities and opportunities in modernizing Navy airborne electronic attack capabilities. Balancing the demands of legacy systems, evolving threats, and future readiness, PMA234 remains at the forefront of electromagnetic spectrum warfare. As Rueter succinctly put it, “We’re not just building systems; we’re building the future of airborne electronic attack.

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