MQ-8C’s surface warfare upgrade: Integrated, capable, ready to fly

By Lt. Neil “Shivo” Whitesell

UX-24, in support of the MQ-8 Fire Scout program, set an aggressive goal to deliver a fully tested surface warfare (SUW) upgrade to the MQ-8C Fire Scout fleet at an accelerated pace.

The SUW increment is designed to integrate the new AN/ZPY-8 maritime surface search radar with the proven BRITE Star Block II (BSBII) targeting turret, and the powerful Minotaur processing suite aboard the MQ-8C.

The radar will provide long-range detection and tracking and radar imaging capabilities. Fielding of the AN/ZPY-8 equipped MQ-8C will enhance the aircraft’s current maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and enhance the lethality of the new Littoral Combat Ship-based Naval Strike Missile by providing an unmanned, organic over-the-horizon targeting platform.

The only exception is the option to wear coverings with camouflage patterns that match the Navy’s existing camo uniform.

Fastening devices must be neutral in color and made of elastic, cord, string and loop. They must tie around the back of the ears or back of the head. It’s ok to use face coverings with barrel lock or back coverings with barrel lock back coverings. They must not interfere with wearing eyeglasses or cause them to fog. Single-layer face covering already available through Defense Logistics Agency and Navy Exchange Service Command are acceptable and meet standards.

Face coverings worn in uniform must overall be conservative in appearance, non-offensive and exhibit nothing that will bring discredit upon the wearer or the Navy.

Since April 5, the Navy has required the wearing of cloth face coverings for all military, Navy civilian and contractors as well as family members while on DoD property, installations and facilities when maintaining proper social distancing between people isn’t possible.

Those rules, laid out in NAVADMIN message 100/20, remain in effect. Now, the Navy’s top uniformed personnel official, Vice Adm. John B. Nowell has issued further guidance in NAVADMIN 194/20 on face coverings which can be worn in uniform and how to get them.

Initial face covering guidance facilitated immediate wear and availability of face coverings as one of several COVID-19 protective measures,” Nowell wrote. “Procurement, design and wear guidance was less defined pending the availability of more durable and conservative designed government procured face coverings.”

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This initial flexibility was by necessity, Nowell said, to quickly put personal protective equipment (PPE) in the hands of Sailors and provided unit commanders flexibility in procuring face coverings through “multiple sources, designs, colors and durability,” allowing them to “rapidly field face coverings to their personnel.”

Since design type and configuration have been narrowed for wear with the uniform, here’s what you need to know about what face coverings can be worn in uniform and how to get them.

The Navy is now requiring face coverings be plain black, brown, tan, white, grey, green, or blue. No lettering/wording, logos, symbols, prints or patterns are authorized except the camouflage pattern that matches the Navy’s existing camo uniform.

The test team is cleared to launch and ready to test.

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