Navy Delayed Announcement of First MQ-8C Deployment Five Weeks

An MQ-8C Fire Scout attached to the “Sea Knights” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5, takes off from the flight deck of the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), Jan. 6, 2022. U.S. NAVY / Petty Officer 2nd Class Danielle Baker

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has deployed the MQ-8C version of its Fire Scout unmanned helicopter for the first time but waited five weeks to make the announcement.

An MQ-8C, built by Northrop Grumman, was deployed operationally on Dec. 14 on board the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), the Navy and Northrop Grumman announced in Jan. 24 releases.

The deployment was apparent before Jan. 24 in a series Navy
photographs taken Jan. 6 while the MQ-8C was operating from the USS Milwaukee in the Caribbean Sea. The ship was deployed in the U.S. 4th Fleet’s area of operations in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South’s mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, according to the caption.

The Milwaukee had departed Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on Jan. 3 after two weeks in port following an outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in the crew.

The MQ-8C was being operated by the “Sea Knights” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5. The squadron also operates the MH-60S Seahawk manned helicopter and is using both aircraft in counter-narcotics operations.

The Fire Scout “will identify targets of interest and refine surveillance data of existing targets of interest, allowing for enhanced capabilities for counter illicit drug trafficking missions,” the Navy said in a release.

“This is a significant milestone in the MQ-8C Fire Scout program,” said Navy Capt. Eric Soderberg, the Navy’s Fire Scout program manager. “The transition from the MQ-8B to the MQ-8C Fire Scout has brought improved sensors and more than doubles the on-station endurance. Advances in Fire Scout’s capabilities further our successful integration of unmanned platforms at sea and the Navy and Marine Corps unmanned campaign plan.”

“Our partnership with the U.S. Navy has been critical in developing Fire Scout’s multi-mission autonomous capabilities which provide greater situational awareness to the joint force,” said Lance Eischeid, director, Fire Scout program, Northrop Grumman. “With the ability to operate from a range of surface ships, MQ-8C Fire Scout is a powerful platform that allows the U.S. Navy to increase the detection and tracking of targets through its onboard sensors and integration with
manned assets.”

“Fire Scout is a force multiplier, not only in our current mission, but in every mission the U.S. Navy conducts,” said Cmdr. Brian Forster, commanding officer of Milwaukee. “I am very excited of the team I have onboard which has already, and will continue to, demonstrate how manned and unmanned assets can work together to effectively achieve the mission.”

In December, an MQ-8C was photographed on the deck of Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Jackson (LCS 6) while in port in Apra Harbor, Guam. The caption stated the Jackson was part of Destroyer Squadron Seven “on a rotational deployment in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operation to enhance interoperability with partners and serve as a ready-response force in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”

The MQ-8C in the Guam photograph was going through pre-deployment functional ground checks for a detachment of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 23 — based at Naval Air Station North Island, California — that will operate the MQ-8C from the USS Jackson.

The MQ-8C, which achieved initial operational capability in June 2019, is an upgrade to the Fire Scout System mainly in that it uses a Bell 407 airframe, which is larger than the earlier-design MQ-8B’s airframe and equipped with more powerful engines, thus having a greater speed, payload and endurance, up to 10+ hours of endurance on station and a range of more than 1,000 nautical miles.

The MQ-8C is equipped with the Leonardo ZPY-8 Osprey search radar or an electro-optical/infrared sensor and uses the same ground control station and the MQ-8B. The Navy plans to add more capability in the form of Link 16 data link, passive targeting, and a mine-countermeasures payload.

Northrop Grumman was under contract to deliver 38 MQ-8Cs, all of which have been delivered and will replace the earlier
MQ-8B version, of which 30 have been delivered to the fleet.

Pilot Ejects as F-35C Lightning II has Landing Mishap on USS Carl Vinson

An F-35C Lightning II, assigned to the “Argonauts” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 147, lands on the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), Jan. 2. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Megan Alexander

ARLINGTON, Va. – An F-35C Lightning II suffered a landing mishap Jan. 24 on the flight deck of USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) while the carrier was conducting routine flight operations in the South China Sea, the U.S Pacific Fleet said Jan. 24.
The pilot safely ejected from the aircraft and was recovered by U.S. military helicopter, according to a release.

“The pilot is in stable condition,” the release said. “There were seven total Sailors injured; three Sailors required medevac to a medical treatment facility in Manila, Philippines, and four were treated by on-board medical personnel.”

All three medevacs were in stable condition and of the four Sailors treated by on-board medical, three have been released. Additional details and the cause of the inflight mishap is under investigation.

The F-35C was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 147 (VFA-147), a unit of Carrier Air Wing Two. VFA-147 is the first F-35C squadron to deploy overseas on an aircraft carrier, having deployed Aug. 2, 2021. A second F-35C squadron, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314, is deployed a unit of Carrier Air Wing Nine on board USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72).

U.S. Navy Interdicts Stateless Vessel Previously Caught Smuggling Weapons
U.S. service members conduct a boarding on a stateless fishing vessel transiting international waters the Gulf of Oman as a rigid-hull inflatable boat and patrol coastal ship USS Chinook (PC 9) sail nearby. U.S. NAVY

MANAMA, Bahrain – On Jan. 18, U.S. 5th Fleet ships interdicted a stateless fishing vessel in the Gulf of Oman that was caught smuggling illicit weapons off the coast of Somalia last year, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command / U.S. 5th Fleet said Jan. 23.

Guided-missile destroyer USS Cole (DDG 67) and patrol coastal ship USS Chinook (PC 9) interdicted the stateless vessel transiting from Iran in waters outside of any state’s territorial sea along a route historically used to traffic weapons to the Houthis in Yemen.

During a flag verification boarding and subsequent search, U.S. forces discovered 40 tons of urea fertilizer, a chemical compound with agricultural applications that is also known to be used as an explosive precursor.
The vessel was the same stateless dhow interdicted in February 2021 off the coast of Somalia by guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) and discovered to be carrying weapons. Among the cache of weapons seized during the February 2021 interdiction were thousands of AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and crew served weapons. The inventory also included barrels, stocks, optical scopes and weapon systems.

Following the Jan. 18 interdiction, the U.S. Navy transferred the vessel, cargo and five Yemeni crewmembers to Yemen coast guard officials Jan. 21.

U.S. naval forces regularly perform maritime security operations in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of legitimate trade and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and other unlawful activity.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses approximately 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Strait of Bab al Mandeb.

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Navy’s Newest Fire Scout UAV Version Apparently on First Deployment
An MQ-8C Fire Scout attached to the “Sea Knights” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5, takes off from the flight deck of the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), Jan. 6, 2022. U.S. NAVY / Petty Officer 2nd Class Danielle Baker

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy has not officially announced it yet, but its newest version of the Navy’s Fire Scout unmanned helicopter — the MQ-8C — apparently is on its first deployment, according to Navy photographs.

An MQ-8C Fire Scout was depicted in series of Navy photographs taken Jan. 6 while the MQ-8C was operating from the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5) in the Caribbean Sea. The ship was deployed in the U.S. 4th Fleet’s area of operations in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South’s mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, according to the caption.

The MQ-8C was being operated by the “Sea Knights” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5. The
squadron also operates the MH-60S Seahawk manned helicopter.

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The MQ-8C can carry the ZPY-8 search radar or an electro-optical/infrared sensor and uses the same ground control station and the MQ-8B. The Navy plans to add more capability in the form of Link 16 data link, passive targeting, and a mine-countermeasures payload.

Northrop Grumman was under contract to deliver 38 MQ-8Cs, all of which have been delivered. The company has delivered 30 of the earlier MQ-8B version.
Capt. Joshua Appezzato, air boss, aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), delivers motivating remarks to the air department at quarters on the flight deck in this 2021 photo. The carrier will be the next to receive modifications to operate the F-35C Lightning II.

U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Robert Stamer

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s next aircraft carrier to receive modifications to operate the F-35C Lightning II strike fighter is the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), according to a Navy official.
USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) – the first carrier to deploy with the F-35C – and USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) currently are deployed to the Western Pacific with F-35Cs as part of their air wings. USS George H. W. Bush (CVN 77), having emerged in August from a Drydock Planned Incremental Availability at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia, operated the F-35C in mid-December for the first time.

Rear Adm. Jim Downey, program executive officer for carriers, speaking Jan. 21 to reporters, detailing the plan through fiscal 2025, said the George Washington was in the final stages of its mid-life Refueling and Complex Overhaul at Newport News Shipbuilding in Newport News, Virginia. The USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) would follow George Washington in receiving the F-35C modifications and would be followed by USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), which recently began RCOH.

The second Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), will be the first ship of its class to receive F-35C modifications. The lead ship, USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), is scheduled to receive the modifications during a Planned Incremental Availability period in fiscal 2025.

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Fairbanks Morse Defense Acquires Maxim Watermakers

BELOIT, Wis. – Fairbanks Morse Defense, a portfolio company of Arcline Investment Management, has acquired Maxim Watermakers, a privately owned provider of desalination and water treatment technologies for marine defense applications based in Shreveport, Louisiana.
The company’s water treatments systems, which provide life-sustaining water for crews during ship deployments, position Maxim as an essential addition for FMD to provide turnkey onboard solutions and global technical support that ensure crews are always mission ready.

“What we do is critically important to the safety of our nation and the world, and FMD is firmly committed to being a single-source partner who can deliver turnkey services when and where our customers need us with no time to spare,” said FMD CEO George Whittier. “Maxim has a strong reputation of producing high-quality water treatment systems with a customer-centric approach, which makes it a great addition to our rapidly growing array of best-in-class marine technologies.”

Operating from a 50,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Shreveport, Louisiana, Maxim currently delivers two lines of seawater reverse osmosis desalination systems and one brackish water reverse osmosis desalination system. Its heat recovery evaporators utilize waste heat to make high-quality potable water from seawater, brackish water, or contaminated feed water sources. Maxim’s products and services include evaporators, reverse osmosis systems, salinity monitoring equipment, cleaning solutions, engineering, parts fabrication and technical services.

“Like FMD, Maxim does not take lightly the role that we play in making sure our military marine customers are mission-ready,” said Brian Herbert, Maxim CEO. “Our commitment to quality has already earned us the trust of military leadership and becoming part of FMD further strengthens that trust. As part of the FMD brand, we will be able to deploy our technology and expand to more ship classes more quickly.”

The acquisition of Maxim Watermakers continues to solidify Fairbanks Morse Defense’s position as an integrated defense contractor and turnkey solutions provider to the U.S. Navy and
U.S. Coast Guard. In recent months, FMD has completed multiple acquisitions to better serve defense customers, including its acquisitions of Federal Equipment Co., Hunt Valve Co., Ward Leonard and Welin Lambie.

7th Fleet Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea

On Jan. 20, USS Benfold (DDG 65) asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law. U.S NAVY

YOKOSUKA, Japan – On Jan. 20, USS Benfold (DDG 65) asserted
navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law. At the conclusion of the operation, USS Benfold exited the excessive claim and continued operations in the South China Sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a release.

This freedom of navigation operation, or FONOP, upheld the rights, freedoms and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging restrictions on innocent passage imposed by the People’s Republic of China, Taiwan and Vietnam and also by challenging the PRC’s claim to straight baselines enclosing the Paracel Islands.

The PRC’s statement about this mission is false, the 7th Fleet said, adding that USS Benfold conducted this FONOP in accordance with international law and then continued on to conduct normal operations in international waters. The operation reflects its commitment to uphold freedom of navigation and lawful uses of the sea as a principle. The United States is defending every nation’s right to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, as USS Benfold did this week.

The People’s Liberation Army Navy Southern Theater’s statement is the latest in a long string of PRC actions to misrepresent lawful U.S. maritime operations and assert its excessive and illegitimate maritime claims at the expense of its Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea, 7th Fleet said. The PRC’s behavior stands in contrast to the United States’ adherence to international law and our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. All nations, large and small, should be secure in their sovereignty, free from coercion, and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules and norms. To this end, the United States works with a broad range of allies and partners across the region to promote and enable cooperative approaches to regional security challenges.
Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations.

**Paracel Islands**

The PRC, Taiwan and Vietnam each claim sovereignty over the Paracel Islands. All three claimants require either permission or advance notification before a military vessel engages in “innocent passage” through the territorial sea. Under international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention, the ships of all states, including their warships, enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea. The unilateral imposition of any authorization or advance-notification requirement for innocent passage is unlawful. By engaging in innocent passage without giving prior notification to or asking permission from any of the claimants, the United States challenged the unlawful restrictions imposed by the PRC, Taiwan, and Vietnam, 7th Fleet said. The United States demonstrated that innocent passage is not subject to such restrictions.

The United States also challenged the People’s Republic of China’s 1996 declaration of straight baselines encompassing the Paracel Islands. Regardless of which claimant has sovereignty over these features, it is unlawful to draw straight baselines around the Paracel Islands in their entirety, 7th Fleet said. With these baselines, the PRC has attempted to claim more internal waters, territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf than it is entitled to under international law. By conducting this operation, the United States demonstrated these waters are beyond what the PRC can lawfully claim as its territorial sea, and the PRC claimed straight baselines around the Paracel Islands are inconsistent with international law.
CNO Visits Stennis Space Center

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday talks to Aerographer’s Mate 2nd Class Kevin Rolka in the oceanographic high bay of Fleet Survey Team headquarters during his first visit to Naval Oceanography and Meteorology Command at Stennis Space Center, Mississippi, Jan. 20. NAVAL METEOROLOGY AND OCEANOGRAPHY / Lt. Bobby Dixon

STENNIS, Miss. — Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday and Vice Adm. Jeffrey Trussler, the deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare and director of naval intelligence, visited Navy commands at Stennis Space Center, Mississippi, Jan. 20, the CNO's public affairs officer said in
a release.

Gilday met with Sailors and civilians and toured Commander, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command (CNMOC) facilities where he received updates about unmanned capabilities, electromagnetic maneuver warfare and undersea warfare.

“As we find ourselves in the breach of strategic competition, the Navy’s role in this competition remains clear,” said Gilday. “We need to control the seas and project power across all domains, and to support that we will leverage innovation, technology and our people to maintain our competitive advantage.”

During the visit to the Glider Operations Center, Gilday observed glider pilots directing unmanned littoral battlespace gliders deployed worldwide using satellite communications. The Naval Oceanographic Office, a subordinate command of CNMOC that maximizes seapower by applying relevant oceanographic knowledge in support of U.S. national security, currently has the largest fleet of gliders in the world.

Throughout the visit, Gilday received updates about unmanned underwater vehicles, unmanned sensor operations and various ocean projects.

“Unmanned systems have and will continue to play a key part in future operations on, above and under the sea,” Gilday added. “I’m thankful for the work and dedication of Naval Oceanography who continues to help ensure the Navy can meet the demands and challenges of today and tomorrow.”

This visit marked CNO’s first trip to CNMOC, the Department of Defense’s authoritative source for environmental characterization and transforming knowledge of physical battlespace into winning decisions.

Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command directs and oversees more than 2,500 globally distributed military and
civilian personnel who collect, process, and exploit environmental information to assist fleet and joint commanders in all warfare areas in making better decisions faster than the adversary. The Sailors and civilians who support the mission serve in a wide range of operational, technical, scientific and service support billets around the globe.

Navy Still Plans to Start New Frigate Construction in April 2022

Then-Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite announces USS Constellation (FFG 62) as the name for the first ship in the new guided missile frigate class of ships while aboard the museum ship Constellation in Baltimore Inner Harbor,

ARLINGTON, Va. — As the first new U.S. Navy frigate works its way through detailed and functional design phases, officials still plan an April start for building the lead ship of the Constellation class.

“Right now, as far as construction, we’re targeting that date,” Capt. Kevin Smith, the frigate program manager told a briefing at the Surface Navy Association annual symposium. However, “there could be some risk to that [during the detailed design phase] but we’re looking hard at that,” he said, adding, “the one thing that we want to make sure of is, that we don’t start building a ship where the design is not mature.”

After the design phases are completed, a critical design review and a production readiness review are slated to follow in fiscal 2022. Only “then, when we’re ready” will construction begin on what will become the USS Constellation guided missile frigate (FFG 62), Smith told the Jan. 11 briefing.

The Navy began the acquisition process for a new multi-mission frigate FFG(X) in 2017, awarding a $795 million detailed design and construction contract in April 2020 to Marinette Marine, a Fincantieri company based in Marinette, Wisconsin. Marinette based its design on the Fincantieri FREMM frigate, which is in service with the French and Italian navies.

Among the capital improvements Fincantieri is making at Marinette to accommodate the first frigate’s construction is a syncrolift platform to move the 496-foot hull from dry land into the water. Unlike the littoral combat ships Marinette is building in Wisconsin, the Constellation will be too big for a side launch down a slipway. Frigate construction will be in Marinette’s Building 34, the new hull erection building, which Smith predicted would be a game changer. Big enough to
accommodate two full-size frigate hulls and one-third of another, it will allow work to continue indoors during Wisconsin winters. The frigate will be “probably close to near completion before they float it off,” and move on to integration of the propulsion plant and combat systems, Smith said.

The frigate will have a combination diesel electric and gas turbine propulsion system, which will be tried and assessed at a Land Based Engineering Test Site being built near the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Philadelphia. Testing on land will feature a full configuration of the frigate’s power plant so “we’re not learning at the waterfront where it’s a little more expensive” to fix problems, Smith said.

The Constellation will also have a beam of 64.6 feet, a draft of 18 feet and a fully loaded displacement of 7,300 tons. “The only thing aluminum on this ship is the mast. Everything else is steel,” Smith said.

The layout is very similar to the FREMM frigate, although to meet U.S. Navy standards for reliability, survivability, maintainability, habitability and lethality, Fincantieri designers “had to lengthen the hull a bit” before submitting their proposal, Smith said. The only changes the Navy made after awarding the contract were to include “buy America” provisions mandated by Congress, he said.

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Coast Guard Cutters Begin Operation Aiga in Oceania
The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Gerczak (WPC 1126), shown here on patrol off the coast of Waikiki, July 4, 2018. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew West

HONOLULU — The crews of the Coast Guard Cutter Juniper (WLB 201) and Joseph Gerczak (WPC 1126) will aim to extend the Coast Guard’s at-sea enforcement presence in the region through a 40-day patrol, the Coast Guard 14th District said Jan. 19.

“Aiga,” the Samoan word for family, is designed to integrate Coast Guard capabilities and operations with Pacific Island Country partners to protect shared national interests, combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and strengthen maritime governance in Oceania.

“Responsible fisheries management is vital to the Pacific’s well-being, prosperity, and security,” said Lt. Cmdr. Jessica Conway, the 14th District’s current operations officer. “The Coast Guard is an adaptable, responsive military force of maritime professionals whose broad legal authorities, capable assets, and expansive partnerships provide a persistent
IUU fishing operates outside the rules adopted at the national and international level. It threatens the ocean’s ecosystem, food security, and economic growth around the world by undercutting law-abiding fishermen and communities that depend on fish and fish products.

“An essential protein source for more than 40% of the world’s population, fish stocks are critical to maritime sovereignty and resource security of many nations,” said Cmdr. Christopher Jasnoch, the Juniper’s commanding officer.

As part of Operation Blue Pacific 2022, the crews of the Juniper and Joseph Gerczak will conduct information sharing activities to advance the U.S.’s bilateral and cultural relationships with Melanesia and Polynesia.

The Coast Guard regularly exercises bilateral shiprider agreements with partner nations. These agreements help to host foreign law enforcement personnel to better exercise their authority, close any global maritime law enforcement gaps, and improve cooperation, coordination, and interoperability.

Operation Blue Pacific is an overarching multi-mission Coast Guard endeavor seeking to promote maritime security, safety, sovereignty and economic prosperity in Oceania while also strengthening relationships with our partners in the region.

“To ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, the U.S. remains committed to strengthening regional alliances and enhancing emerging partnerships,” said Lt. Joseph Blinsky, Joseph Gerczak’s commanding officer. “Leading global deterrence efforts, the Coast Guard likewise remains committed to combating IUU fishing and our crews look forward to collaborating with PICs to better address this growing national security concern.”