Career Advancement: MARAD Has a Story to Tell of Good Jobs, Work-Life Balance

Ann Phillips, administrator of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration. *Brett Davis*

The Maritime Administration has a good story to tell, and Ann Phillips, the retired Navy admiral who runs MARAD, is seeking new ways to tell it.

"Not enough people know enough about the maritime ministry, and they don't know what opportunities are there for them," she said in an interview with Seapower at the Department of Transportation headquarters in Washington, D.C. "It's good paying jobs, good paying union jobs, good paying jobs with a career advancement opportunity."

MARAD, established in 1950, is the DOT agency responsible for

the nation’s waterborne transportation system, including supporting the technical aspects of ships and shipping, port and vessel operations and national security-related maritime transportation. It maintains a fleet of cargo ships in reserve to provide sealift surge capability in wartime and in case of national emergencies. Phillips was sworn in as administrator on May 16, 2022, after serving nearly 31 years in the U.S. Navy as a surface warfare officer.

Like its military brethren, the maritime industry faces challenges, such as an aging ships in the Ready Reserve Force (part of the wartime surge capability) and a shortage of Mariners. A few years ago, MARAD faced a shortage of an estimated 1,800 Mariners to be able to activate the full Ready Reserve Force for six months, such as might be required in wartime.

“And along came COVID, which made it worse for sure,” Phillips said. “People left because they weren’t guaranteed replacements. They left because they were stuck overseas. They left because they didn’t want to get COVID or they didn’t want to get involved in all the challenges of operating under those circumstances.”

Things are looking brighter. Enrollment is trending up at the MARAD-funded and owned Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, as well as the six state academies in California, Michigan, Maine, Massachusetts, New York and Texas.

MARAD has a Student Incentive Program for the state academies, and Congress authorized doubling the incentive to $64,000 over four years, which mostly covers student expenses. Upon graduation, officers become part of the Navy’s Strategic Sealift Officer Force, according to a description of the program published by the California State University Maritime Academy.

“This year we completely filled up all the slots for the

Student Incentive Program for the first time in forever," Phillips said. There was a question as to whether upping the funding would matter, but "it would appear the answer is yes, it will make a difference," Phillips said with a laugh.

The academy at Kings Point has also been working hard on recruiting, she said, and has 300 students coming into the new freshman class, up from recent years.

"They have to get through the very arduous and rigorous curriculum at Kings Point. But, that's a success," Phillips said.

Improvements

MARAD has made several improvements lately to continue to attract and retain recruits, both in terms of hardware and policy and standards.

It has developed a program to designate some qualified training entities as Centers of Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education, a voluntary program intended to improve and support the workforce. As of earlier this year, 32 centers have been designated, including colleges and other facilities in 17 states and Guam.

"It's not just credentialing Mariners, it's also workforce development for maritime more broadly," Phillips said. The designation gives the centers "bragging rights" but for the industry it helps tap into a broader set of potential industry members and provides "other opportunities to get the word about out about the maritime industry and what it can do for you."

On the policy and standards side, MARAD has implemented EMBARC, which stands for Every Mariner Builds A Respectful Culture. The program was introduced by MARAD and the Merchant Marine Academy in December 2021. It lays out policies, programs, procedures and practices to help prevent and respond

to sexual assault and harassment. The owners and operators of any vessel that embarks Merchant Marine Academy cadets on board must adopt the EMBARC standards, which include zero tolerance for sexual assault and harassment, eliminating barriers to reporting such incidents, supporting survivors, witnesses and bystanders who report incidents, among several others.

“Any vessel that is required to carry midshipmen, which is anybody receiving a payment under the maritime security program, tanker security, or cable fleet security program, plus our operators of Ready Reserve fleet vessels, all have to be a part of the program, or we may withhold their stipend, their payment,” Phillips said.

MARAD isn’t interested in withholding payments, but in ensuring the safety of Mariners at sea. Other ship operators that aren’t required to comply have been coming forward to do so, Phillips said, meaning a “vast percentage of the U.S.-flag fleet” is now EMBARC compliant.

The program was underway before she became administrator, Phillips noted, “but to be able to take it from a program to a law in a year is almost unheard of. And it has made a difference. It has made a difference. Talking to midshipmen – we have a Midshipman Advisory Council now, we were tasked to put together at Kings Point – and they talk to me about how they feel EMBARC matters and has made a difference to them. Some of them have said, I don’t know a maritime industry without EMBARC.”

EMBARC and other quality-of-life improvements MARAD is making may help in recruiting women, who are not a large part of the commercial maritime industry to date. Phillips said 8% of the U.S. industry are women but just 2% globally.

Empire State, the first ship in the new National Security Multi-Mission Vessel program to build state-of-the-art training ships for the Merchant Marine academies. *Philly Shipyard*

“There are not many women in the industry, broadly. And so, that’s a shortfall. Fifty percent of our country’s population, roughly, are women, and yet 8% of the industry is women. We know this from the Navy, you’ve got to get to a critical mass. And once you do, everything becomes more straightforward because the novelty is gone, right?” Phillips said. “And so, we’re not yet there in maritime, but if we want to, if we want to grow our Mariner pool [but] we’re missing half the people in the country, then well, that’s an obvious place to look. And if you want to make people feel safe at sea, that applies to everybody. That’s just not women. That’s Mariners broadly. So, all of that comes together in EMBARC.”

NSMV

There is also a strong new hardware push, namely getting MARAD's new National Security Multi-Mission Vessels, or NSMVs, out to the training academies to replace the older National Defense Reserve Fleet ships now in use. A model of an NSMV sat in the middle of the table in the MARAD office where we spoke.

"New York has theirs. She just took off on her summer cruise yesterday morning," Phillips said on June 11 of the ship, Empire State. "Massachusetts will be getting theirs later this summer, Patriot State, and there's three more coming for the rest of the Maritime Academies. They are tremendous training vessels. It's much more modern than the ships that we've had. Although I cast no aspersions on steam vessels or the training vessels that the academies have been using, they have all served their purpose and served their country well … but this is a state-of-the-art vessel."

The NSMV represents more than just a shiny new ship, Phillips said, it's also a boon to recruitment and retention. Students at all six of the state academies and the Merchant Marine Academy will have access to the ships, which can also be mobilized by the federal government if they are needed to respond to disasters or for humanitarian assistance.

"It makes a difference with young recruits," she said. "They don't want to see steam." The new ships also are a way to boost quality of life, as they give cadets a flexibility their forebears didn't have.

"I think the, the work-life balance piece matters now more than ever," Phillips said. "And we've seen, when I visit our Ready Reserve fleet ships – which of course are much older – and quality of life is, of course, challenged on an older vessel. But when I ask Mariners what they want, they want connectivity. They want internet, they want Starlink [satellite communications], they want be able to get on Instagram and talk to their kids. All these things that this can do, right?" she said, pointing to the NSMV model. "All

these things that can do. But they want that. They want a gym. They want good quality food.

“They just want to know you care about them.”

In addition to benefiting the training schools, the NSMV is helping bolster America’s shipbuilding industry, which suffers from a worker shortage and backed-up schedules. The NSMV ships are being built by Philly Shipyard under a firm fixed-price contract from TOTE Services LLC, the program’s vessel construction manager.

“Philly had 88 people on their rolls and now they have easily 1,400 people working on this,” Phillips said. “And we’ve been a part of that the whole way. Our small shipyard grant program helped provide them opportunities to get their very modest amounts of money to get their apprenticeship training up and running.”

The NSMV contract also enabled the shipyard to win other contracts, and now “they’ve got an order book and they’re off to the races … that’s an example of how that can be done. So, let’s keep doing it,” she said.

The Flexibility of Maritime

Merchant Marine Academy graduates also have unusual flexibility, in that they can commission with any of the military services if they choose.

“If you go to King’s Point, you … graduate with your license, either third mate or third engineer, you graduate with a Naval Reserve Commission or perhaps an active-duty commission. You can do that too. And of course, you have your degree. So, you have an engineering degree, a license, and a military commission. The world is your oyster. You can do all kinds of things with that. You’re pretty much set for the rest of your life,” Phillips said.

She recounted a story from an academy graduate whose father wanted her to go to the Naval Academy, as he was a Navy man.

“She said, no, daddy, I want to go to Kings Point, because then I can go to any of the services,” Phillips said. “And he admitted to me, yeah, she was right. In the end, she did not accept a commission, but she works for the Navy and she’s a port engineer for the Navy and handles naval vessels and using her King’s Point experience.”

Students can wait until their senior year to decide to join any of the other services.

“We’ve had Space Force commissions last year, I think two Coast Guard – lots of folks do that – but all services,” she said, noting their Merchant Marine background is still useful even if they go into another service.

“If they’re going to join the Navy with a Navy commission then they aren’t sailing U.S. flag, right? But they still come with that background. And I can tell you from personal experience, that’s a connection. … One of the ships I was on, the supply officer was a Kings Point graduate. She could stand a bridge watch any day of the week. She had no problem. All of that was learned here. She done it. She had experiential learning. It was easy for her.”

Phillips said being a Merchant Mariner is simply a good job that not enough people know about, and most people don’t understand how much of their daily goods are shipped over water.

“They don’t realize how much of their goods are moved commercially on rivers or in coastwise trade. They just don’t really think about it,” Phillips said. Also, “people don’t think of it as an industry. They don’t think of it as an industry where they can have a long-term career.”

And a flexible career at that. Phillips said during her Navy

years, “when I came back from deployment, if I had duty the next day, it was like, oh, that’s nice. You got back from deployment. You’ve been gone for eight months. Don’t be late for watch. But when you’re off in the industry, you’re off. You can work six months a year. You can work nine months a year. It’s up to you. You can do it in pieces. It depends on who you’re sailing for and what your watch rotation is. But you get an excellent salary and you get excellent benefits … if you’re part of a labor union or with your company.”

That flexibility means “you can manage your life in a different way,” Phillips said. “And you can’t do that in the military.”

The Future

Asked where she would like the maritime industry to be in five years, Phillips said she’d like to see the construction of more sealift and tanker security vessels, expanded capacity at the Kings Point academy and a congressional appropriation for a grant program to help expand the work of the Centers of Excellence.

“The Center of Excellence program has a grant program authorized, but not appropriated,” Phillips said. “So, an appropriation there would help us work collaboratively across the selected centers of excellence institutions and give them the ability to build more capacity, to do more recruiting locally.”

One goal she described as aspirational would be a collaboration across all the maritime stakeholders to create an advocacy program for Merchant Mariners to “get that word out there” about the good jobs the industry can provide.

The U.S. Marine Corps has had Super Bowl ads: Why not one for the Merchant Marine?

From the July-August issue of Seapower *magazine.*

CNO Reviews Quality of Service Initiatives at HII Newport News Shipbuilding

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti reviewed Quality of Service initiatives with Navy and shipyard leadership at HII Newport News Shipbuilding in Newport News, Virginia, July 31, 2024.

Last year, the Navy signed a Joint Memo "Setting a New Course for Navy Quality of Service," to ensure Sailors have the support and resources they require. During her second visit to Newport News, Franchetti received updates on the shipyard's major programs, infrastructure investments and QoS improvements.

"It's great to hear from our Sailors here in the Newport News Shipbuilding that our Quality of Service initiatives are

making a difference," said Franchetti. "I appreciate the candid conversations and hard work to remove barriers that has occurred this past year as a result of the Cross Functional Team's efforts to work with our industry partners and other stakeholders to transform Fleet feedback into results."

Franchetti visited the triad of the USS Columbus (SSN 762) to get their perspective on QoS initiatives and improvements to safety and security outside of the shipyard. They also discussed a new contract incentive that has enabled HII to construct two new buildings on the pier where Engineering Overhauls of Columbus and then USS Boise (SSN 764) will take place. One building will house berthing and a galley, and the other a work center to improve the quality of life of the service members on board these submarines.

While touring the facilities CNO was briefed on the design and planning underway for a new parking garage that will create more than 2,000 new spaces at NNS once it is complete in 2026, as well as the plans for the construction of a Carrier Refueling Overhaul Workcenter (CROW) facility, which will provide approximately 80,000 square feet of multi-use space for Sailors and HII-NNS shipyard workers. She also saw the 24/7 micro market, designed to provide Sailors with access to more quality food options.

The trip included a tour of Huntington Hall, where renovations are currently ongoing. The updates include refurnished furniture and improvements such as upgraded televisions, kitchen equipment, and an upgraded air conditioning system in the gym, which will soon be available for 24/7 access.

"These upgrades to our existing facilities are making Newport News a better place to work and live for our Sailors," said Franchetti. "This is just the beginning of Quality of Service improvements, and I am committed to ensuring this work continues here – and then scales out to other Fleet concentration areas – for the next generation of Sailors."

Vice Admiral Scott Gray serves as the chair of the QoS Cross Functional Team that reports directly to Admiral James Kilby, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, on the CFT's efforts to establish standards and measures for QoS and bring them to life at Newport News Shipbuilding.

USS Florida Returns to Kings Bay Following 727-Day Deployment

From Petty Officer 1st Class Travis Alston, 1 August 2024

KINGS BAY, Ga. – Ohio-class guided-missile submarine USS Florida (SSGN 728) returned to Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Georgia, following a 727- day deployment to 5th, 6th, and 7th

fleet areas of operations, July 31.

Assigned to Commander, Submarine Group Ten, USS Florida departed in August 2022 and conducted five crew swaps, before returning to Kings Bay.

“We have demonstrated the versatility of SSGN platform to operate anywhere at any time,” said Capt. Peter French, blue crew commanding officer. “We operated in several different oceans. It’s very uncommon for East Coast submarines to deploy to the west coast, but we managed to do an exceptional job completing the mission.”

During their deployment, the crews conducted vital missions crucial to national security, enhancing operational capabilities and reinforcing deterrence effort, while traveling more than 60,000 nautical miles. The crews also had the opportunity to visit Greece, Guam, Diego Garcia and the United Kingdom, as part of routine port calls.

“Our Sailors are the true strength for our boat and the Navy,” said Master Chief Electronics Technician Submarine, Navigation Christopher L. Martell, gold crew chief of the boat. “They consistently impress me with their unwavering dedication to the submarine force. We train and we fight as a family, and I’m excited to get the crews back home to the actual families and enjoy some much needed time off.”

USS Florida entered Norfolk Naval Shipyard in July 2003 to undergo a refueling and conversion from an SSBN to an SSGN. The conversion was completed in April 2006 and is homeported in Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Georgia.

On May 25, 2006 the boat had a return to service ceremony at Naval Station Mayport, Florida.

Submarine Group Ten is the nation’s preeminent provider of sea-based strategic deterrence, Tomahawk Land Attack Missile

strikes, and unique submarine-based special operations capabilities. The base is home to all east coast Ohio-class submarines.

For more news from Commander, Submarine Group 10, visit Commander, Submarine Group 10 (navy.mil) and http://www.facebook.com/submarinegroupten

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Chad Cary to Lead NOAA Corps and NOAA Office of Marine and Aviation Operations

Rear Adm. Chad Cary will serve as the director of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps and NOAA Office of Marine and Aviation Operations. (Image Credit: NOAA)

By David Hall, NOAA Communications, August 2, 2024

The U.S. Senate confirmed on Thursday President Biden's nomination of NOAA Rear Adm. Chad Cary to lead the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps (NOAA Corps) and NOAA Office of

Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO).

“Supporting the nation’s environmental and economic security is one of the Biden-Harris Administration’s top priorities and the NOAA Corps, NOAA’s fleet, and the dedicated professionals who operate these critical components of our infrastructure are vital in fulfilling that mission,” said U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. “Rear Adm. Cary’s leadership will ensure that we can continue to provide essential services to the public – from hurricane forecasts to nautical charts. I congratulate him on his confirmation to serve as the next director of OMAO and the NOAA Corps and thank him for his service to our nation.”

In addition to leading the NOAA Corps – one of the nation’s eight uniformed services – Cary will oversee NOAA’s fleet of 15 research and survey ships and 10 specialized aircraft, including the agency’s “hurricane hunters,” all of which are operated by a combination of NOAA Corps officers and civilians.

“Rear Adm. Cary is a proven leader who has the skills, experience and dedication needed to advance NOAA’s science, service and stewardship mission,” said NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad, Ph.D. “I am confident he will lead the NOAA Corps and NOAA fleet both capably and effectively as we work together to meet the challenges of a dynamic world.”

Cary has served in many operational and management assignments with NOAA, most recently as deputy director of the NOAA Corps and OMAO’s deputy director for operations. In that capacity, he oversaw the day-to-day operations of OMAO’s marine, aviation and uncrewed systems operations, as well as OMAO’s health and cyber services.

He has held command positions aboard NOAA ships Reuben Lasker and John N. Cobb. He has also served as the director of the NOAA Corps Commissioned Personnel Center and applied his at-

sea and shoreside operational experience and expertise to support NOAA Fisheries, NOAA's National Weather Service and NOAA headquarters.

"I am grateful for this opportunity to continue serving the nation alongside our highly skilled and dedicated workforce," said Cary. "I would also like to thank my predecessor, Vice Adm. (select) Nancy Hann, for her vision, courageous leadership and service to the nation."

Cary was born and raised in Alaska. He earned a bachelor's degree in environmental science with an emphasis in marine sciences from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before joining the NOAA Corps in 2001. He also holds a master's degree in geography from Portland State University and a graduate certificate in legislative studies from Georgetown University.

VMFT-402 begins standup at Fighter Town East

10 Jun 2024 | Lance Cpl. Kyle Baskin, Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION BEAUFORT, S.C. – Three F-5N Tiger IIs arrived to Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Beaufort, South Carolina, on May 30, 2024, as part of Marine Fighter Training Squadron (VMFT) 402's stand up process to serve as an adversary squadron.

"It's a huge day in the lifecycle of our squadron," said Lt. Col. Andrew Christ, commanding officer, VMFT-402, Marine Aircraft Group 41 (MAG-41), 4th Marine Aircraft Wing (4th MAW), "we just delivered the first F-5N Tiger IIs, and it marks a significant milestone in our stand up towards activation."

VMFT-402 will serve as the Marine Corps' second adversary squadron; VMFT-401 located at MCAS Yuma is already in operation. Both VMFT-401 and VMFT-402 will be assigned to MAG-41, 4th MAW, Marine Forces Reserve.

“This is a unique collaboration between the air station and the parent unit of VMFT-401, which will remain MAG-41 in Dallas Fort Worth, Texas and 4th MAW,” said Bortnem, “so this is a very unique partnership that we have with our ability to host aircraft and units that are both part of 2nd MAW and 4th MAW.”

“We are expanding to establish a second adversary squadron that is VMFT-402, here in Beaufort, South Carolina,” said Maj. Erin Mathis, operations officer, VMFT-402, Marine Aircraft Group 41, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing.

An adversary squadron acts as opposing forces during training with other squadrons. Pilots with adversary squadrons study the tactics and maneuvers of foreign adversaries to employ them in training to create realistic scenarios.

“We, as experts in adversary tactics and experts in the way the adversary fights, provide the fleet units with a unique look at basically what the adversary does,” said Mathis.

“The ability for us to have on-station adversary support is absolutely critical to the development of both our fleet F-35 pilots in the future and our current training F-35 pilots,” said Bortnem.

Having a local adversary squadron allows for more training opportunities, an easier planning process and allows for VMFT-402 to provide in person debriefs.

“We have a rapidly growing F-35 fleet particularly on the East Coast now and Marine Corps aviation has an insatiable need for as much adversary support and training as they can receive to prepare them for the next fight that’s coming,” said Christ.

Due to available space to house and support the squadron, and the proximity to Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 and the closest training ranges, MCAS Beaufort was chosen to be the home of VMFT-402, said Bortnem.

“This has been Fighter Town East since 1950. VMFT-401, the previous squadron, had been here many, many times before. So the ability for VMFT-402 to be housed here just makes perfect sense,” he said.

The unit will officially reactivate as Marine Medium Helicopter Training Squadron (HMMT) 402 in September 2024, and will then be redesignated as VMFT-402.

Originally, HMMT-402 was stood up in 1967 and trained helicopter pilots for the Vietnam War, before it was decommissioned in 1972, said MSgt. Jason Tracoma, senior enlisted advisor, VMFT-402.

“Our short term goals will evolve over the course of the summer, we’re going to go through a number of maintenance inspections to make sure that we’re safe for flight operations autonomously,” said Christ.

“It’s been a long time coming, we’ve needed this capability on the East Coast for a number of years and can’t come soon enough,” said Christ, “we need to get our house ready for the high fight.”

MCAS Beaufort provides support to the 2nd MAW and attached II Marine Expeditionary Force units. The air station is the operational base for Marine Aircraft Group 31 and its associated squadrons. MCAS Beaufort is home to Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501, the premiere F-35 training squadron on the East Coast.

Royal Australian Air Force Welcomes First Northrop Grumman MQ-4C Triton

The multi-intelligence MQ-4C Triton operates at higher altitude and has longer endurance than medium-altitude systems to provide commanders with unmatched persistent maritime surveillance. (Northrop Grumman)

Australia's Triton program remains on track with three additional aircraft currently in production

From Northrop Grumman, July 31, 2024

TINDAL, Australia – July 31, 2024 – Northrop Grumman Corporation (NYSE: NOC) joined the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) to welcome its first MQ-4C Triton uncrewed aircraft during a ceremony at RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory. The arrival of the high-altitude, long-endurance Triton enables

Australia to deploy the most advanced maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting capability available today.

- The first MQ-4C Triton arrived at RAAF Base Tindal on June 16 following a three-segment flight from Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland.

- Northrop Grumman personnel worked closely with their RAAF counterparts to prepare for the aircraft's arrival and support basing activities.

- Australia's Triton program remains on track with three additional aircraft currently in production at Northrop Grumman's Palmdale, California, facility.

Experts:

Christine Zeitz, chief executive and general manager, Australia & New Zealand, Northrop Grumman: "As one of the most advanced intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting systems in the world, and a product of a cooperative development program between Australia and the United States, Triton is a proven multi-mission, multi-domain national security asset vital to the Australian Defence Force during this critical time.

Capt. Josh Guerre, U.S. Navy Triton program manager: "The delivery of Australia's first MQ-4C represents a significant step in a collaboration between the U.S. and Australia to drive the future of multi domain intelligence collection. The U.S. Navy is thrilled to collaborate with Australia to deliver this game changing intelligence capability into the 7th Fleet area of responsibility."

Program Details:

Built for the U.S. Navy and the RAAF, the multi-intelligence MQ-4C Triton supports a wide range of missions, including maritime patrol, signals intelligence and search and rescue. These aircraft deliver unmatched persistent surveillance for the prediction of an adversary's behavior, enabling better planning and enhancing joint military responses. Key attributes include:

- Higher operating altitude and longer endurance than medium-altitude systems
- Ultra-long operational range of 7,400 nautical miles (8,515 miles)
- Simultaneous multi-intelligence sensor operations delivering an exponential increase in mission information

Northrop Grumman successfully completed the first flight of Australia's MQ-4C Triton uncrewed aircraft at its Palmdale facility in November 2023. The remaining three Australian Tritons currently under contract are progressing as planned through their production schedules. Once fully fielded, Triton will be operated by the Number 9 Squadron from two locations to perform surveillance over the Indo-Pacific region: RAAF Base Edinburgh in South Australia, and RAAF Base Tindal in the Northern Territory.

Northrop Grumman is establishing a dynamic support environment for the progressive delivery of the Triton systems into Australia, including establishing ground stations at RAAF Base Edinburgh and facilitating aircraft integration into RAAF Base Tindal. The company is building a highly qualified Australian

workforce across both locations, leveraging extensive knowledge and experience gained from supporting U.S. Navy Triton operations.

Marine Corps’ Second F-35C Squadron Declares Initial Operational Capability

U.S. Marine Corps F-35C Lightning II aircraft assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 311, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, are staged during a live ordnance training event at the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar combat aircraft loading area, California, July 24, 2024. This was the first time VMFA-311 conducted live ordnance operations independently and a milestone for the squadron,

which declared initial operational capability on July 31, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Jennifer Sanchez)
From III Marine Aircraft Wing

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR, Calif.—Demonstrating the Marine Corps' commitment to aviation advancement, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 311, Marine Aircraft Group 11, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, declared initial operational capability on July 31, 2024.

Achieving initial operational capability is a key milestone for the squadron as part of the Marine Corps tactical aviation (TACAIR) transition plan, the transition from the AV-8B Harrier and F/A-18 Hornet to the F-35. Receiving this qualification means that VMFA-311 has the operational F-35C Lightning II aircraft, trained pilots, maintainers, and support equipment to sustain its mission essential tasks. These tasks include close air support, strike coordination and reconnaissance, anti-air warfare, suppression of enemy air defenses and electronic attacks.

"I am incredibly proud of the Marines and Sailors in this squadron as they hit this critical milestone that ensures greater lethality and operational readiness for the Wing, the Marine Corps, and the joint force," said Maj. Gen. James Wellons, commanding general of 3rd MAW.

Formerly VMA-311, the "Tomcats" of VMFA-311 reactivated in April 2023 as part of the Marine Corps' transition to an all fifth-generation force. VMFA-311 achieved its "Safe for Flight" certification in September 2023, allowing the squadron to conduct independent flight operations.

The squadron flew more than 900 sorties, approximately 1,700 hours, and completed more than 800 simulator hours and 2,400 maintenance actions to reach initial operational capability.

“Initial operational capability is a milestone and achievement in readiness,” said Lt. Col. Michael Fisher, commanding officer of VMFA-311, “It’s all on the backs of the Marines out there. What they do in their day-to-day actions is what made this possible.”

In addition to achieving initial operational capability, VMFA-311 Marines have trained at the most advanced aviation schools offered by the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps. Maj. Timothy Potter, an F-35C pilot, graduated from the U.S. Navy Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor Program, more commonly known as TOPGUN, becoming a pilot instructor and increasing the squadron’s ability to train other pilots. Warrant Officer John Page, an aviation ordnance officer, graduated from the Marine Corps Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course. Marines completed lightning tactics instructor qualifications, air combat maneuvering qualifications, division lead and section lead qualifications.

The next step for VMFA-311 is full operational capability, attained when VMFA-311 receives its complete inventory of ten F-35C aircraft, projected for fiscal year 2025.

“Nothing changes for us, our pursuit of excellence and how we carry ourselves, initial operational capability is a byproduct of daily competency and being good at our job,” Fisher said. “It is a great accomplishment, but when we wake up the next day, we are going to keep doing the same thing. Now full operational capability is the goal.”

The Marines of VMFA-311 are actively training and preparing for potential future deployments with the F-35C, continuing the squadron’s legacy as a vital component of Marine Corps aviation.

VMFA-311 was originally commissioned as VMF-311 on December 1,

1942, in Cherry Point, North Carolina and has had a notable history of “firsts” for Marine Corps aviation.

Over the last 80 years, VMFA-311 has flown a variety of aircraft, including the F4U Corsair, F9F Panther, A-4 Skyhawk, AV-8B Harrier II, and currently the F-35C Lightning II. VMFA-311 was one of the first Marine Corps squadrons to transition to jet aircraft with the F9F Panther.

Now the squadron leads the way alongside VMFA-314 as one of the first Marine Corps F-35C Lightning II squadrons.

“The Tomcats have a storied history that includes legends such as Ted Williams and John Glenn, and participation in every major conflict since World War II,” Wellons said. “Today’s Marines add another chapter to that legacy with the introduction of the F-35C and fifth-generation capabilities to VMFA-311.”

In 2020, the squadron, then VMA-311, deactivated its legacy Harrier, and began preparing for its reactivation in April 2023, as VMFA-311, the Marine Corps’ second F-35C Lightning II squadron. Starting with 84 Marines and one aircraft, the reactivation was part of ongoing modernization efforts across the Marine Corps to make the force more lethal, effective, and survivable.

The F-35C’s multirole capabilities enable Marine Corps aviation to adapt to a wide range of mission requirements, including air-to-air combat, air-to-ground strikes, reconnaissance and electronic warfare. As operational challenges evolve, the F-35C’s versatility enhances the Marine Corps’ ability to respond.

“As a previous F/A-18 Hornet pilot, the F-35 is our bid for success for the future,” Fisher said. “It is where the Marine Corps is going for TACAIR.”

The Marine Corps has eight operational F-35B squadrons and two training squadrons, operating more than 100 F-35B aircraft around the world. The Marine Corps' two F-35C squadrons, VMFA-311 and VMFA-314, are both home-stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.

Each variant of the F-35 brings slightly different capabilities to the joint force. The F-35C is specifically engineered for carrier-based operations, with heavier landing gear and enlarged, foldable wings designed to facilitate flight operation on naval vessels.

The transition to the F-35C Lightning II is a testament to the Marine Corps' continued evolution and commitment to maintaining cutting-edge capabilities in modern aerial combat.

USS Preble to Forward Deploy to Japan

USS Preble (DDG 88) leaves Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Oahu, Hawaii on March 20, 2024 in preparation for U.S. Missile Defense Agency's Flight Test Aegis Weapon System-32 (FTM-32), held in cooperation with the U.S. Navy. (courtesy photo)
by Petty Officer 1st Class Brian Reynolds

01 August 2024

YOKOSUKA, KANAGAWA, JAPAN – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Preble (DDG 88) will move to Yokosuka, Japan, as part of a scheduled rotation of forces in the Pacific, the U.S. Navy announced today. This move will be a permanent change of station for the crew and family members.

Preble will replace USS Benfold (DDG 65), which will depart Yokosuka and move to Everett, Washington.

The forward presence of Preble supports the United States' commitment to the defense of Japan, enhances the national security of the United States and improves its ability to protect strategic interests. Preble will directly support the

Defense Strategic Guidance to posture the most capable units forward in the Indo-Pacific Region.

The United States values Japan’s contributions to the peace, security and stability of the Indo-Pacific and its long-term commitment and hospitality in hosting U.S. forces forward deployed there. These forces, along with their counterparts in the Japan Self-Defense Forces, make up the core capabilities needed by the alliance to meet our common strategic objectives.

The security environment in the Indo-Pacific requires that the U.S. Navy positions the most capable ships forward. This posture allows the most rapid response times for maritime and joint forces and brings our most capable ships with the greatest amount of striking power and operational capability to bear in the timeliest manner.

Maintaining a forward-deployed naval force capability with the most advanced ships supports the United States’ commitment to the defense of Japan and the security and stability of the vital Indo-Pacific region.

General Dynamics Announces Rayha to Succeed Graney as President of Electric Boat

From General Dynamics, August 1, 2024

RESTON, Va. – General Dynamics (NYSE:GD) announced today that Kevin Graney, who currently serves as president of Electric Boat, has informed the company that he will retire at the end of the year. He will be succeeded by Mark Rayha, who currently serves as senior vice president and chief operating officer of Electric Boat, effective December 1.

“Kevin has served General Dynamics with distinction for nearly 30 years, including tenures as president of both NASSCO and Electric Boat. His shipbuilding expertise and strong leadership have been instrumental to the performance and continuous improvement of both NASSCO and Electric Boat,” said Phebe Novakovic, chairman and chief executive officer. “Mark is a 35-year veteran of General Dynamics and is a proven and capable leader. His experience as CFO and COO of Electric Boat will ensure that we continue to grow to support our nation’s need for submarines.”

Graney joined General Dynamics in 1995 and served in a variety of leadership roles at Electric Boat and NASSCO before becoming a general manager and then president of NASSCO from 2013 to 2019 and president of Electric Boat in 2019.

Rayha joined General Dynamics in 1989 at Land Systems. He

became CFO of General Dynamics Mission Systems in 2015. He joined Electric Boat in 2020 and served as CFO from 2021 to 2023. He became chief operating officer in 2023.

General Dynamics is a global aerospace and defense company that offers a broad portfolio of products and services in business aviation; ship construction and repair; land combat vehicles, weapons systems and munitions; and technology products and services. General Dynamics employs more than 100,000 people across 65 countries worldwide and generated $42.3 billion in revenue in 2023. More information about General Dynamics is available at www.gd.com.

U.S. Navy Awards Leonardo DRS $417 Million Contract for Submarine Combat System Hardware

ARLINGTON, Va. July 31, 2024 – Leonardo DRS, Inc. (NASDAQ: DRS) announced today that it was awarded a contract by the U.S. Navy to provide critical electronic combat control and sonar systems equipment for installation across the service's fleet of submarines and allied fleets. The contract ceiling is more than $417 million.

The Technology Insertion Hardware TI-26 indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract will provide design, procurement, production, sparing, test, installation, and support of displays, workstations, processors, and network systems; the production of subsequent systems, kits and enclosures; and engineering and technical services. The contract was awarded by the U.S. Navy's Naval Undersea Warfare Center, Keyport.

TI-26 is the latest generation of a continuously evolving family of display, processor, and network systems in support of the US Navy's Submarine Warfare Federated Tactical System family of systems required on U.S. Navy submarines. This contract combines purchases for the U.S. Navy, the Foreign Military Sales program, and the Royal Australian Navy.

“We are very proud to again be selected as the design agent on TI-26 and are honored to support this critical submarine combat control and sonar system hardware program for the U.S. Navy and allied partners,” said Cari Ossenfort, senior vice president and general manager of the Leonardo DRS Naval Electronics business unit. “DRS is uniquely qualified for this program because of our agility, proven engineering processes, and experienced team, and that is also the reason we remain a trusted partner to Naval Sea Systems Command and Program Executive Office Submarine.”

This work is an example of DRS’s deep experience as a leader in complex design and manufacturing supporting a wide range of missions and capabilities. The company’s abilities extend across all domains to support naval, ground, air, space, and cyber missions in areas of sensing, force protection, computer networking, as well as naval power and propulsion systems.