Navy's MQ-8C Fire Scout Operating in Westpac; MQ-8Bs to Be Retired

Aviation Electronics Technician 1st Class Corie Wooldridge, from San Marcos, California, performs ground turns on an MQ-8C Fire Scout, attached to the "Wildcards" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 23, assigned to the Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Jackson (LCS 6). *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Charles DeParlier*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's MQ-8C version of its Fire Scout unmanned helicopter is now operating on its first deployment to the Western Pacific, the second deployment of the type so far. Meanwhile, the Navy is proceeding with plans to accelerate retirement of the fleet of older MQ-8B versions in fiscal 2023.

The Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Jackson (LCS 6) is operating with a detachment from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 23, which includes an MQ-8C. The Jackson in the first LCS deployed to the Western Pacific since the summer of 2020 and began operations with the MQ-8C on April 20. Two other LCSs are deployed in the Indo-Pacific region with the older

MQ-8B version

The Northrop Grumman MQ-8C, based on the Bell 407 airframe, can carry the Leonardo ZPY-8 Osprey radar, the Teledyne FLIR Brite Star II electro-optical/infrared sensor and the Automatic Information System for surface search and tracking, said Scott Weinpel, Northrop Grumman's business development director for Fire Scout, in a May 23 interview with *Seapower*. It can augment the MH-60S Seahawk manned helicopter also deployed with the helicopter squadron detachment.

Weinpel said the COBRA II (Coastal Battlefield Reconnaissance and Analysis II) sensor is being developed to give the MQ-8C a day/night mine-hunting capability over a larger area and in a deeper water column than the COBRA I deployed on the MQ-8B.

The MQ-8C first deployed in December 2021 on the Freedom-class LCS USS Milwaukee (LCS 5) in the U.S. 4th Fleet area of operations.

The Navy has 36 MQ-8Cs on strength. In the Navy's fiscal 2023 budget request, the service plans to place about half of the MQ-8Cs in long-term preservation, Weinpel said, attributing the decision to the Navy's budget priorities.

"We really are hoping that, with our mission extension efforts and the capabilities and enhancements that we want to incorporate with Fire Scout, that the future looks bright, especially as we look towards the future [Constellation-class] frigate, where Fire Scout is incorporated into [the Navy's] Capabilities Development Documents for FFG 62," he said. "We fully expect that we will be a part of that requirement.

"It would be an appropriate time to pull those [MQ-8Cs] out of preservation and incorporate them with that [frigate] fleet," he said, noting that the MQ-8C could easily pivot to the antisubmarine warfare mission set, deploying sonobuoys and relaying the acoustic data that they would collect to the mother ship or another ASW platform.

Weinpel also said Northrop Grumman could relatively easily restart production of the MQ-8C if required.

He also confirmed the Navy's decision to accelerate retirement of its fleet of MQ-8Bs to fiscal 2023 from 2024, also a result of budget pressure. He said the retired MQ-8Bs could be adapted to homeland security roles, including service with Customs and Border Protection.

Weinpel said the MQ-8C performed well on its first deployment.

"We had great feedback from the operators of the HSC-22 detachment," he said. "They were able to use the radar and EO/IR, [and] had great TCDL [Tactical Common Data Link] operational use, so they were able to fly out to the maximum range of the Fire Scout and then they were also distribute some of the information that was getting down to the Fire Scout control station to other areas of the ship where it became relevant as they were able to conduct some counter-narcotics missions."

Earlier this month, an MQ-8C provided bomb hit analysis for a Hellfire Longbow missile shoot from the Independence-class LCS USS Montgomery (LCS 8).

Austal USA Launches the Future LCS USS Augusta

The future USS Augusta (LCS 34) prepares to take to the water. *AUSTAL USA*

MOBILE, Ala. – On May 23, Austal USA successfully launched the 17th Independence-variant littoral combat ship, the future USS Augusta (LCS 34), the company said in a release.

Assisted by tugs, the ship was escorted out of Austal USA's floating dry dock and secured pier side on the waterfront for machinery commissioning and system activation in preparation for sea trials later this year.

The launch of Augusta was a multi-step process which involved lifting the 2,500-metric-ton ship almost three feet in the air, moving it approximately 400 feet onto a moored deck barge adjacent to the assembly bay using transporters and then transferring the LCS from the deck barge to a floating dry dock. The floating dry dock was submerged with LCS 34 entering the water for the first time.

"We're proud to announce another successful milestone achievement for the LCS program at Austal USA," said Austal USA's Vice President of New Construction Dave Growden. "Austal USA's team of talented shipbuilders are excited to have another LCS in the water and are looking forward to delivering her to the Navy so she can join her sister ships in the Pacific fleet."

Augusta is the 17th of 19 Independence-variant littoral combat ships Austal USA is building for the U.S. Navy. Five LCS are under various stages of construction. Austal USA is also constructing four expeditionary fast transport ships for the U.S. Navy and will begin construction on Navajo-class towing, salvage and rescue ships this summer.

U.S. Marine Corps C-UAS Program Kicks Off U.S. Production

The Marine Air Defense Integrated System Remote Weapon

Station. *KONGSBERG*

JOHNSTOWN, Pa. – Production of the Marine Air Defense Integrated System (MADIS) Remote Weapon Station (RWS) has successfully moved from Kongsberg, Norway, to Kongsberg Protech Systems USA in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, with the inaugural system completing assembly and testing in March.

Additional systems are also being built for MADIS as part of the U.S. Marine Corps' Ground Based Air Defense modernization effort.

"Kongsberg's Johnstown facility consistently yields remote weapon station manufacturing excellence, having produced more than 20,000 systems over the last 15 years," said Jason Toepfer, project manager, MADIS RWS, Kongsberg Protech Systems. "Our highly trained and skilled staff partnered with engineers and staff from Norway to successfully transition the production of all MADIS RWS to the Pennsylvania facility as part of our schedule and contract with the U.S. Marine Corps. The successful build of this inaugural system exemplifies our rigorous processes, joining the 5 prototype and test assets we've produced for the Marine Corps in Norway. This also kicks off MADIS RWS production here in the U.S., a move that allows us to better support this customer and deliver this critical lethality enhancement."

The Kongsberg RS6 RWS for MADIS RWS includes the XM914E1 30mmx113mm percussion-primed cannon with a co-axial M240C (7.62mm) machine gun, an integration kit for the Stinger Air-To-Air Launcher and provisions for future C-UAS defeat systems.

MADIS is part of the U.S. Marine Corps' plan to upgrade their two active Low-Altitude Air Defense battalions. The first 30mm remote weapon system to be qualified on the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle platform, MADIS RWS mounts on JLTVs and fights as a complimentary pair, designated as Mk1 and Mk2. The MADIS Mk1 features Stinger missiles and neutralizes fixed and

rotary-wing aircraft. Mk2 fulfills the Counter-Unmanned Aircraft System mission requirement, while also providing radar and command-and-control for the pair.

The U.S. Marine Corps awarded Kongsberg the indefinite delivery / indefinite quantity other transaction authority production contract in Sept. 2021. It has a ceiling of $94 million and includes a series of low-rate initial production systems, full-rate production units, spares and training. This production contract award followed a Sept. 2020 OTA contract award from the Marine Corps to Kongsberg for test articles and activities, which included Design Verification Testing, after a competitive process.

The Kongsberg RS6 RWS for MADIS leverages technology and competence drawn from multiple counter-unmanned aircraft systems (C-UAS) and air defense programs. The system leverages commonality with the family of Protector RWS delivered and fielded with the U.S. Army and Marine Corps.

Littoral Combat Ship USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul Commissioned

Sailors salute the audience during the commissioning ceremony of the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul (LCS 21) in Duluth, Minnesota. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sonja Wickard*

DULUTH, Minn. – The U.S. Navy commissioned its newest littoral combat ship, USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul (LCS 21), in Duluth, Minnesota, May 21, 2022, said Commander, Naval Surface Force, US Pacific Fleet, in a release.

Rep. Betty McCollum, of Minnesota's 4th District, was the principal speaker for the commissioning ceremony.

"The strength of America's national security, and the democratic values we hold dear, are being tested today like they have not been in decades," said McCollum. "I can think of no two names that represent that strength more than Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Together we are one team – those who built this fine ship, and those who will serve on her. It is the strength and determination of the American people that

is the backbone of our national security."

Erik Raven, undersecretary of the Navy, reflected on attending his first commissioning ceremony. "The Twin Cities represent the Great State of Minnesota's economic, cultural, and political center. The Twin Cities play a significant role in our nation's economic network," said Raven. "Now, more than ever, it is fitting that a littoral combat ship is named Minneapolis-Saint Paul – honoring the legacy of work and contribution of the people whose work ultimately impacts our daily lives nationwide and globally."

Vice Admiral Scott Conn, deputy chief of naval operations for Warfighting Requirements and Capabilities also attended. "Thank you all for preparing LCS 21 for this day," said Conn. "I recognize how special it is to be together for this milestone, and to spend this day bringing the newest ship in our fleet to life in this way. And more so, to do it in the State of her namesake cities is unique and special."

The governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz, also attended the ceremony. "This is a unique opportunity to gather ourselves as Minnesotans, and Americans," said Walz. "We're not just a country; we're an ideal."

Guest speakers for the event were Jon Rambeau, vice president and general manager of Lockheed Martin Integrated Warfare Systems and Sensors and Sen. Amy Klobuchar.

Rep. Pete Stauber, of Minnesota's 8th District, assisted in placing the ship into commission. The ship's sponsor Jodi Greene, former deputy undersecretary of the Navy, gave the first order to "man our ship and bring her to life."

Built by the Lockheed Martin and Fincantieri Marinette Marine in Marinette, Wisconsin. Minneapolis-Saint Paul was launched and christened in on June 15, 2019. The ship completed

acceptance trials, Aug. 21, 2020, and was delivered to U.S. Navy on Nov. 18, 2021.

Minneapolis-Saint Paul will be homeported at Naval Station Mayport, Florida.

Ishee Nominated for Vice Admiral and Command of U.S. 6th Fleet

Rear Adm. Thomas E. Ishee. *U.S NAVY*

ARLINGTON, Va. — Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III announced May 20 that the president has made the following nomination:

Navy Rear Adm. Thomas E. Ishee for appointment to the grade of vice admiral, and assignment as commander, 6th Fleet; commander, Task Force Six; commander, Striking and Support Forces NATO; deputy commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe; deputy commander, U.S. Naval Forces Africa; and Joint Force Maritime Component Commander Europe, Naples, Italy. Ishee is currently serving as director, Global Operations, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

Ishee is a native of Danielsville, Georgia, and a 1987 graduate of the University of Georgia, where he majored in mathematics and computer science. He was commissioned in 1988 after attending Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island and earned a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin and a Master of Arts in Security Studies from the Air War College.

His sea tours included assignments onboard submarines USS Narwhal (SSN 671), USS Sea Devil (SSN 664), engineer officer onboard USS Tunny (SSN 682) and executive officer onboard USS La Jolla (SSN 701).

He commanded USS Key West (SSN 722). While in command, the crew was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation, the U.S. Pacific Fleet Arleigh Burke Trophy and Battle Efficiency Award. He also commanded Submarine Squadron 11, where he ensured the readiness of six fast attack submarines and oversaw the operations of three torpedo retrievers, a floating drydock and the Navy’s submarine rescue systems.

His tours ashore included assistant professor of Naval Science at the University of Texas at Austin; engineer and executive officer of Moored Training Ship MTS 626; executive assistant to the deputy commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet; director of intelligence and special operations for Commander, Submarine Force U.S. Pacific Fleet; director of operations for Commander, Submarine Group 7 and Task Force 54/74; senior

advisor to the Secretary of Defense for U.S. Pacific Command Plans; executive assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations; deputy commander, Joint Functional Component Command-Global Strike; director of operations, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa; deputy commander, U.S. 6th Fleet, and commander, Submarine Group 8.

Phillips Sworn In as 20th Maritime Administrator

Rear Adm. Ann Phillips, left, then commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 2, visited the Netherlands navy frigate HNLMS Evertsen (F805) during Exercise Baltic Operations 2013. *U.S. NAVY*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation announced May 16 that retired U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Ann Phillips has been confirmed and sworn in as the 20th administrator of the

Maritime Administration.

Nominated by President Biden on Oct. 21, 2021, Rear Adm. Phillips was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on May 10. She is the first woman to lead MARAD as administrator.

“From her distinguished naval service to her leadership on coastal infrastructure, Rear Adm. Ann Phillips has championed America’s maritime sector throughout her career,” said Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. “Her experience and expertise will be invaluable as we address supply chain bottlenecks, implement the maritime investments in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, ensure the safety and success of midshipmen at the Merchant Marine Academy, and combat climate change in the maritime sector. I thank Deputy Administrator Lucinda Lessley for her tremendous service guiding MARAD as acting administrator and look forward to all that she and Ann will accomplish together at the agency in the years ahead.”

As head of the Maritime Administration, Phillips will advise the Secretary of Transportation on commercial maritime matters, to include the movement of goods, supply chain, as well as the U.S. maritime industry, environment and compliance, ports and waterways infrastructure and strategic sealift. She will engage public and private stakeholders in the maritime industry and oversee the U.S Merchant Marine Academy.

Phillips will also oversee MARAD’s programs to improve and modernize the nation’s maritime network by administering the investment in ports and waterways made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including $2.25 billion to be awarded over the next five years through the Port Infrastructure Development Program and $25 million for the America’s Marine Highway Program.

“It’s an honor to work alongside the professionals who make up

the MARAD team, and, to serve the American people, Secretary Buttigieg and the Biden-Harris Administration," Phillips said. "I understand the critical role that our commercial Merchant Marine plays in our national and economic security. In my nearly 31-year Navy career, I have witnessed many of the challenges facing our maritime sector and look forward to working with my colleagues to address them. This is an exciting time for MARAD as we work to expand and strengthen America's waterborne transportation system and workforce."

Phillips served most recently as Special Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Adaptation and Protection, Commonwealth of Virginia, developing Virginia's first Coastal Resilience Master Plan. Prior to her appointment to the Office of the Governor, she served nearly 31 years on active duty and has extensive experience operating with multi-national maritime forces, including NATO and Partnership for Peace nations, and serving overseas in Guam and Lisbon, Portugal.

Her final flag command, Expeditionary Strike Group Two, included 14 ships and 10 subordinate commands – all the Amphibious Expeditionary Forces on the East Coast of the United States. Earlier she served on the Chief of Naval Operations' Staff as Deputy Director and then Director of Surface Warfare Division. Previous to those positions, she commissioned and commanded the USS Mustin (DDG 89) and to command Destroyer Squadron 28.

Phillips graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and earned a Master of Business Administration, with distinction, from The College of William & Mary – Raymond A. Mason School of Business.

Second Iwakuni-Based F-35B Squadron Achieves Full Operational Capability

A U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 242 lands at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, in 2021 during a joint training evolution with Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force assets. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Tyler Harmon*

IWAKUNI, YAMAGUCHI, Japan – On May 17, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242 achieved full operational capability and is now ready to support the full complement of its missions, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing said May 19.

A significant part of this milestone is the establishment of 32 F-35B aircraft permanently forward-based as part of Marine Aircraft Group 12, ready to support a free and open Indo-Pacific. This transition occurred on schedule per the annual

Marine Corps' aviation plan.

The F-35 Lightning II represents the future of Marine Corps tactical aviation and will eventually replace the AV-8B Harrier II and the F/A-18 Hornet in all units across the Marine Corps. On Oct. 16, 2020, VMFA-242, known as the "Bats," was re-designated as an F-35B squadron and, on Sept. 9, 2021, the squadron attained initial operational capability.

"The FOC milestone is the culmination of well over two years of planning and execution, all while being forward-deployed and in the face of a global pandemic. In my 20-plus years of service, I have never seen a unit come together in a way that our Marines and Sailors have while overcoming many challenges," said Lt. Col. Michael D. Wyrsch, the commanding officer of VMFA-242. "I am incredibly proud to say that I was a member of this team and I look forward to seeing where the Bats' lasting culture of excellence will take them."

MAG-12 received the first forward-based F-35B squadron in January 2017 when VMFA-121 relocated to MCAS Iwakuni. With the addition of VMFA-242, MAG-12 is now the only forward-based unit in the Indo-Pacific with two permanently based F-35B squadrons.

"VMFA-242 has executed a masterful training plan and successfully accomplished the required elements necessary to declare FOC. This declaration provides added capability and capacity, enhances our posture, and ensures that we are able to effectively respond to any tasking," said Maj. Gen. Brian W. Cavanaugh, the commanding general of 1st Marine Aircraft Wing.

USS Ronald Reagan CSG Departs Yokosuka for 2022 Deployment

YOKOSUKA, Japan – The U.S. Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), and its strike group departed Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka on May 20 to support security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, said Lt. Cmdr. Joe Keiley, Commander, Task Force 71 Public Affairs, in a release.

During this routine at-sea period, Ronald Reagan, its strike group ships, the embarked Carrier Air Wing 5, Carrier Strike Group 5 and Destroyer Squadron 15 staffs are expected to work with allies and partners, promote adherence to a rules-based international order, as well as maintain presence and flexibility to meet the needs of the U.S. Department of Defense.

Ronald Reagan successfully completed sea trials in preparation for deployment on May 17.

“Ronald Reagan’s forward deployed presence underscores our nation’s commitment to our allies and partners,” said Capt. Fred Goldhammer, Ronald Reagan’s commanding officer. “Our crew has worked very hard to make the ship ready to face any future challenge, and I am tremendously proud of their efforts. The Sailors onboard Ronald Reagan are incredibly talented and resilient, and their unwavering commitment to our mission helps ensure that our nation’s maritime presence remains strong.”

Sailors manned the rails in summer white uniforms as the ship pulled away from the pier.

“The Ronald Reagan strike group and its team of professional Sailors across its commands, are ready to respond throughout the region in service of our maritime interests,” said Rear Adm. Michael Donnelly, commander, Task Force 70, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 5. “The support of our families makes what we do at sea possible. In the days ahead we will strengthen our relationships with like-minded allies and partners, and deter anyone who would seek to disrupt international norms.”

The Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group will include the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers USS Antietam (CG 54) and USS Chancellorsville (CG 62), as well as Arleigh Burke-class destroyers from DESRON 15.

Navy Awards General Dynamics Electric Boat $313.9 Million for Columbia-Class Submarine Work

An artist's rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines. *U.S. NAVY*

GROTON, Conn. – General Dynamics Electric Boat, a business unit of General Dynamics, has been awarded a modification to the previously awarded Columbia Integrated Product and Process Contract by the Naval Sea Systems Command, the company said May 19. The modification has a total value of $313.9 million.

The contract modification will support submarine industrial base development and expansion for the construction of the

Columbia-class fleet ballistic missile submarines as well as additional support for the manufacturing, procurement and delivery efforts for United Kingdom Strategic Weapon Support System kits.

“Ballistic-missile submarines are the critical, survivable leg of our nation’s nuclear arsenal and Columbia is the Navy’s top acquisition priority,” said Kevin Graney, president of General Dynamics Electric Boat. “We are grateful for the steadfast trust and support the Navy and Congress have in Electric Boat as we continue the work we began 15 years ago to deliver Columbia and the next 60 years of deterrence for our nation.”

Electric Boat will continue to work with its vendors and subcontractors to optimize efforts to ramp up production capability and support the increased demand associated with the Columbia program.

At 560 feet long with a displacement of nearly 21,000 tons, the submarines of the Columbia class will be the largest ever built by the United States. The Columbia will have a fuel core that will power the submarine for its entire service life, eliminating the need for a mid-service refueling and increasing the time the ship can spend on deployment. Electric Boat will deliver the lead ship to the Navy in 2027.

Navy to Commission Future Littoral Combat Ship Minneapolis-Saint Paul

The future USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul (PCU LCS-21) arrives in Duluth, Minnesota on May 16. PCU LCS-21 is a United States Navy Freedom-class littoral combat ship that will be commissioned in the Port of Duluth on Saturday, May 21. *U.S. AIR NATIONAL GUARD / 1st Lt. Crystal Kirchner*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy will commission the future USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul (LCS 21) as the newest Freedom-variant littoral combat ship during a 10 a.m. CDT ceremony Saturday, May 21, in Duluth, Minnesota, the Defense Department said May 20.

USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul is the second naval ship to honor Minnesota's Twin Cities, although each city has been honored twice before.

The principal speaker is U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum. Additional speakers include Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz; U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar; U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber; Undersecretary of the Navy Erik Raven; Vice Adm. Scott Conn, deputy chief of naval operations for warfighting requirements and capabilities; and Jon Rambeau, vice president and general manager of Lockheed

Martin Integrated Warfare Systems and Sensors. The ship's sponsor is Jodi Greene, principle at the Mabus Group and former deputy undersecretary of the Navy for policy. She will give the first order to "man our ship and bring her to life."

"It is fitting that a littoral combat ship is named for Minneapolis-Saint Paul, honoring the rich history, hard work, and contributions of the people there," said Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro. "I am certain the crew who will man this ship will carry on the legacy of the Twin Cities and will play an important role in the defense of our nation and maritime freedom."

The first U.S. Navy warship named Minneapolis-Saint Paul was a Los Angeles-class submarine launched in 1983 that participated in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul (SSN 708) was the first submarine to carry Tomahawk missiles specifically designed for use in strikes against Iraq during the Gulf War. Having served for over two decades with distinction, the Navy decommissioned the submarine in 2007.

USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul will homeport at Naval Station Mayport, Florida.

The ceremony will be live-streamed at USS Minneapolis-Saint Paul Commissioning. The link becomes active approximately 10 minutes before the event (9:50 a.m. CST).