MQ-9 Makes Debut at RIMPAC SINKEX 2022

A U.S. Air Force MQ-9A Reaper lands at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii during the Rim of the Pacific 2022. *U.S. AIR FORCE / Airman 1st Class Ariel O'Shea*

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – The first use of a U.S. Air Force MQ-9A Reaper, a remotely piloted aircraft, occurred during a Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2022 sinking exercise, July 12, the Air Force said July 20.

Participating in the SINKEX provided an opportunity for units from Australia, Canada, Malaysia and the United States to test weapons and systems in a simulated environment, working against opposing forces and eventually culminating in the explosion of a decommissioned naval vessel and marked a significant development in maritime warfighting capability.

The presence of the MQ-9A's at the world's largest

international maritime exercise provides an opportunity for combined and joint-force collaboration.

“They need us and we need them,” said U.S. Air National Guard Capt. Phillip West, the RIMPAC MQ-9 maritime force integration lead. “That’s where RIMPAC comes into play.”

He said the Air Force and the Navy speak different languages, each using their own distinct jargon. Working together on exercises like RIMPAC and the SINKEX promotes smooth communication between the branches. This ensures sharpened combat readiness, increased strategic impact, and strengthened deterrence efforts by providing tactical proficiency to MQ-9A aircrews.

With the MQ-9 flying over the ocean as opposed to routine training in remote land locations, the main objective for the SINKEX was the gathering of practical data about operating in a maritime environment as opposed to a desert environment.

“The data that we have in a simulator feeds off of real-world engagements like SINKEX,” West said. “With what’s called the new Smart Sensor, they’re trying to build a database of what ships look like. They need us to actually do it so that they can build a database, and then they can fit it into a simulator so we can practice it and have more efficient training.”

This year is historic not only because of the MQ-9A but because it marks a return to a full-scale exercise not seen since before the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 iteration of RIMPAC was reduced in scale to be conducted with less face-to-face contact. The return to a full-scale exercise demonstrates capable, adaptive partners working together to increase the interoperability, resiliency, and agility needed by the joint and combined force.

Navy Awards L3Harris $380 Million Contract for Cooperative Engagement Capability

L3Harris Technologies will produce and support the Cooperative Engagement Capability for the U.S. Navy under a contract worth up to $380 million. *U.S. NAVY*

MELBOURNE, Fla. – The U.S. Navy awarded L3Harris Technologies a contract worth up to $380 million for the production, repair, and sustainment of the Cooperative Engagement Capability (CEC) system with an initial award of $15 million, the company said in a July 19 release.

The CEC system enables high-quality situational awareness and

integrated fire control capability for the battle force. It is designed to enhance the anti-air warfare capability of U.S. Navy ships, U.S. Navy aircraft, U.S. Marine Corps Composite Tracking Network and allied nation units and is a key element of the U.S. Navy's integrated sensors and networked communications solution set.

"L3Harris is the trusted global provider of resilient, all-domain communications networks, and with this CEC agreement, the Navy has affirmed we deliver best-in-class capabilities to employ mission critical data for their most important missions," said Brendan O'Connell, president of Broadband Communication Systems at L3Harris.

"The CEC enables the Navy, Marine Corps and coalition forces to sense, defend and strike earlier than the threat, increasing the survivability of the battle force and the overall speed of communication as they maneuver in a complex, multi-domain battlespace."

Good Retention Cushioning Recruiting Challenges, Marine Assistant Commandant Says

Staff Sgt. Albert Vargas, a landing support chief with Combat Logistics Battalion 13, 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, re-enlists aboard the San-Antonio class amphibious transport dock ship USS Anchorage (LPD 23), May 1, 2018. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Austin Mealy*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Marine Corps is focusing on retention of serving Marines as a way to mitigate the challenges of recruiting in today's American society, the Corps' assistant commandant said in recent public forums.

"Our recruiting challenges this year across the board are, in fact, difficult, which is why we're so focused on retention rather than recruiting," said Gen. Eric Smith, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, testifying July 19 before the House Armed Services Committee subcommittee on Readiness. "We will make or come very close to making our recruiting mission in '22. It will come to a degree at the expense of the pool that we have ready for '23. Any time you have less time in the delayed entry program, you will have a higher attrition rate at recruit training, which is unacceptable. So, the focus for us is retention, and then ensuring that the American people

see the value proposition of service in the United States Marine Corps and the United States military writ large."

Smith addressed the retention and recruiting challenge the day before during a July 18 webinar hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the U.S. Naval Institute and sponsored by HII.

"We cannot recruit our way out of our future challenges, but we can retain our way out," he said. "If we have an individual who seeks to serve their nation, makes it through entry-level training, gets additional training, we want to keep that person. Why would I want them to go away, and them I have to go seek another person? That just adds to the problem. So, you can't recruit your way out, but you can retain your way out."

Smith, whose son currently serves as a Marine recruiter, discussed the value of the Marine brand.

"People say, 'Other services are giving really big bonuses, $50,000 to $60,000; why aren't you?'" he said. "Our biggest bonus we ever give – and we don't give many to enlisted – is about $8,000, because the bonus is, you get to call yourself a U.S. Marine. And that's not false bravado; it's who we are, a brand; that's who we recruit.

"What we do is we make sure that we are out there as a face," Smith said. "71% of our enlistment contracts are [from] face-to-face contact from seeing a Marine with operational experience who is tough, tested, fit, ready to fight, who's out there in the public square to engage with students. What I think we can do and need to do for students and those who've already graduated is work closely with the Department of Education, administrators and educators to really enforce the value proposition of service."

The assistant commandant said the Corps needs to "counter the narrative that the Marine Corps service in general is not fulfilling. We're a valuable thing and it's a valuable service

to the nation.”

He pointed out a streamlining of the re-enlistment process has taken place.

“A year ago, there were 22 steps to take to re-enlist,” he said. “That’s down to one. We use technology to streamline [re-enlistment]. If you wish to re-enlist and you’re a qualified Marine, the answer is yes.”

Smith said the Corps should ask a potential re-enlistee, “What would it take to keep you? It’s about managing talent as opposed to, ‘Here’s the cookie cutter.’”

He said the cookie cutter approach “will not work in the future environment where so many in our society are not qualified for enlistment or don’t wish to enlist.”

Ship to Shore Connector LCACs Get Lift of Opportunity Aboard Future USS Fort Lauderdale

The Navy’s newest amphibious transport dock ship is transporting the Navy’s newest connectors to their new homeport, highlighting the significant capabilities being delivered to the Navy from the Gulf Coast. *U.S. NAVY / Ronnie Newsome*

WASHINGTON – The Navy’s newest amphibious transport dock ship is transporting the Navy’s newest connectors to their new homeport, highlighting the significant capabilities being delivered to the Navy from the Gulf Coast.

Ship to Shore Connector, Landing Craft, Air Cushion (LCAC) 103 and 104, received a lift of opportunity aboard future USS Fort Lauderdale (LPD 28), July 16, Team Ships Public Affairs said July 19.

During LPD 28’s transit from Huntington Ingalls Industries’ Ingalls Shipbuilding Division in Pascagoula, Mississippi, to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where the ship will soon be commissioned, the newest LPD worked with Assault Craft Unit 4 (ACU 4) as LCAC 103 and 104 entered the well deck. The craft

will remain aboard the ship as it transits to its homeport in Norfolk after commissioning.

“As the future USS Fort Lauderdale readies for commissioning, the LOO [lift of opportunity] provides the opportunity to further demonstrate a capability that will be essential to the future amphibious fleet for years to come,” said Capt. Cedric McNeal, program manager, Amphibious Warfare Program Office, Program Executive Office Ships. “We welcome the opportunity to bring together key Navy and Marine Corps next generation capabilities as we look to strengthen and advance the amphibious maritime mission.”

LCAC 103 and 104, delivered to the Navy by Textron Systems in December 2021 and June 2022 respectively, have been at Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division receiving post-delivery upgrades and participating in test and trials events. Once the craft are in Norfolk, they will proceed to ACU 4 in Little Creek, Virginia, where they will join LCAC 101 and 102 to continue post-delivery test and trials and fleet introduction.

LCACs/SSCs are used primarily to transport vehicles, heavy equipment, and supplies through varied environmental conditions, from amphibious ships to over the beach. Delivery of this craft will significantly enhance the Navy’s and Marine Corps’ capability to execute a broad spectrum of missions well into the 21st century, from humanitarian assistance and disaster response to multidimensional amphibious assault.

CNO, Commander-in-Chief of

the Chilean Navy Discuss Partnership

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday meets with Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Navy Adm. Juan Andrés de la Maza Larrain at the Pentagon for an office call on July 18. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Michael B. Zingaro*

WASHINGTON – Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday welcomed Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Navy Adm. Juan Andrés de la Maza Larrain at the Pentagon for an office call, July 18, the CNO's public affairs office said in a release.

The two leaders discussed maritime security, cyber defense, unmanned technology and their shared commitment to deepening partnership through future exercises and combined naval presence.

"As we face shared global maritime security challenges, we

must partner with like-minded nations and create opportunities to increase collaboration, enhance interoperability, and build our collective capacity," said Gilday. "Chile is a longstanding and trusted partner, and the U.S. Navy will continue to work with Chile and other regional maritime forces to deepen our security cooperation and pursue opportunities to promote peace and stability throughout the Americas."

"I am very pleased to greet today Admiral Gilday, whom I had not had the opportunity to meet in person, due to the pandemic that forced to suspend this important meeting," said de la Maza.

"Taking advantage of the visit we will make to the frigate Lynch deployed at RIMPAC [Rim of the Pacific Exercise], we have arranged this meeting where I can mention that the various cooperation and exchange activities with the United States Navy, as Admiral Gilday mentions, have been carried out for many years. We have common challenges and we must face them in a combined manner, because they are global problems that require solutions in which all countries participate."

Gilday added, "My meeting today with Admiral de la Maza was very productive and I look forward to seeing him in Hawaii as we observe the RIMPAC exercise."

The U.S. Navy and Chilean Navy operate regularly together around the globe. Chile regularly participates in RIMPAC and is represented in this year's iteration by the Chilean Navy frigate Almirante Lynch (FF 07).

The Chilean Navy also participates annually in the UNITAS multinational maritime exercise in the waters of the Eastern Pacific and South Atlantic, and leads the biennial Teamwork South maritime exercise.

This was the first in-person meeting between the two heads of navy since de la Maza assumed command in 2021.

Artillery Rapid Mobility Key to Survival, Marine Assistant Commandant Says

U.S. Marines with 5th Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, set up high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) in front of an AN/TPS-80 Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar set to detect, identify and track airborne threats, during Valiant Shield 22, at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, June 13. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Tyler Andrews*

WASHINGTON — The Russian invasion of Ukraine is showing the value of the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) in providing long-range precision fires while shifting positions to avoid counter-battery fire, a senior Marine Corps general said, showing its advantages over towed tube artillery and

supporting the investment of HIMARS in Force Design 2030.

“What we’re focused on is long-range fires, and longer-range fires is better,” said Gen. Eric Smith, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, speaking July 18 during a webinar hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the U.S. Naval Institute and sponsored by HII. “You want to be able to out-stick your adversary. The introduction of HIMARS for us is absolutely vital, as is our NMESIS – Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System – [with the] Naval Strike Missile, which [has a] range in excess of 100 miles.

“The capability that is brought by long-range fires is what we seek,” Smith said. “Towed artillery has a max range. It also has a mobility issue because towed things like boats, U-Hauls, things that are on a trailer are not as mobile as individual vehicles. That’s why the [HIMARS] is so good.”

Smith that artillery must be highly mobile to avoid detection and targeting by drones.

“You have to be able to fire and move immediately,” Smith said. “You no longer have six minutes, which is [the capability of] a really well-oiled gun crew from ‘pull last round’ till ‘you’re on the move.’ What we have to see now is that there are autonomous loitering munitions that are looking for that signature. And as soon as they see that signature – we call it a POO, a point of origin – they’ve already got lethal authority to strike that. You don’t have six minutes to move, whereas with a HIMARS you can shoot and be gone literally in seconds, less than a minute. So that is a key lesson learned for long-range fires.

Smith said the artillery has to contend with ubiquitous, inexpensive drones and you have to drop your signature, either because you radiate or you are physically seen, because you are targeted almost immediately.

Under Force Design 2030, the Marine Corps is increasing its

HIMARS batteries and reducing its M777 155mm tube artillery batteries. Having decided initially to reduce the number of tube artillery batteries to five, experimentation led the Corps to increase the number of tube artillery batteries to seven.

The Defense Department has shipped a number of HIMARS and M777 systems to the Ukrainian armed forces to aid in their resistance to the Russian invasion.

GA-ASI to Supply 8 MQ-9A Extended-Range UAS for Marine Corps

General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. will provide eight

MQ-9A Extended Range aircraft as part of the ARES contract, the company announced July 17. GA-ASI

SAN DIEGO – General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. was awarded a contract for eight MQ-9A Extended Range unmanned aircraft systems as part of the Agile Reaper Enterprise Solution (ARES) contract from May 27, 2022, the company said in a July 17 release.

GA-ASI anticipates awards later this year for ground control systems, spares and ground support equipment as part of the first increment of the Marine Air Ground Task Force Unmanned Expeditionary program of record.

GA-ASI will begin first delivery of aircraft and support equipment this winter to facilitate the fleet standup in late summer 2023 for U.S. Marine Corps' Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron (VMU) 3 located at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. As part of the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 efforts, VMU-3 will operate these MQ-9A ERs with their unique sensors and network capabilities to support training for the Marine Littoral Regiment.

"We look forward to rapid deployment of these MQ-9A ERs for our USMC customer," said Patrick Shortsleeve, GA-ASI vice president of DoD Strategic Development. "This capability will be a key ISR contributor for the Marine Air Ground Task Force – and ultimately for U.S. Indo-Pacific Command – as we pace ourselves to outmaneuver our adversaries."

The MQ-9A Extended Range is designed with field-retrofittable capabilities such as wing-borne fuel pods and reinforced landing gear that extends the aircraft's endurance to more than 30 hours, while further increasing its operational flexibility. It provides long-endurance, persistent surveillance capabilities, with full-motion video and synthetic aperture radar/moving target indicator/maritime mode radar. An extremely reliable aircraft, MQ-9A ER is equipped with a fault-tolerant flight control system and triple

redundant avionics system architecture.

Navy’s F-5 Modernization Completes Engineering Phase; Moves into Production, Deployment

The ARTEMIS program will blend commercial-off-the-shelf solutions and industry partner investments to reduce potential safety risks by adding necessary upgrades to instrumentation increasing safety and capability. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Navy’s Specialized and Proven

Aircraft program office (PMA-226) F-5N+/F+ Avionics Reconfiguration and Tactical Enhancement/Modernization for Inventory Standardization (ARTEMIS) program successfully reached Milestone C decision June 28, effectively moving into production and deployment, the Naval Air systems Command said July 14.

To meet the Navy and Marine Corps requirement to increase fleet adversary training capacity with high-altitude tactical fighters, the PMA-226 Adversary Team is inducting 22 repatriated, former Swiss Air Force F-5E/F aircraft into the ARTEMIS modification program. This program will reconfigure the airframe and incorporate a block upgrade consisting of emerging and existing commercial technology while capitalizing on industry's private investment and lessons learned to upgrade necessary safety and capability features on the aircraft. The program office will reconfigure the airframes and convert the F-5E/F engines to the Navy and Marine Corps standard F-5N/F. Once that is complete, the program will integrate the block upgrade, which consists of a new glass cockpit and avionics suite that uses technology found in more modern aircraft to improve safety and capability.

Subsequent to this upgrade, the 22 aircraft will be in the F-5N+/F+ baseline configuration. The Adversary Team and industry partner Tactical Air Support Inc. (Tactical Air Support) will execute the F-5N+/F+ ARTEMIS program. Tactical Air Support owns and operates F-5AT aircraft currently supporting PMA-226 tactical fighter training and has performed similar modernization and safety upgrades on its own fleet of aircraft. Tactical Air Support assisted in the validation of the block upgrade F-5N+/F+ configuration on two of the prototype Navy F-5Ns completed earlier this year.

Capt. Gregory Sutton, PMA-226 program manager said, "This program will provide a fleet of upgraded, safe and modernized adversary aircraft, providing the realistic and relevant tactical training that our aviators need to win in the

fight.”

To improve and enhance aircraft safety and mission effectiveness and to meet existing and emerging requirements and obsolescence issues, the ARTEMIS program integrates fully digitized avionics instrumentation and provides increased safety and capability upgrades. These upgrades will also add tactical capabilities designed to improve air-to-air training.

“PMA-226’s Adversary Team drove to a successful milestone decision by challenging norms to tailor the program requirements using a blend of commercial solutions and the lessons learned by our industry partners with a focus on desired outcomes and risk mitigation,” said Boyd Forsythe, PMA-226 F-5 Adversary Team lead.

Given the significant use of commercial-off-the-shelf components with well-defined maintenance and support equipment requirements that are used for the F-5N+/F+ configured aircraft, the product support strategy will be to execute Navy and Marine Corps maintenance procedures at the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) maintenance facility, with fleet support teams within close proximity to the OEM facility to assist. The program’s preventive maintenance will consist of inspections, cleaning and scheduled maintenance tasks.

Raytheon Missiles & Defense Delivers First SPY-6 Radar

Arrays to Aircraft Carrier

When three SPY-6(V)3 radar arrays (left) are combined, they provide 360 degree coverage for aircraft carriers, like the future USS John F. Kennedy. *RAYTHEON MISSILES & DEFENSE*

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Raytheon Missiles & Defense has delivered SPY-6 radar arrays to the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), the first aircraft carrier to receive the advanced radar, the company announced July 18.

This delivery is the first of three for the aircraft carrier. Together, the three fixed-face radar arrays will form a SPY-6(V)3, also known as the Enterprise Air Surveillance Radar, which provides 360-degree coverage for the ship. In addition to the proven multi-mission capabilities across the SPY-6 family, SPY-6(V)3 has unique features that meet the needs of an aircraft carrier, including weather mapping and air traffic control functionality.

“This is the first aircraft carrier that will be equipped with SPY-6 radars, the leading naval radar system in the world,” said Kim Ernzen, president of Naval Power at Raytheon Missiles & Defense. “With the recent contract, SPY-6 will provide

premier detection and coverage for more than 40 ships in the U.S. Navy throughout the next decade.”

The SPY-6 family of radars provides integrated air and missile defense for seven classes of ships. Its radar modular assemblies, known as RMAs, allow SPY-6 to be scalable and modular to support production for the U.S. and partner nations across all variants.

Missile Exercise Sends Frigate to the Bottom

Rim of the Pacific 2022 military forces from Australia, Canada, Malaysia and the United States fired upon and sunk the decommissioned ex-USS Rodney M. Davis (FFG 60), July 12, during a sinking exercise to gain proficiency in tactics, targeting and live firing against a surface target at sea. *U.S. NAVY*

HAWAII – Units from Australia, Canada, Malaysia and the United

States took part in a live-fire missile exercise that resulted in the sinking of a former U.S. Navy guided missile frigate at sea on July 12.

The ships and aircraft, which were participating in the Rim of the Pacific 2022 (RIMPAC) exercise, sank the decommissioned ex-USS Rodney M. Davis (FFG 60) July 12, in waters 15,000 feet deep, 50 nautical miles north of Kauai.

According to a statement from the RIMPAC Combined Information Bureau, “Live-fire events provide realistic training that refine partner nations’ abilities to plan, communicate and conduct complex maritime operations such as precision and long-range strike capabilities.”

The objective of the sinking exercise, or SINKEX, is to “gain proficiency in tactics, targeting and live firing against a surface target at sea,” the statement said.

“This exercise provided a great opportunity for the extremely talented Sailors, soldiers and aviators who comprise the RIMPAC 2022 team to hone their skills in a live-fire setting,” said Royal Canadian Navy Rear Adm. Christopher Robinson, deputy commander of the RIMPAC Combined Task Force. “There is nothing that really replaces the training value of opportunities such as this, which enable us to test our weapons and their associated combat systems with as much realism as possible. These live-fire exercises are vital for maintaining our proficiencies, building our interoperability, and increasing our readiness for future operations.”

Royal Canadian Navy frigate HMCS Winnipeg (FFH 338) fired two Harpoon missiles as part of the SINKEX. A U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft deployed an AGM-84D Harpoon missile, and an F/A-18F Super Hornet from Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) launched an GBU-16 laser guided bomb for the event.

The 1,850-ton, 321-foot Royal Malaysian Navy corvette KD Lekir

fired an Exocet MM40 missile during the SINKEX. Lekir is the first Royal Malaysian Navy ship to launch a missile and hit a target outside of Malaysian waters. The ship had also recently fired an Exocet during the Taming Sari exercise north of the Strait of Malacca in May.

“The SINKEX was a professionally enriching experience for the crew of KD Lekir,” said Adm. Mohd Reza Mohd Sany, chief of the Royal Malaysian Navy. “These events provide an excellent platform toward enhancing interoperability amongst the participating navies. The involvement is an experience that will elevate the professionalism of the KD Lekir crew,” said Mohd Reza. “The biggest international maritime exercise is an opportunity for a joint exercise involving various countries while strengthening cooperation among the participants,”

“The coordinated firing of anti-ship munitions is a complex activity. This SINKEX demonstrates the interchangeability of the capable and adaptive RIMPAC partners,” said Royal Australian Navy Commodore Paul O’Grady, commander of the RIMPAC maritime forces component. “In doing so, significant measures were taken to protect the maritime training environment.”

The ex-Rodney M. Davis was a 4,100-ton, 453-foot Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided missile frigate that served in the U.S. Navy from 1987 to 2015. Preparing decommissioned ships for sinking follows a rigorous process to ensure there are no hazardous materials, fuels or lubricants still onboard. The target ships must be sunk in water at least 6,000 feet deep and at least 50 nautical miles from land.

RIMPAC Fire

At least one mishap was reported during RIMPAC. A Peruvian navy corvette, BAP Guise (CC 28), suffered a fire outbreak July 18. A statement from the Peruvian navy said the fire was “mitigated and controlled by the crew with support of foreign

units.”

The ship was not identified in the initial statements from the RIMPAC Command Information Bureau, but the Guise was identified in subsequent statement from the Peruvian navy.

According to a statement from the CIB, the RIMPAC watch floor received the report of a fire and potential injuries aboard a Combined Task Force ship around 8:00 a.m., Sunday morning Hawaii time. “Two critically stable patients were evacuated from the ship by a helicopter from French Navy frigate FS Prairial (F731) to USCGC Midgett (WMSL 757), and have since been transferred ashore by U.S. Navy helicopter from USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72),” the statement said.

“Two crew members suffered burns as a result of it and were evacuated by helicopter for their respective care at a specialized hospital in Honolulu, the details having been communicated to their relatives,” the Peruvian Navy statement said. “It should be noted that the rest of the naval personnel are unharmed.”

RIMPAC is the world’s largest international maritime exercise, with 26 nations, 38 ships, four submarines, more than 170 aircraft, more than 30 unmanned systems and 25,000 personnel participating this year in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California. The biennial exercise will conclude Aug. 4. RIMPAC 2022 is the 28th exercise in the series that began in 1971.