Berger: Marines Need More MQ-9 Drones for 'Organic ISR'

The Marine Corps' first MQ-9A at an undisclosed location in the Central Command area of responsibility. *U.S. Marine Corps*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Marine Corps will expand its fleet of MQ-9 Reaper drones to meet growing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance needs, the commandant said May 10.

"We're going to move from three squadrons right now to perhaps double that," Gen. David Berger told an audience at the Modern Day Marine exposition. "And the reason why is the need for organic ISR."

The MQ-9A Block 5 aircraft can stay aloft for more than 26 hours, attain air speeds of 220 knots and can operate to an altitude of 45,000 feet. Manufactured by General Atomics

Aeronautical Systems Inc., the Reaper has a 3,850-pound payload capacity that includes 3,000 pounds of external stores. It provides a long-endurance, persistent surveillance capability with full-motion video and synthetic aperture radar.

Berger said that ISR needs were increasingly critical for Marine Corps units, large and small. “So absolutely, we’re going to expand in Group 5, large-scale, big-wing, medium-altitude, long-endurance, uncrewed aircraft. That’s so we can have, for the naval force, persistent organic ISR access from the MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force] level on down to the squad level,” he said.

Over that last year-and-a-half, the Marines have conducted nine force-on-force exercises at the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command and Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center at Twentynine Palms, California, Berger said. All of them showed that “small, distributed lethal teams that can employ organic ISR, loitering munitions, and weapons like the Javelin and Carl Gustav [recoilless rifle] are much more lethal than larger formations that are using traditional force structures and concepts,” backing up the concepts behind his Force Design 2030 plan to retool the way the Corps fights.

The Marines began leasing two Reapers in 2018 under a company owned/company operated agreement, later acquiring them from GA-ASI in 2021 as the first increment of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force unmanned aircraft expeditionary program of record. The Marines procured 16 more of the aircraft to operate in support of distributed maritime operations and expeditionary base operations, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Marine Panel: Existing Platforms Need Better Employment to Address Global Logistics Challenges

A CH-53K King Stallion helicopter, left, flies over the Chesapeake Bay after successfully connecting with a funnel-shaped drogue towed behind a KC-130J tanker aircraft during aerial refueling wake testing. Lt. Gen. Edward Banta, Deputy Commandant for Installations and Logistics, noted the Marines would need to improve their use of C-130J transports; CH-53K helicopters; and developing unmanned aerial, surface and subsurface systems to address logistics challenges as the threat of a conflict in the Indo-Pacific grows. *U.S. NAVY / Erik Hildebrandt*

WASHINGTON – The emerging difficult security environment, particularly with the growing threat from China in the Indo-Pacific theater, has placed greater importance on global logistics and created new challenges on how to sustain the deployed forces, a panel of senior Marine officers said May 10.

Improving global logistics in this new operating situation will require better knowledge of "what we have, where we have it and how best to support the Marines" operating across the vast distances of the Pacific, said Lt. Gen. Edward Banta, deputy commandant for Installations and Logistics. Meeting the requirements to sustain the deployed forces also will require reducing their demands for support, including the need for energy and information bandwidth, Banta said at the Modern Day Marine exposition at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center.

Meeting the need to sustain Marine forces in a potentially

contested environment will require better employment of existing support platforms, such as the C-130J transports and CH-53K helicopters as well as developing unmanned aerial, surface and subsurface systems, he said.

Maj. Gen. Joseph Shrader, commanding general, Marine Corps Logistics Command, said the new challenges will require "extending the reach" of the U.S. based logistics installations, such as the depots at Barstow, California, and Albany, Georgia. That could include moving some of the depot capabilities to the operational levels, while modernizing the depots by "deciding what we need and getting rid of the rest."

Schrader and other officer on the panel also stressed the demand to create greater security for the energy and communications requirements for all the Marine installation. To do that, the Corps has experimented with moving some of its installations off the commercial energy grid and will do more of that in the future, they said. They also are making concerted efforts to improve cybersecurity at the domestic installations and overseas bases.

The panel members echoed the statement by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger that better and more secure logistics was essential to the existence of the "stand-in forces," which could be relatively small and mobile units operating on islands or isolated land positions within the enemy's fire engagement zone. Those operations on what are called Expeditionary Advanced Bases, are among the concepts being developed under Berger's Force 2030 reorganization drive

Brig. Gen. Adam Chalkly, assistant deputy commandant for Installations and Logistics also pointed out that 30 years of uncontested lines of global support is ending and the security of the forward-deployed operational and logistical support installations is no longer ensure, which puts new demands on the entire sustainment system.

CNO, Italian Defense Chief of Staff Meet, Discuss Maritime Strategy and Partnership

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, left, is shown hosting then-Chief of the Italian Navy Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone at the Pentagon in this February 2020 picture. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Raymond D. Diaz III

WASHINGTON – U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday met with the Italian Chief of Defense Staff Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone at the Pentagon May 10, the CNO's Public Affairs Office said in a release.

Gilday and Cavo Dragone discussed the long-lasting and vital maritime partnership between Italy and the United States, as

well as the importance of global security.

“The very nature of our operating environment requires common values and a collective alliance,” said Gilday. “You have been a strong partner and gracious host to U.S. naval forces and our joint efforts in Europe. Working together is critical to regional security and stability.”

“We are ready to make further commitments in all domains, in what we consider an important portion of allied areas of responsibility, namely the wider Mediterranean region,” said Cavo Dragone.

Gilday and Cavo Dragone also spoke about strategic competition, China and Russia.

They both affirmed the close relationship of the U.S. and Italian navies and expressed appreciation for their partnership as NATO allies and as friends.

The U.S. and the Italian navy regularly operate together around the globe. In addition to conducting real-world tri-carrier operations, earlier this year the two navies also participated in exercises and activities such as Neptune Strike 2022, Obangame Express, and assorted bilateral drills. These exercises highlight NATO’s ability to integrate high-end maritime warfare capabilities to support the defense of the alliance.

Italy hosts American Sailors at Naval Support Activity (NSA) Naples, Naval Air Station Sigonella and NSA Naples Detachment Gaeta.

Gilday previously met with Cavo Dragone in February 2020 and October 2021, when he served as the chief of the Italian navy.

BAE Systems Testing ACV for Marine Corps Recon Program

BAE Systems is proposing the Marine Corps use its Amphibious Combat Vehicle for the Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle program. *BAE Systems*

WASHINGTON – BAE Systems is offering the Marine Corps an alternative to its proposal to produce a new-start platform for the Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle program by demonstrating a new version of its Amphibious Combat Vehicle, which is currently operational.

"We like to believe there is an advantage in a proven platform," that has great land and water mobility and significant survivability, BAE representative Mark Brinkman said May 10. The advantages of adapting the ACV for the recon requirement include a single established parts supply line, a single school house for vehicle drivers and maintenance personnel, and an active production line, he said.

Brinkman discussed the BAE proposal next to a basic ACV that has been modified with an assortment of sensors and defensive

systems required for the reconnaissance vehicle, on display at the Modern Day Marine exposition at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center.

The demonstration vehicle had optical and infrared sensors, a small tethered unmanned aerial vehicle, the ability to carry and command and control a larger class-two UAV, and counter-UAV systems. The modified ACV would support a vehicle commander, a driver and five sensor operators, each with a multi-function operating station, Brinkman said.

The Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle program would replace the existing Light Armor Vehicle, which functions as a scout and troop support platform, but is nearing its end-of-service life. The Marine Corps has given contracts to General Dynamics Land Systems and Textron Systems to develop prototypes for the ARV. But BAE, on its own initiative, will test a modified ACV this summer, provide it for Marine testing and then submit a detailed proposal next year, Brinkman said.

A potential drawback for the BAE proposal is the Marines' requirement for a vehicle weight limit of 37,000 pounds, set to allow four vehicles to be carried on an LCAC ship-to-shore connector. The BAE ACV weighs about 35 tons – 70,000 pounds.

Brinkman said the ACV's weight is offset by its "ability to swim" from ship to shore, reducing the need for a connector, like the LCAC.

But that could minimize the standoff distance for the amphibious shipping as the ACV swims at about 7 knots, compared to the 30-knot water speed of the LCAC.

Coast Guard Offloads $5.6 Million in Seized Cocaine in San Juan, Puerto Rico

USCGC Joseph Napier, shown here in the Port of Bridgetown, Barbados.

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier and Caribbean Corridor Strike Force agents offloaded 626 pounds of seized cocaine Monday in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a May 10 release.

The offload of contraband resulted from a go-fast vessel interdiction April 28, 2022, in Mona Passage waters near the Dominican Republic.

The interdiction is the result of multi-agency efforts involving the Caribbean Border Interagency Group and the

Caribbean Corridor Strike Force. The seized cocaine has an estimated wholesale value of approximately $5.6 million dollars.

During the morning of April 28, the crew of a Coast Guard HC-27J Spartan aircraft detected a suspect vessel north of Mona Island, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan diverted the cutter Joseph Napier that arrived on scene with the suspect vessel. Upon detecting the presence of the Coast Guard cutter, the occupants of the suspect vessel were observed jettisoning multiple bales of suspected contraband into the water and attempting to flee the area toward Dominican Republic territorial waters. Once in Dominican Republic waters, the crew of a Dominican Republic navy vessel interdicted the suspect vessel and apprehended three Dominican Republic nationals who were aboard. Meanwhile, the crew of the cutter Joseph Napier recovered 11 bales of the jettisoned suspected contraband, which tested positive for cocaine.

“Safeguarding the nation’s southernmost maritime border is among our top priorities,” said Capt. Gregory H. Magee, Coast Guard Sector San Juan commander. “You can expect to see many more of these interdictions from the Coast Guard, federal and local law enforcement, and from our Dominican Republic Navy partners as we work together to stop drug smuggling go-fast vessels at sea and prevent them from making landfall in Puerto Rico.”

Special Agents supporting the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force are leading the investigation into this case.

Cutter Joseph Napier is a 154-foot fast response cutter that is homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

General Atomics Awarded Propulsor Demonstration Hardware Contract

SAN DIEGO – General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems (GA-EMS) has been awarded a sole-source delivery task order from Naval Surface Warfare Center, Carderock Division to provide structural hardware for the propulsor of the Navy's new Columbia-class submarine, the company said in a May 10 release. The delivery task order is part of a broad Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity Propulsor Demonstration Hardware contract to develop and deliver critical components and hardware for installation on current and future U.S. Navy nuclear-powered submarines.

"This is one of several task orders awarded to GA-EMS under the PDH contract that applies our advanced engineering and manufacturing expertise to deliver essential hardware components supporting existing and future submarines and other undersea vehicles," stated Scott Forney, president of GA-EMS. "From engineering Virginia-class bearings to developing new propulsion techniques for the next submarine design, we facilitate the use of new techniques, unique materials, precision machining and extensive test procedures to deliver equipment that meets exacting specifications and the highest quality and reliability standards to support the warfighter.

"This task order involves the precision machining of components to extremely tight tolerances and demanding material specifications, and the delivery of approximately 10,000 pounds of hardware that will affix the Propulsor Bearing Support Structure, already provided by GA-EMS, to the submarine," Forney said. "The delivery will meet the shipyard's schedule for the installation of critical components onto the first Columbia-class submarine currently

under construction, and it will provide the manufacturing template for these structures in follow-on ships of this class."

The hardware is scheduled for delivery in early 2023. Engineering is underway at GA-EMS' San Diego and Tupelo, Mississippi, facilities, with all manufacturing occurring in Tupelo.

Oshkosh Displays Vehicles at Modern Day Marine Expo

The Pratt Miller Defense EMAV can carry a 6,000-pound payload capacity and flat rack and is designed to support most logistics missions. *OSHKOSH DEFENSE*

OSHKOSH, Wis. – Oshkosh Defense, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oshkosh Corp., is displaying a Joint Light Tactical Vehicle and trailer and a Pratt Miller Defense Expeditionary Modular

Autonomous Vehicle at the Modern Day Marine Expo 2022. The vehicles will be on display at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. from May 10-12, 2022.

The 4-door Heavy Guns Carrier JLTV will be equipped with the John Cockrill CPWS 2.0 turret and Northrop Grumman 25x137mm M242 Bushmaster chain gun.

“The modular design of the Oshkosh Defense JLTV, which we’ve built over 16,000, can be adapted to dozens of military missions, from serving as battlefield ambulances to hosting antitank weapons,” said George Mansfield, Vice President and General Manager of Joint Programs for Oshkosh Defense. “The ability to easily integrate weapons that increase the JLTV’s firepower and lethality cost-effectively is yet another example of the vehicle’s flexibility and adaptability for next-generation warfare.”

The Pratt Miller Defense EMAV on display is a tracked, autonomous vehicle developed for the Marine Corps Warfighting Lab. The EMAV’s hybrid-electric powertrain is capable of silent watch and silent mobility and provides exportable power capability. Furthermore, with a 6,000-pound payload capacity and flat rack, the EMAV is designed to support most logistics missions.

“Oshkosh Defense’s advanced technology capabilities run the gamut from autonomous vehicles to hybrid-electric powertrains,” said Pat Williams, vice president and general manager of U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps Programs for Oshkosh Defense. “We partner with the U.S. Marine Corps and other customers to understand and analyze the challenges they face and explore solutions. This collaboration allows us to apply these next-generation defense technologies and advanced systems to our vehicles in order to meet their evolving mission needs.”

Fuse Installs Permanent Remote Monitoring Solution at Navy's Pacific Missile Range Facility

WASHINGTON — Fuse Integration, a federal defense communications, networking and computing solutions provider, has completed the first permanent installation of its Tactical Technologies Toolset at a U.S. Navy shore facility, the company announced in a May 9 release. T3, a remote network monitoring and management solution for multidomain operations, was installed for the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Dahlgren Division, at the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) in Barking Sands, Hawaii. PMRF personnel will use T3 to monitor and manage the Aegis SPY radar at that facility.

"Ballistic missiles are one of our nation's fastest growing threats, and it's imperative that the Navy's air-and-missile-defense radar is working every moment of every day," said Sumner Lee, CEO of Fuse. "We're proud to support PMRF personnel with our T3 installation, so they can ensure that their Aegis SPY radar is working as needed, at all times."

Designed to provide an easier way to view the health and status of distributed fleet networks and systems, T3 presents commanders and decision-makers with a layout of tactical data link, network and radar settings and status. T3's high-tech, intuitive user interface will support PMRF personnel to better troubleshoot, maintain and manage the radar at this facility during day-to-day operations as well as for special test events.

For this landmark installation, the Fuse team coordinated planning and collaboration with PMRF personnel and Aegis subject matter experts at the NSWC Dahlgren Division.

Fuse is a warfighter-focused engineering and design firm providing innovative communications, networking and computing solutions for defense customers. The company's virtualized network systems, tactical edge virtual network and airborne networking gateway products improve the sharing of information, video, text and voice among warfighters throughout airborne, maritime and ground environments. Founded in 2010, Fuse is a service-disabled veteran-owned small business with headquarters in San Diego and a corporate office in Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Force Design Update Adjusts MV-22 Squadron Force Levels

An MV-22B Osprey assigned to the Aviation Combat Element from Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Africa 20.2, Marine Forces Europe and Africa, conducts deck landing qualifications aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5), June 28, 2020. *U.S. Marine Corps / Cpl. Tanner Seims*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 annual report has announced adjustments in the force levels of its Marine medium tiltrotor (VMM) squadrons that fly the MV-22B Osprey assault transport aircraft.

"We originally planned to divest three MV-22 medium tiltrotor

squadrons from the Active Component, which would have resulted in a total of 14 squadrons of 12 aircraft each," said the report, released May 9 by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H. Berger. "However, detailed analysis demonstrated that 16 squadrons of 10 aircraft each better satisfies joint force requirements and better supports service needs to organize, train and equip. In particular, this force structure simplifies the formation of a Marine Expeditionary Unit's aviation combat element."

"Quite frankly, it was personnel-driven," said Lt. Gen. Karsten S. Heckl, deputy commandant for combat development and integration, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, and commanding general, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, speaking May 6 to reporters and amplifying the Corps' reasoning for the change in VMM squadron aircraft complement.

"There were many external factors to that primary factor of personnel," Heckl said. "So, there a few levers the commandant can pull on to generate resources. The conclusion that the Headquarters, Marine Corps, staff came to was that manpower was the most appropriate because we were over-sized, we were at an unsustainable number, so that was the logical choice to make."

Heckl said the squadron size of 10 MV-22Bs would give the Corps the flexibility to add more F-35B Lightning II strike fighters to the ACE if it so chose. Currently the ACE typically deploys with six F-35B Lightning II strike fighters or AV-8B Harrier II attack aircraft.

"Right now, the MEUs are going out – and it depends whether it's 10 or 12 V-22s when the [MEUs] go out [on deployment]," he said. When we start making every deployment with [F-35Bs] and the possibility that the numbers [of F-35Bs] that would go out – those numbers changing – the 10- [V-22s per squadron] makes all the sense in the world.

“Quite frankly, when you take into the equation the attrition rate, pipeline aircraft, training aircraft, the numbers work out pretty well,” he said.

The Marine Corps has cut or is cutting four MV-22B squadrons. The stand-up of VMM-212 was canceled in fiscal 2019. VMM-264 and VMM-166 were deactivated in fiscal 2020 and 2021, respectively. VMM-164 will be deactivated in fiscal 2022. The remaining force will include 14 active-component fleet VMM squadrons, one active-component VMMT fleet replacement squadron and two reserve-component VMM squadrons.

The Force Design annual report also called for an experiment in active-reserve integration of a reserve VMM squadron. The commandant directed the Corps to “perform Active Component/Reserve Component integration proof of concept in 2d MAW [Marine Aircraft Wing] by incorporating VMM-774 into an Active Component Marine Aircraft Group in [fiscal 2023].”

VMM-774 is based at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, also the base of two Navy helicopter mine-countermeasures squadrons that have been combined active-reserve squadrons.

Naval Safety Command to Conduct No-Notice, Short-Notice Inspections

Rear Adm. Frederick R. Luchtman, commander, Naval Safety Command, salutes the sideboys during an establishment ceremony for the Naval Safety Command on Feb. 4. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class (SW/AW) Weston A. Mohr*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The new Naval Safety Command intends to hold no-notice and short-notice safety inspections of Navy commands to identify and understand risk and assess the safety posture of the fleet, the new command's first commander said.

One-star Rear Adm. Fredrick "Lucky" Luchtman, speaking May 5 in a session of the U.S. Navy Memorial's SITREP Speaker Series, also said the new command will become a two-star billet soon, filled by a former carrier strike group or expeditionary commander, thereby giving greater perspective "on all things safety throughout the fleet."

The Naval Safety Command was established from the old Naval Safety Center on Feb. 7, 2022, to elevate the attention to safety, assessment of it and accountability for it in the fleet. All of the former directors of the Naval Safety Center since it was established in 1951 have been aviators, as is the first current commander of the Naval Safety Command, Luchtman. During the 1950s the mishap rate of naval aviation as it upgraded from piston-engine aircraft to jets skyrocketed and the Navy launched the center to assess the causes and propose solutions.

Luchtman reports directly to the chief of naval operations, a reflection of the Navy's increased emphasis on safety, especially in the wake of the fire that destroyed the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard.

The admiral estimates that mishaps cost the Navy $1 billion per year in loss of aircraft, steaming time for ships and personnel costs, among other costs. The year 2020 was even more costly with the loss of the Bonhomme Richard.

The Naval Safety Command will be sending assessment teams out to the fleet to determine the effectiveness of the safety

management systems. The command is developing “a cadre of professionals who can truly assess compliance.” Luchtman said one of his goals is to streamline and simplify the safety management system by identifying risk, communicating it and holding accountability at the right level.

“The accountability piece is absolutely key,” he said. Referring the Bonhomme Richard incident, he said, “the system isn’t healthy as it could be.”

Luchtman mentioned one demographic that has a bearing on automotive safety in the Marine Corps, a service that makes heavy use of motor transport. He said 25% of Marine Corps recruits did not have a driver’s license, a percentage far large than a generation ago.

Luchtman’s successor will be a surface warfare officer, Rear Adm. Christopher M. Engdahl, currently commander, Expeditionary Strike Group 2 and commander, Amphibious Force, U.S. 7th Fleet.