Bollinger Delivers the Future USCGC Pablo Valent

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Pablo Valent, delivered to the Coast Guard on March 17. *BOLLINGER SHIPYARDS*

LOCKPORT, La. – Bollinger Shipyards LLC delivered the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Pablo Valent to the service in Key West on March 17, the company said in a release.

This is the 174th vessel Bollinger has delivered to the U.S. Coast Guard over a 35-year period and the 48th fast response cutter delivered under the current program.

“The early delivery of the USCGC Pablo Valent is another win in Bollinger’s nearly four-decade partnership supporting the men and women of the United States Coast Guard,” said Bollinger president and CEO Ben Bordelon. “We are incredibly

proud that the FRC platform is a model program for government acquisition and has surpassed all historical quality benchmarks for vessels of this type and complexity. The results are in the detail and the continued early delivery of truly extraordinary Coast Guard cutters that will serve our nation for decades to come."

The USCGC Pablo Valent is the first of three FRCs to be homeported in St. Petersburg, Florida. Sector St. Petersburg has become one of the Coast Guard's largest commands, with an area of responsibility encompassing over 400 nautical miles of coastline along Florida's west coast and the third largest U.S. port for domestic trade. The sector has responsibility for five primary operational missions: search and rescue; marine safety; maritime law enforcement; ports, waterways and coastal security; and living marine resources.

This week, President Joe Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal 2022, which included $130 million for two additional FRCs, continuing the program beyond its 64-vessel program of record. This is the second time Congress has added FRCs beyond the original 58 vessel program of record.

Each FRC is named for an enlisted Coast Guard hero who distinguished themselves in the line of duty. The Florida Keys Hurricane of September 1919 was one of the worst in Texas history, heavily damaging the Brazos Life-Saving Station and leveling the Coast Guard Station at nearby Aransas. Seventy-seven-ton schooner Cape Horn had been fishing far out in the Gulf as the storm descended on the schooner and its crew of eight, capsizing the vessel and flooding the hold. The men clung to the flooded hulk as the strong hurricane pushed it toward the Texas coast.

The Brazos Station lookout spotted the Cape Horn and took immediate action. The crew launched the surfboat in some of the worst sea conditions ever experienced in the area.

Although the men were skilled surfmen, the boat shipped seas constantly as waves boarded the vessel from the stern. Pablo Valent and the rest of the crew held the boat steady and safely landed with all 15 occupants. For their valiant efforts, Valent and the rest of the Brazos crew received the Silver Life-Saving Medal. Valent went on to have a successful career in the Coast Guard, taking command of the Brazos Station (a.k.a. Port Isabel Coast Guard Station) in 1935, becoming the first Hispanic American in the service to do so. Valent retired after 28 years of service in the Coast Guard.

Navy's New Hovercraft Delivers Helicopter for Air Force

Skip Whitmore, Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City, marshals a Landing Craft Air Cushion vehicle onto shore south of Hurlburt Field, Florida, Feb. 24. The amphibious landing craft carried a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter from Pensacola to

be used for training purposes within Eglin Air Force Base range. *U.S. AIR FORCE / Samuel King Jr.*

ARLINGTON, Va. — An unusual transport mission last month demonstrated the capabilities and versatility of the Navy's new LCAC 100-class ship-to-shore connector.

The Air Force 96th Test Wing at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, requested the assistance of the Naval Surface Warfare Center — Panama City Division to solve a problem in transporting a CH-46 helicopter from Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida, to Eglin. The retired helicopter was to be used to "support future training operations for the Air Force Special Operations Command Special Tactics Training Squadron," Jeremy Roman of the NSWC PCD public affairs office said in a March 23 release.

"With a height of nearly 17 feet, transporting the helicopter by land would have required extensive preparation work in order to lower the height to safely maneuver on public highways," Roman said.

The 96th Test Wing and the NSWC PCD determined the best solution was using one of the LCAC 100-class ship-to-shore connectors, which recently entered fleet service, to transport the helicopter over the water to Eglin.

LCAC 103, the third production LCC 100-class SSC, was selected for the mission, conducted on Feb. 24.

"LCAC 103 transited from Panama City, Florida, to NAS Pensacola where the CH-46 was loaded and then transported to Eglin AFB," Roman said. "The LCAC 103 then displayed its amphibious capability by transiting from water to shore at Eglin AFB where the CH-46 was rolled off the deck onto dry land. LCAC 103 further demonstrated the SSC amphibious capabilities by transiting across Santa Rosa Island at the Eglin AFB Test Range to navigate back to base via the most efficient route to NSWC PCD. This long-distance, land-hopping

mission, supported post-delivery test and trials objectives by successfully gaining reliability growth hours while demonstrating required capabilities for Navy and Marine Corps expeditionary forces.”

“NSWC PCD is a Navy research, development, test and evaluation laboratory, and this mission displayed the fruit of the RDT&E and acquisition teamwork which is providing this critical expeditionary capability to the fleet. It is always a bonus when that capability supports our sister military branches and partners,” said Randy Whitehead, NSWC PCD Air Cushion Vehicle and Seabasing technical program manager, in the release.

“This was an excellent demonstration of key capabilities such as the LCAC’s unique combination of range, speed, amphibious versatility and lift capacity. It not only allowed us to successfully execute this mission but also showed how SSC can bring more to the table for future Distributed Maritime Operations.”

The LCAC 100-class SSC is built by Textron Systems and is replacing the older LCAC 01 class hovercraft in the fleet. Testing of the LCAC 100 craft is conducted at NSWC PCD. Recently, two LCAC 100s were delivered to the fleet’s Assault Craft Unit 4 at Little Creek, Virginia.

Israeli Air Force Leader Takes Flight in CH-53K

Brig. Gen. Eyal Grinboim, Israeli air force chief of staff, along with his staff, discuss the capabilities of the CH-53K prior to flying on the aircraft. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – Israeli air force Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Eyal Grinboim visited Naval Air Station Patuxent River in February for a program update and flight on the CH-53K heavy lift helicopter, Naval Air Systems Command said March 23.

Grinboim and his staff met with Maj. Gen. Gregory Masiello, program executive officer for air anti-submarine warfare, assault and special mission programs. Masiello and Col. Jack Perrin, program manager, Heavy Lift Program Office (PMA-261), gave the IAF group an overview of the CH-53K program and a status update on current tests and production.

The visit included an opportunity to co-pilot the aircraft. U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Luke Frank, pilot and officer in charge of CH-53K detachment for Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron 1, provided pre-flight safety instructions before leading the group in a flight. The flight demonstrated the power and capabilities of the CH-53K aircraft.

Grinboim’s visit to the program office was the first since Israel’s decision last year to purchase the CH-53K. The IAF

signed a letter of offer and acceptance on Dec. 30, 2021, with the U.S. government. The agreement is for purchase of 12 CH-53K aircraft with first deliveries planned in 2025.

As the long-range logistic support backbone for the U.S. Marine Corps, the CH-53K will support Israeli special operations programs first, as well as provide the Israeli Defense Forces with a platform that has the speed, safety and gross weight capability to support all of its missions, including troop and cargo transport, and search and rescue.

The CH-53K program is on track to achieve Initial Operational Capability in 2022. VMX-1 completed all initial operational test and evaluation scheduled events, including a real-world, non-test event recovering a 14,000-pound downed Navy H-60 from a 12,000 feet high zone in the mountains of Northern California. The CH-53K will transport Marines, heavy equipment and supplies during ship-to-shore movement in support of amphibious assault and subsequent operations ashore.

Navy’s E-2D Distributed Readiness Trainers Improving Readiness, Capability

Naval aviators train on E-2D distributed readiness trainers, which are training devices capable of elements of two, five crewmember aircraft to conduct a single training scenario simultaneously and execute the full list of tactics, techniques, and procedures. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The aircrew from Carrier Airborne Command & Control Squadron 125 (VAW-125), an E-2D Advanced Hawkeye squadron, recently completed two weeks of on-site readiness training following the installation of two E-2D Distributed Readiness Trainers by the Naval Aviation Training Systems and Ranges program office, Naval Air Systems Command said March 23.

These medium-fidelity trainers contain a complete mock-up of the E-2D weapons system and are available via commercial off-the-shelf components, allowing them to be operational faster than higher fidelity trainers. The D-DRT uses touch screen technology and are less expensive to maintain than the legacy trainers, which improves reliability and reduces lifecycle costs.

“Our ability to cycle through reps and sets of advanced tactics, techniques and procedures in a short amount of time will make the warfighter more lethal at a much lower cost to the taxpayer,” said David Adams, PMA-205 Training Systems integrated product team lead.

The devices were installed to coincide with the squadron’s return from deployment, for use immediately upon return. PMA-205 team members were on hand to provide instruction on their operation.

“The event provided VAW-125 an increased level of combat readiness and the ability to maintain combat effectiveness without costly travel to traditional training locations,” said PMA-205 program manager, Capt. Lisa Sullivan.

A multidisciplinary PMA-205 team conducted the training and provided aircrew with “hands-on” instruction to learn how to operate the devices and get the most out of their training. The trainers can accommodate an E-2D element of two five-crewmember aircraft to conduct a single training scenario simultaneously and execute the full list of tactics, techniques, and procedures.

Cmdr. Ryan Mann, executive officer of the E-2 Weapons School, said, “These devices have received a significant amount of positive feedback from the E-2D community, and it is very excited about its capabilities.” Future developments and iterations of the D-DRT will add additional capability to improve readiness.

Navy’s Two-Carrier Block Buy Stabilized Supplier Base During COVID Pandemic, Industry Exec Says

USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) transits the James River after leaving Newport News Shipyard during sea and anchor, Feb. 25, 2022. Ford is underway in the Atlantic Ocean after completing the industrial portion of a six-month planned incremental availability. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jacob Mattingly*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy’s procurement and congressional funding of two Ford-class aircraft carriers in a single block buy enabled numerous small suppliers to weather or even survive the COVID pandemic, an industry official said. The stability of the program also enabled the aircraft carrier industrial base to control costs and enact savings.

Stable and predictable funding provided by the block procurement of CVN 80 and CVN 81, in place before the pandemic, gave the aircraft carrier industrial base the ability to absorb the shock of the pandemic, especially for the small lower-tier suppliers, said Rick Giannini, chairman of the Aircraft Carrier Industrial Base Coalition and CEO of Milwaukee Valve, speaking March 22 in a phone conference with *Seapower*.

“The two-carrier buy was really very helpful to the supply base [during the pandemic], because those orders in the hands of the suppliers before COVID gave them the work to get through things,” Giannini said.

Giannini said the ACIBC’s top priority is “stable and predictable funding,” which he defined as “a two-carrier block buy over eight years, with carriers purchased on four-year centers.

“And with that comes advance planning funding early in the cycle,” which he said “really is the catalyst. It’s great to have the bulk buy, but if we don’t have the funds to go and buy those raw materials as a supply base, it makes it very difficult to enact the savings that come out of it. We got good funding for [CVNs] 80 and 81, and one of the lessons is we need more early on so we can get more of the supply base involved.”

Giannini cited the experience of his own company, Milwaukee Valve.

“We were able to buy all of the materials for two full shipsets up front. Now we have that material in our facility so that the lead times not be impacted by material problems. Nor will the cost change. And it saves significant dollars and will improve the lead times overall.”

He said a two-carrier block buy is “very doable. We’re hoping we can get it moved up into 2024 – eight years after the AP

[advance procurement] money came in for 80/81. We're really trying to match the procurement of the Nimitz class. They were built on 3.5-year centers. So, four [-year centers] is good enough."

The carrier industrial base coalition includes 2,000 companies from 46 states that employ approximately 121,000 workers. Its member companies provide $9.6 billion worth of materials and services for one aircraft carrier.

Workforce issues became prominent during the pandemic because many "baby boomer" workers retired earlier than planned. A shortage of skilled workers is focusing companies on recruiting and developing shipyard and manufacturing workers. Many companies are forming partnerships with local community and technical colleges and trade schools.

Giannini's Milwaukee Valve company's workforce is down about 8% in personnel, he said. Also, he noted that when a worker contracted COVID-19, about 10 other workers around that worker had to be quarantined, greatly affecting workflow for a week or two at a time. Absenteeism had risen to about 8 to 10 points on a fairly consistent basis, he said.

Giannini attended the dinner March 21 – sponsored by the Navy League –with Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday in Norfolk, Virginia, to celebrate the centennial of the U.S. Navy's first aircraft carrier, where, he noted, the CNO said the Navy needed a force level of 12 aircraft carriers.

SASC Chair Reed: Defense

Budget Turmoil Fault ‘Not in Our Stars, But in Ourselves’

Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a hearing in review of the fiscal 2023 defense authorization request on March 8. *DOD / U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jack Sanders*

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee quoted Shakespeare to lay the blame on Congress itself for the defense budget legislative turmoil over the last two decades of multiple continuing resolutions, and said budget delays are especially dangerous in the world’s current geo-political climate.

“We’ve gotten into a very bad habit over the last several years, but I hope we can get it done,” said Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), when asked by *Seapower* if he foresaw a return to the regular defense budget legislative process in Congress. Reed spoke March 23 in a webinar with reporters of

the Defense Writers Group.

Reed noted the fiscal 2022 budget was received late from the Defense Department, which pushed back deliberations. The 2023 president's budget proposal is scheduled to be delivered to Congress March 28, almost two months later than the normal plan.

Reed said getting the defense budget out on time is "extremely helpful to the services. Most services don't – regrettably – plan to do anything in the first quarter of the new fiscal year because they assume they won't have a budget and, in some cases, even authorization acts. That's a whole quarter of just standing around tapping your feet, and in this world, with these adversaries, and the speed of technology, that's wasted time."

Reed noted the services had to wait nearly six months before the 2022 defense budget finally was appropriated.

"It's not an efficient way to spend money," he said.

"The problem is, as Shakespeare said, is not in our stars but in ourselves," Reed said. "In Congress we have been, for many reasons, distracted. It's a complicated political environment and I hope we can refocus."

Reed said he, ranking member Sen. James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) and the Senate Appropriations Committee leaders would like to get their defense bills done on time.

"Sometimes we become hostage to other issues, unfortunately," Reed said. "But our goal is very clearly to get it done and get it done on time."

Reed also took the opportunity to say in the current world climate, the United States has to "reimagine how we fight. We have to develop new warfighting concepts. We have new equipment. We have new areas of space and cyber that have been

around by every day are much more critical for what we have to do.”

Reed said tough choices have to be made about legacy systems, and that the U.S. has to look to its allies as a “major source of strength.”

DoD Inspector General to Audit Navy’s MQ-25 UAV Program

The Boeing unmanned MQ-25 aircraft on the flight deck aboard the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brandon*

Roberson
ARLINGTON, Va. — The inspector general of the Department of Defense is planning to conduct an audit of the U.S. Navy's MQ-25 Stingray aerial refueling unmanned aerial vehicle program.

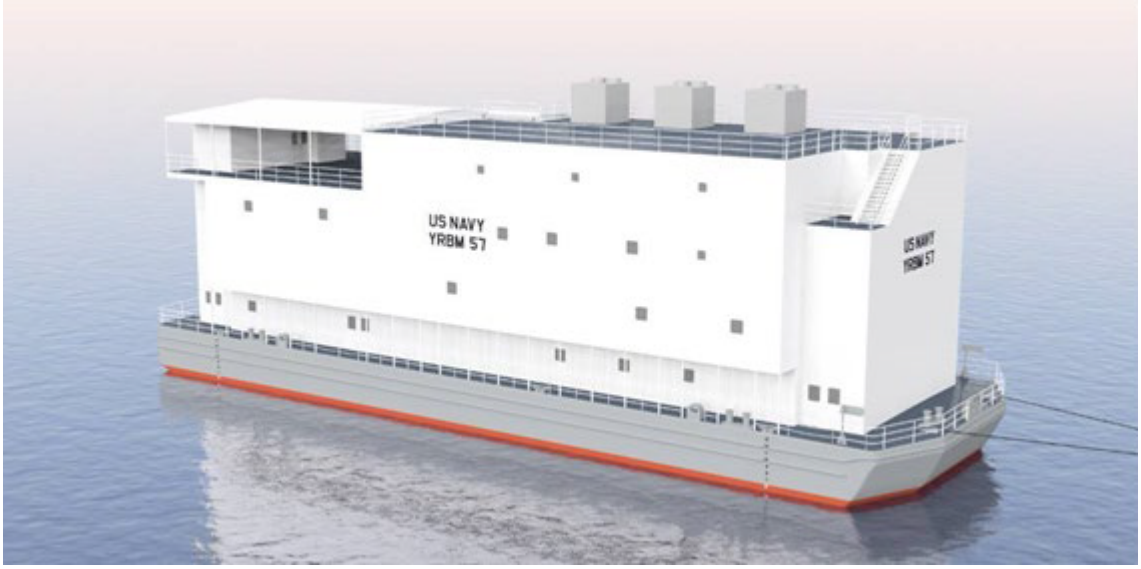
In a March 21 memorandum addressed to the undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, the director for Operational Test and Evaluation, and the auditor general of the Department of the Navy, the inspector general said, "The objective of this audit is to determine whether Navy officials are effectively managing the MQ-25 Stingray program to meet operational capability requirements and user needs. We may revise the objective as the audit proceeds, and we will also consider suggestions from management for additional or revised objectives."

The MQ-25 program is designed to provide a UAV capable of refueling carrier-based aircraft, thus freeing more F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters for their primary missions.

A prototype of the MQ-25A, built by Boeing, has flown and has demonstrated the ability to refuel F/A-18s, F-35 Lightning II strike fighters and E-2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning aircraft. The prototype, known as T1, also was put through flight deck handling trials at sea on board the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in December 2021.

Boeing is under contract to build seven MQ-25As. The Navy anticipates it will procure a total of 72 Stingrays under current planning. Initial operational capability is planned for fiscal 2025.

Navy Orders YRBM Barges from Conrad Shipyard



A Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing barge. *CONRAD SHIPYARD LLC*

MORGAN CITY, La. – Conrad Shipyard LLC has been awarded a contract by the U.S. Navy for the design and construction of up to eight Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing (YRBM) barges, the company said in a release.

YRBM barges provide a temporary home away from home and workplace for service men and women whose vessels are in port for repairs or maintenance. Conrad's design incorporates functional spaces which allow the Sailors to work, sleep, and eat comfortably.

The fixed-price contract, a small business set-aside, has a potential value of more than $140 million. Conrad expects to deliver the first YRBM barge to the Navy in late 2023. If the Navy exercises options for the additional barges, peak production is expected to occur from 2023 through 2025.

"We are excited to enter into this partnership with the Navy to help modernize its fleet," said Conrad Shipyard CEO Johnny Conrad. "Not only will this contract provide an abundance of jobs for our workforce in the Morgan City area, but it will

also help to support a multitude of small businesses. I know our dedicated and hardworking men and women at Conrad are proud to work on this project which will ultimately benefit the brave service men and women of the U.S. Navy.”

The YRBM barge is an ABS A1 Accommodation Barge with a footprint of roughly 151 feet by 49 feet by 14 feet. The vessel provides pier-side living accommodations capable of berthing 199 mixed gender personnel, messing for 300 personnel, and includes spaces for medical offices, classrooms, workspaces, laundry rooms, storerooms and lounge areas.

Navy Decommissions Two More Patrol Ships

Sailors assigned to the coastal patrol ship USS Whirlwind (PC 11) salute during the ship's decommissioning ceremony on March 21 at Naval Support Activity Bahrain. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Dawson Roth*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy decommissioned two more Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships in March, bring to five the number of PCs retired from the U.S. 5th Fleet this year, all within a one-month period, according to the fleet's public affairs office.

USS Whirlwind (PC 11) was decommissioned in ceremonies held in Bahrain on March 21. A week earlier, USS Squall (PC 7) was decommissioned on March 14. The recent PC force reductions began on Feb. 23 with the decommissioning of USS Firebolt (PC 10), followed by Typhoon (PC 2) on Feb. 28 and Tempest (PC 2) on March 7.

All of the above decommissioned PCs will be made available for foreign military sales.

The reductions leave the Navy's last five PCs on strength

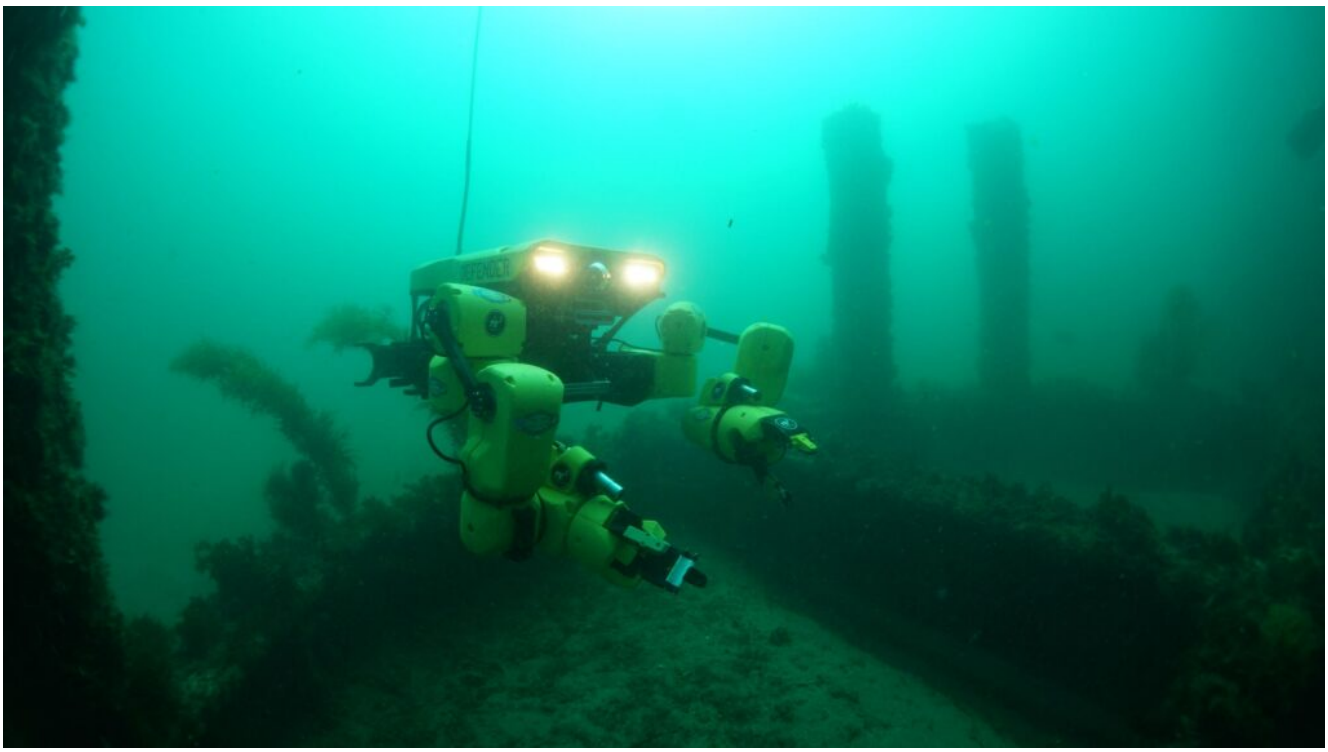
still in service with the 5th Fleet: USS Hurricane (PC 3), USS Monsoon (PC 4), USS Sirocco (PC 6); USS Chinook (PC 9) and USS Thunderbolt (PC 12).

USS Squall – like its sister ships, it was built by Bollinger Shipyards – was commissioned on July 4, 1994. It was based at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, California until late 2005, when it was moved to Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Virginia. In 2013. Squall was assigned to the 5th Fleet.

USS Whirlwind was commissioned on July 1, 1995. It was stationed at Little Creek from which it supported operations in the U.S 4th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility. The Whirlwind also provided homeland security near New York City's harbor following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the city. The ship was transferred to the 5th Fleet in 2013.

"Our patrol coastal ships have made a lasting impact here in the region supporting naval operations and safeguarding maritime security," said Capt. Robert Francis, commander of Task Force 55 at U.S. 5th Fleet, in the March 21 5th Fleet release. "This was only made possible by the dedicated Sailors who served aboard these ships for nearly three decades."

ONR-Sponsored RE2 Robotics, VideoRay ROV Achieve New Depth Milestone



RE2 Robotics' Sapien Sea Class underwater robotic arms, coupled with VideoRay's Defender remotely operated vehicle, make up the Maritime Mine Neutralization System. *RE2 ROBOTICS*

PITTSBURGH and POTTSTOWN, Pa. – RE2 Robotics, a leading developer of intelligent mobile manipulation systems, announced March 22 that its Maritime Mine Neutralization System reached an unprecedented depth milestone of more than 1 kilometer during a recent open-water demonstration for the U.S. Navy's project sponsor, the Office of Naval Research.

M2NS is an underwater autonomous mine neutralization system composed of RE2 Sapien Sea-class underwater robotic arms mounted onto VideoRay's inspection-class Defender remotely operated vehicle. M2NS also uses RE2's advanced computer vision and autonomy software, RE2 Detect and RE2 Intellect, to enable the precise, autonomous, and clandestine neutralization of a target.

During the test event, which took place in the Pacific Ocean with support from the Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific in Point Loma, California, four successful dives exceeding 1,000 meters of depth were completed. The dives were conducted using supervised autonomy, which allows human operators to monitor the robotic system's autonomous movements and make

corrections if necessary.

“These tests allowed us to demonstrate the continuing success of the M2NS project for the U.S. Navy,” said Jack Reinhart, vice president of project management, RE2 Robotics. “The progress we made during these deep dives shows that we could successfully complete an underwater supervised autonomous mission at depths of more than 1,000 meters without any damage to the system. The M2NS system succeeded where no other system of this class has before.”

All onboard electronics remained operational during the deep dives, including the ROV’s camera feed and data to the support vessel, proving the survivability of the complete system to a depth of more than 1,000 meters.

“We have proven the ability to deploy the Defender with a large payload to depths of 3,500 feet [1,000-plus meters] from a small deck footprint,” said Marcus Kolb, chief technology officer, VideoRay. “We performed complex, autonomous manipulation tasks with the RE2 system while station-keeping a few feet off the bottom. We are excited about the direction of this program and how it will help accelerate commercial solutions.”

Following the success of these dives, RE2 Robotics and VideoRay are planning future demonstrations for ONR to test the system’s autonomy capabilities using a tetherless ROV at extended depths. OceanComm Inc., a provider of high-speed wireless underwater communication technology, will provide wireless acoustic modems for future dives.