Ship XO Fleet-Up to CO Concept Resulting in Better Ships, Navy Surface Chief Says

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's ship command policy of having a ship's executive officers fleet up to become the ship's commanding officer is proving to be successful and is making better COs for the fleet.

"I am a full proponent of XO-CO fleet-up," Vice Adm. Rich Brown, commander of Naval Surface Forces, said in a Jan. 6 media teleconference, information from which was embargoed until Jan. 13.

"Just like anything else it has its pros and cons, just like the traditional career path of a separate XO to a separate CO had its pros and cons," Brown said. "What I know now is something we predicted back then – I think it's really proven out. If you talk to the commodores and the strike group commanders, especially during the transition, the ships that were on their second or third iteration of XO fleeting up to CO were better ships.

"If you talk to commanding officers today, they will tell you, 'I can't imagine taking command of my destroyer having not been the XO first.' " He said. "They know their ship, they know their material readiness, they know their crew, they know their wardroom, on Day One of being in command. And on Day One they're not only in command of the ship but they're commanding the ship."

Brown said that bad CO/XO combinations can occur and "we're not opposed to breaking that chain. When an XO comes into a ship with a great command climate and the ship is really

firing on all cylinders, that XO not only adds to that command climate but they're kind of inculcated into that command climate. But for some reason the command has a bad command climate, the XO can get inculcated into that bad command climate, so we're actively breaking that. We've done that a couple of times on both coasts where we split up the team or put a new team in there. But it's only been a handful of times because – quite honestly – under fleet-up the ships are really performing."

Brown said that, with all of the difficulties over the last decade of flat budgets and high operational tempo, one would expect the surface community to have witnessed a critical dip from material standpoint and "we really didn't. If you look at our INSURV [Bureau of Inspection and Survey] scores over the last 10 years, they remain steady or they've improved."

"If you look at our PMS [Preventative Maintenance System] scores, our training scores, I attribute XO-CO fleet-up as one of the contributing factors," he said, noting that when the XO checks on board and notes an upcoming INSURV in 20 months, for example, he or she realizes that he or she will be the CO in 20 months and will pay better attention to the material readiness of the ship.

"A lot of goodness," Brown noted of the resulting attention.

The admiral said the policy came out of the 2018 All-Up Review as something to look at, but the decision was made in June 2019 to stay the course with some minor tweaks.

Brown said he was the architect of the policy when he was assigned to the Bureau of Personnel in 2005.

"The whole [ship] XO-CO fleet-up program started on a buck slip on my desk," he said.

The naval aviation community has used the XO-CO fleet-up concept for decades.

Navy Surface Chief: LCS Will Deploy With Laser Weapon

An A/N SEQ-3(XN-1) laser weapon system at Dahlgren, Virginia, like the one deployed in 2014 aboard the USS Ponce. A littoral combat ship, the USS Little Rock, also will have a laser weapon installed, says the admiral in charge of the Navy's surface ships. U.S. Navy/John F. Williams

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of the Navy's surface warships said a littoral combat ship (LCS) soon will deploy with a laser weapon system on board.

Vice Adm. Rich Brown, commander of Naval Surface Forces, in a Jan. 6 media teleconference, embargoed until Jan. 13, said the weapon system will be installed in the Freedom-class USS Little Rock (LCS 9). Brown said the laser system would be installed in the ship midway during its deployment during a crew swap and planned maintenance availability.

The Little Rock, based in Naval Station Mayport, Florida, is expected to deploy sometime over the next year. The Navy was not ready to discuss the origin or type of laser weapon system to be installed.

The Navy already has installed a laser weapon system on the amphibious transport dock ship USS Portland (LPD 27). Earlier, an experimental laser weapon system, the SEQ-3, was deployed to the Persian Gulf in 2014 on board the USS Ponce, which since has been decommissioned.

Keel Laid for Future Destroyer USS John Basilone

BATH, Maine – The keel of the future USS John Basilone (DDG 122) was ceremoniously laid at General Dynamics Bath Iron Works shipyard on Jan. 10, the Program Executive Office-Ships said in a release.

Speakers at the ceremony included Capt. Seth Miller, DDG 51-class program manager, Diane Hawkins, niece of the ship's namesake, and the ship's sponsors, Amy Looney and Ryan Manion.

The ship's sponsors authenticated the keel by etching their initials into the keel plate, a tradition that symbolically recognizes the joining of modular components and the ceremonial beginning of the ship.

"It's an honor to celebrate this milestone with Ms. Looney, Ms. Manion and members of the Basilone family," Miller said. "Laying the keel for our nation's 72nd Arleigh Burke destroyer, and building a ship named for a man who embodied the spirit of commitment and strength, this is a truly special occasion."

The ship's namesake was a U.S. Marine Corps gunnery sergeant who was killed in action during the Battle of Iwo Jima in World War II. Basilone received the Medal of Honor for heroism displayed in the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942 and for conspicuous gallantry displayed in the Battle of Iwo Jima after he single-handedly destroyed an enemy blockhouse and led a Marine tank under fire safely through a minefield.

Arleigh Burke-class destroyers are multimission surface combatants that serve as integral assets in global maritime security, engaging in air, undersea, surface, strike and ballistic-missile defense as well as providing increased capabilities in anti-submarine warfare, command and control

and anti-surface warfare.

As a Flight IIA Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, John Basilone will employ the Aegis Baseline 9 Combat System, which includes Integrated Air and Missile Defense capability, delivers quick reaction time, high firepower, and has increased electronic countermeasures capability for anti-air warfare.

MARAD Announces Funding Availability for Small U.S. Shipyards

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) announced the availability of $19.6 million in federal funding to support capital improvements and employee training at small U.S. shipyards. The Small Shipyard Grant Program helps modernize eligible shipyard operations by improving efficiency and fostering quality ship construction, repair and reconfiguration.

"The Department of Transportation will be investing $19.6 million to help shipyards across the country improve their facilities and maintain their efficiency," Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao said.

The private American shipyards that build and repair America's military and commercial fleets contribute billions of dollars to the nation's economic growth. In 2013, the private shipbuilding and repair industry supported nearly 400,000 direct and indirect jobs nationwide, $37.3 billion in gross domestic product and $25.1 billion in labor income.

“U.S. small shipyards are the economic backbone for communities throughout the country,” Maritime Administrator Mark. H. Buzby said. “They are a proven, wise investment, leveraging the skills and expertise of our shipyard community, which in turn empowers our entire maritime industry.”

Available to U.S. shipyards with fewer than 1,200 production employees, the Small Shipyard Grant Program supports a variety of projects, including capital and related improvements and maritime training programs to foster technical skills and operational productivity. Since its inception in 2008, the program has awarded more than $223 million through 244 grants.

Comtech Wins $211 Million Contract to Support Next-Gen Marine Troposcatter

MELVILLE, N.Y. – Comtech Systems Inc. has been awarded a 10-year, $211 million contract by the Cubic Mission Solutions for next-generation troposcatter systems to support the U.S. Marine Corps.

Comtech Systems is part of Comtech’s Government Solutions segment. Cubic Mission Solutions is a business division of Cubic Corp.

In connection with this contract award, Comtech received an initial $13.4 million order to supply next-generation terminals to Cubic. Delivery of the first units will support test and evaluation for the Marine Corps.

Compared to legacy systems for the Marines, Cubic and Comtech's next-generation troposcatter solution increases bandwidth by an order of magnitude and reduces the size, weight and power by nearly 90%, making it the highest data capacity and most mobile beyond-line-of-sight system in the world.

"We are extremely excited to be able to provide our leading next-generation troposcatter solution to Cubic, in support of the U.S. Marine Corps," said Fred Kornberg, president and CEO of Comtech Telecommunications Corp.

"As the world's leader in digital troposcatter systems, our next-generation technology will enable the warfighter to communicate more reliably and with greater capability on the battlefield than ever before."

Northrop Grumman Wraps Initial In-Water Testing of AQS-24 Sonar Using Next-Gen Deploy, Retrieval Payload

The AQS-24 mine-hunting sonar during recent testing of a next-generation deploy and retrieval payload. Northrop Grumman Corp.

PANAMA CITY, Fla. – Northrop Grumman Corp.'s AQS-24 mine-hunting sonar recently completed initial in-water testing of a next-generation deploy and retrieval payload, the company said in a release.

Operated from the Mine Countermeasures Unmanned Surface Vessel (MCM USV), the AQS-24 D&R demonstrated the unmanned operations needed to perform a mine hunting mission off the MCM Mission Package aboard the littoral combat ship (LCS).

“Achieving this important milestone demonstrated reliable unmanned mine hunting operations, while using operationally representative hardware from the LCS MCM Mission Module,” said Alan Lytle, vice president of undersea systems for Northrop Grumman. “This allows the program to begin preparation for further at-sea testing of the system for extended duration missions in rigorous conditions.”

The MCM USV tests are ahead of planned user-operated evaluation system testing of the AQS-24 on LCSs. The company has multiple versions of the AQS-24 to provide mine-hunting capabilities for navies. The AQS-24B is a deployed system which uses side-scan sonar for real-time detection, localization and classification of bottom and moored mines in addition to a laser line scanner for precise optical identification.

Integration of the AQS-24 sonar with USVs allows for the real-time transmission of all AQS-24 data to a remote sonar operator, who can then commence real-time mission analysis (RTMA) of all recorded mission data. RTMA significantly reduces MCM detect to engage timelines, as well as the real-time reacquisition and identification of bottom mines following traditional mine hunting sorties.

Coast Guard to Commission

Fast-Response Cutter Daniel Tarr

The Coast Guard Cutter Daniel Tarr moors in Galveston, Texas, on Dec. 26. The Daniel Tarr is the service's 36th fast response cutter and will be commissioned Jan. 10. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 3rd Class Paige Hause

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Coast Guard will commission the fast-response cutter Daniel Tarr in Galveston, Texas, on Jan. 10, according to the Coast Guard's 8th District.

The Daniel Tarr is the 36th FRC delivered to the Coast Guard by Bollinger Shipyards. Vice Adm. Scott Buschman, Coast Guard Atlantic Area commander, will preside over the ceremony.

Lt. Nicholas Martin is the Daniel Tarr's commanding officer.

Daniel Tarr, the cutter's namesake, was one of four Coast Guard coxswains who served with the Marines during the amphibious invasion of Tulagi, Solomon Islands, in August 1942. Tarr enlisted as a surfman and later became coxswain of USS McKean's Boat Number 1 prior to the invasion.

On Aug. 7, 1942, Tarr, along with the other three coxswains, landed the first wave of the Marine Corps' Raider Battalion on the beaches of Tulagi. In the following three days, they also delivered vitally needed equipment, ammunition and supplies. For their role in the landing of the Marines' first wave and capture of Tulagi, the four coxswains were awarded the Silver Star Medal. They were the first enlisted men in the Coast Guard to receive the Silver Star Medal.

The Coast Guard Cutter Daniel Tarr's patrol area will encompass 900 miles of coastline for the 8th District, from Carrabelle, Florida, to Brownsville, Texas. Fast-response cutters are named after Coast Guard enlisted heroes and are

replacing the service’s 110-foot patrol boats. These vessels feature advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment.

Navy Awards BAE $175 Million for Vicksburg Modernization

The guided-missile cruiser USS Vicksburg prepares to depart Naval Station Mayport, Florida, for a two-month underway in 2016. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Mark Andrew Hays

NORFOLK, Va. – BAE Systems has received a $175 million contract from the U.S. Navy to modernize the guided-missile cruiser USS Vicksburg, the company said in a Jan. 6 release. The Vicksburg will undergo about 18 months of work at the company’s shipyard in Norfolk, the ship’s homeport.

The modernization period (MODPRD) contract includes options that, if exercised, would bring its cumulative value to $175.1 million.

BAE Systems initiated the first phase of Vicksburg’s modernization program in May 2017. The company will begin the final phase of work, called MODPRD, later this month. Under the new contract, the shipyard’s employees and industry partners will work on the ship’s weapons and engineering equipment, including its

gas turbine
propulsion system, restore crew habitability spaces and support the
installation of a new Aegis combat system, communication suite and CANES
(Consolidated Afloat Network Enterprise System). The Vicksburg's MODPRD is
scheduled to be complete in July 2021, allowing the ship to rejoin the
operational fleet afterward.

BAE's Norfolk shipyard also is performing similar work on the guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg. The Gettysburg's MODPRD work began in January 2019 and is expected to be complete this fall. The Gettysburg and Vicksburg were commissioned in the early 1990s, but BAE's work is expected to extend the service lives of both ships into the mid-2030s.

"Over the last few years, BAE Systems has worked extensively on modernizing the Navy's Atlantic Fleet cruisers," said Dave Thomas, vice president and general manager of BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair. "The Vicksburg and Gettysburg modernizations are big jobs. Our experience with cruisers and the expertise of our ship repair partners will return these vital combatants to the fleet with clear improvements and upgraded capability to carry out their missions."

Coast Guard Interdicts 9 Cuban Migrants

A Coast Guard Cutter Charles Sexton small boat crew interdicts a Cuban migrant vessel about 25 miles southeast of Tavernier

Creek, Florida, on Jan. 2. U.S. Coast Guard
MIAMI – The Coast Guard interdicted nine Cuban migrants 25 miles southeast of Tavernier Creek on Jan. 2, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release.

Coast Guard Sector Key West watchstanders received a notification via radio of a migrant vessel with nine people aboard. The watchstanders directed the launch of a Coast Guard Station Islamorada response boat and diverted the Coast Guard Cutter Charles Sexton (WPC-1108) to interdict the vessel.

The cutter crew interdicted the vessel and safely embarked the migrants.

One migrant was transferred into U.S. Customs and Border Protection custody after being brought ashore for more advanced medical care.

The remaining eight migrants were safely repatriated to Cuba on Jan. 4.

A total of 52 Cuban migrants have attempted to illegally enter the U.S. via the maritime environment in fiscal year 2020, which began Oct. 1, 2019, compared to 454 Cuban migrants in fiscal year 2019. These numbers represent the total number of at-sea interdictions, landings and disruptions in the Florida Straits, the Caribbean and Atlantic.

Coast Guard Vessel Capsizes in Oregon

ASTORIA, Ore. – A 26-foot Coast Guard trailerable aids to navigation boat capsized Jan. 4 with four crew members aboard near Pier 39 in Astoria, the Coast Guard 13th District said in a release.

Four Coast Guardsmen were aboard the vessel conducting routine operations when the capsizing occurred. The vessel reportedly encountered a series of heavy wakes that came over the bow, which resulted in an unrecoverable starboard list that capsized the vessel.

At 11:39 a.m., watchstanders at the 13th Coast Guard District command center in Seattle received four personal locator beacon alerts registered to Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team Astoria.

The beacons' positions correlated with multiple good Samaritan reports of visual distress signals in the vicinity of Pier 39 in Astoria. Correlating reports were also received by Astoria 911 dispatch.

At about 11:50 a.m., watchstanders at Coast Guard Sector Columbia River issued an urgent marine information broadcast (UMIB) and directed a Coast Guard Air Station Astoria MH-60 Jayhawk crew and a Coast Guard Station Cape Disappointment 47-foot motor lifeboat crew to respond.

At 12:09 p.m., crew members aboard the Columbia Bar Pilot vessel Connor Foss contacted the Coast Guard reporting they had recovered the four Coast Guardsmen from the water after responding to the UMIB and were en route to awaiting medical personnel at the 17th Street pier.

Clatsop County Sheriff Marine Unit assisted in the recovery by

towing the capsized vessel to the 17th Street pier.

All persons involved are reported to be in healthy condition after being evaluated at Columbia Memorial Hospital. The Coast Guard is overseeing salvage operations and has initiated the mishap board review process.