Marine Corps May Extend AV-8B Harrier Service to 2028

WASHINGTON – The Marine Corps' fleet of AV-8B Harrier II attack aircraft may serve until 2028, the Corps' aviation chief told Congress, a two-year extension of the previous plan.

"We will continue to be a fourth-gen/fifth-gen [tactical aircraft] fleet out until about 2030, with Harriers probably going to 2028 and F/A-18s going to 2030-2031," said Lt. Gen. Steven R. Rudder, the Marine Corps' deputy commandant for aviation. He testified April 4 during a hearing of the Tactical Air and Ground Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

The Corps earlier had extended the Harrier's planned service out to 2026 in view of the delays in the F-35B Lightning II joint strike fighter. Rudder's comment indicates that the Harrier may serve until 2028, three years longer than planned.

The F-35B has deployed on two amphibious assault ships, USS Wasp and USS Essex, flying the aircraft's first combat missions in September from the deck of the Essex.

According to one source, a planned F-35B deployment on a third ship this year was assumed instead by a detachment of AV-8Bs.

Rudder said the Corps plans to achieve a 100% fifth-generation tactical fighter force by 2030. He said the mixture percentage of fourth-gen to fifth-gen fighters in the Marine Corps today is 80-20.

The Marine Corps operates three operational F-35B squadrons and its first F-35C squadron, VMFA-314, is in transition.

Navy’s Triton UAV Expected to Deploy in Summer 2019

WASHINGTON – The Navy’s director of air warfare said the service expects to deploy the MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, high-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle later this year.

“The Triton is going forward this year, probably later this summer,” Rear Adm. Scott D. Conn, director of air warfare in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, said during an April 4 hearing of the Tactical Air and Ground Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

The deployment will mark the achievement of Early Operational Capability, which originally was planned for last year at Andersen Air Force on Guam for two MQ-4Cs assigned to Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19. The deployment was postponed when one of the two Tritons experienced a landing mishap on Sept. 13 at Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California.

The MQ-4C eventually will be deployed to several bases and will be used to establish five orbits – patrols – with a 24/7 presence over the oceans. Its sensors will be used to search for, detect and identify shipping and other targets of interest. The Triton will work closely with the Navy’s fleet of P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

“We’re going to continue to build capability and capacity with that system,” Conn said, noting that the capacity and capability need to be increased before the Navy can retire its EP-3E electronic reconnaissance aircraft in 2021. “We are on track to do that.”

Navy Air Warfare Director: Report on Next-Generation Fighter Due in Summer

WASHINGTON – The Navy's analysis of alternatives (AoA) for its next-generation air-dominance fighter aircraft is almost finished, a Navy admiral told Congress.

"That AoA will be complete this spring," Rear Adm. Scott D. Conn, director of air warfare in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, said during an April 4 hearing of the Tactical Air and Ground Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

"The final report will come out this summer, and that will inform future choices reflected in future budget cycles in terms of what we need to do to get after the lethality that we need at a cost that we can afford."

The F/A-XX air-dominance fighter will be a sixth-generation aircraft that eventually will succeed the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter in the Navy's carrier air wings.

The F-35C Lightning II joint strike fighter achieved Initial Operational Capability in February and will join the Super Hornet in carrier air wings. Strike Fighter Squadron 147 is the Navy's first fleet F-35C squadron.

Conn said the Navy expects to attain a 50-50 percentage mix of F-35Cs and F/A-18E/Fs by about 2030. The Navy has ordered 78 Block III Super Hornets and plans to modify more than 100 older Super hornets to the Block III configuration.

“Any additional resources that would be available from an F-35 perspective would provide us some buffer to meet our transition schedule as we get transition squadrons from Super Hornets into the Joint Strike Fighter,” Conn said.

Marine Corps Sees Cargo UAVs as the Future of Logistics in Distributed Operations

140318-N-PO203-138 QUANTICO, Va. (Mar. 18, 2014) A Kamen K-Max helicopter equipped with the Autonomous Aerial Cargo Utility System (AACUS) lifts off during an Office of Naval Research (ONR) demonstration held at the Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., as part of the Autonomous Aerial Cargo Utility System (AACUS) program. AACUS consists of a sensor and software package that when integrated into rotary wing aircraft enables autonomous, unmanned flight allowing the Marine Corps to rapidly resupply forces on the front lines as an alternative to dangerous convoys, manned aircraft or air drops in all weather conditions. (U.S. Navy photo by John F. Williams/Released)

WASHINGTON – The Marine Corps plans to continue experimentation with its two K-Max cargo unmanned aerial vehicles (CUAVs) and hopes to procure more to add to experimentation in logistics for distributed operations.

“We see this as the future of distributed operations in how we logistically supply ourselves,” said Lt. Gen. Steven R. Rudder, the Marine Corps’ deputy commandant for aviation, responding to a question about an unfunded requirement for $18 million for the K-Max unmanned cargo helicopter from Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Connecticut) during an April 4 hearing of the

Tactical Air and Ground Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

The Marine Corps owns two CQ-24A K-Max unmanned helicopters and deployed them to Afghanistan in 2011 through 2014 as an experiment in logistics to forward operating bases. Operated by contractors, they transported 4.5 million pounds of cargo, much of which would otherwise have been transported by 900 convoys of trucks through territory subject to ambush and improvised explosive devices.

“We endeavored to make them a program of record and are still working down that road,” Rudder said. “But we were not able to secure funding to get that flying in the fleet for test and operational usage for experimentation. We have since been able to secure funding for a cooperative research and development contract that we’re working with [the K-Max vendor].

“In the next few weeks [the two CUAVs] are going to be trucked back to Connecticut, and we’re going to give them to the vendor to let them work through a couple different things,” Rudder added. “One is autonomous logistics delivery. There are certain things you want on call but there are other things that you need going autonomously. The K-Max, with its lift capability and the way we conceive distributed operations in the future, if we get those airplanes, we’re going to configure them [the same] as we’re configuring a test vehicle in Connecticut with autonomy, which will allow them to have terrain-following radar and, [with] a push of a button, it will take the cargo to a particular point that was programmed in, drop that cargo and do it all day long. We’ve seen efficiencies with this over time.

“With the money we have funded right now – to do those two aircraft that we own – we will bring those back from Connecticut, hopefully by the end of next summer, to begin experimenting in [Marine Corps Air Station] Yuma [Arizona] and [Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center] Twentynine Palms

[California], but the emphasis right now is to create a few more air vehicles so we can expand this usage," he said.

NAVSEA SIOP Office Leading $21 billion Naval Shipyard Modernization

WASHINGTON – A new Navy program office will centrally coordinate a plan to recapitalize its four public shipyards, the Naval Sea Systems Command Office of Corporate Communication said in an April 3 release.

The Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Plan (SIOP) Program Office, PMS-555, established in June 2018, is working in concert with Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC), and Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) to recapitalize and modernize the infrastructure at the four public nuclear shipyards to include critical dry dock repairs, restoring needed shipyard facilities and optimizing their placement, and replacing aging and deteriorating capital equipment.

Executing this plan will improve the naval shipyards' productivity and increase their maintenance throughput to support the combat readiness of the Navy.

Without major upgrades and reconfigurations, the shipyards would not be able to meet the fleet's future aircraft carrier and submarine depot maintenance and inactivation requirements looking out through 2040.

"The Navy relies on NAVSEA to deliver combat-ready ships and

submarines out of planned maintenance availabilities on time," said NAVSEA Cmdr. Vice Adm. Tom Moore. "Modernizing our four naval shipyards – a massive task under any circumstance – is critical because it's the only way we will be able to meet our future mission requirements."

"This is a comprehensive plan, developed in partnership with NAVFAC and CNIC, that will allow the Navy to bring its organic shipyards into the 21st century to fully support the Navy the nation needs," Moore added.

The Navy's four public shipyards – Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia; Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Kittery, Maine; Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility, Bremerton, Washington; and Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii – were originally designed and built in the 19th and 20th centuries to support construction of sail- and conventionally-powered ships using industrial models of the time. As a result, they are not configured to maintain and modernize nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and submarines.

Developing, programming and executing the plan falls to the PMS-555 program office, which is staffed by industrial engineers, process improvement specialists, facilities engineers, regulatory compliance specialists, strategic and financial analysts, Civil Engineer Corps officers, construction managers and construction schedulers from NAVSEA, CNIC and NAVFAC.

"The Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Plan articulated a vision that shipyard infrastructure has three interdependent components: the dry docks, the facilities and the capital equipment; and that these configurations are fundamentally linked to the shipyards' ability to execute the mission they are tasked to do," said Steven Lagana, PMS-555 program manager.

“We are utilizing modeling and simulation as a tool to integrate these components to better inform the desired infrastructure layout. Through this, the Navy will be in a better position to make meaningful, long-lasting investments that not only address the condition of the facilities and equipment but also change the way the work is conducted. Once we’re finished, the Navy will recover more than 300,000 work days per year, every year.”

The first milestone PMS-555 is scheduled to achieve is the development of a “digital twin” of the naval shipyards. This will be a virtual representation of the shipyards that will be used to conduct modeling and simulations of the shipyard environment to aid in evaluations and decisions for the future shipyard infrastructure. The program office is also developing comprehensive strategies to address historic preservation and environmental compliance during this recapitalization effort.

The program office is hosting its first industry day April 8 at the Washington Navy Yard.

“We’re sold out,” Lagana said. “We have more than 100 companies from 19 states and the District of Columbia who are coming to hear about the program and see how they can be part of this once-in-a-century team that will deliver the shipyards the Navy needs.”

HII Completes Acceptance Trials for National Security

Cutter Midgett

PASCAGOULA, Miss. – National Security Cutter (NSC) Midgett (WMSL-757) has finished its acceptance trials, Huntington Ingalls Industries' (HII) shipbuilding division announced. Midgett, the eighth NSC Ingalls has built for the U.S. Coast Guard, spent two days in the Gulf of Mexico proving the ship's systems.

"The success of these trials is a direct result of the hard work and expertise of our shipbuilders, the INSURV team and our U.S. Coast Guard customer," said George S. Jones, Ingalls' vice president of operations.

The U.S. Navy's Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) were on board, as Ingalls' test and trials team led the sea trials and conducted extensive testing of the propulsion, electrical, damage control, anchor-handling, small boat operations and combat systems. The team finished the trials with a completed full-power propulsion run on Midgett.

"With the success of these trials, NSC 8 is one step closer to becoming another highly capable, vital asset to the men and women of our Coast Guard," said Derek Murphy, Ingalls' Coast Guard program manager. "Our dedicated NSC team has proven themselves once again, and we could not be more proud of what they have accomplished."

Ingalls has delivered seven Legend-class NSCs and has two more under construction, including Midgett, set to be delivered before the end of 2019. Stone (WMSL-758) is scheduled for delivery in 2020. In December of 2018, Ingalls received two fixed-price incentive contracts with a combined value of $931 million to build NSCs 10 and 11.

NSC 8 is named to honor the hundreds of members of the Midgett family who have served in the U.S. Coast Guard and its

predecessor services. At least 10 members of the Midgett family earned high honors from the Coast Guard for their heroic lifesaving deeds. Seven Midgett family members were awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal, the Coast Guard's highest award for saving a life, and three were awarded the Silver Lifesaving Medal.

State Department OKs Possible Sale of MH-60R Helicopters to India

WASHINGTON – The State Department has approved a possible sale to India of 24 MH-60R Seahawk helicopters for an estimated cost of $2.6 billion, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in an April 2 release, the day the DSCA delivered the required certification notifying Congress.

India requested the MH-60R helicopters along with mission equipment, crew-served weapons and spare systems. The request includes 1,000 sonobuoys, 10 Hellfire missiles, four Hellfire training missiles, 30 Mk54 torpedoes and four Naval Strike Missile inert training missiles.

Support also would include spare engine containers; facilities study, design and construction; spare and repair parts; support and test equipment; communication equipment; ferry support; publications and technical documentation; personnel training and training equipment; U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical and logistics support services; and other related elements of logistical and program support. The total estimated cost is $2.6 billion.

The proposed sale will provide India the capability to perform anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare missions along with the ability to perform secondary missions including vertical replenishment, search and rescue, and communications relay. India will use the enhanced capability as a deterrent to regional threats and to strengthen its homeland defense. India will have no difficulty absorbing these helicopters into its armed forces.

The principal contractor will be Lockheed Martin Rotary and Mission Systems of Owego, New York.

Leonardo Submits TH-119 for Navy Training Helicopter Competition

PHILADELPHIA – Leonardo submitted to the U.S. Navy its proposal to manufacture and support up to 130 training helicopters, the company said in an April 2 release.

Manufactured in Philadelphia and featuring a Pratt & Whitney PT-6 engine, the TH-119 boasts the highest power margins in its class. Its Genesys Aerosystems' avionics equip pilots to fly safely during low visibility and challenging weather while providing a foundation for transitioning to combat helicopters.

The "hot" pressure refueling in the TH-119 allows fuel tanks to be filled without shutting the engine down, leading to quicker turnaround and more time spent flying. A durable metal box-beam airframe stands up to the daily grind of training and

enables repairs to be conducted on-site, unlike the repairs on most composite aircraft, which require lengthier off-site attention.

The TH-119 has completed its flight tests and meets all FAA requirements and safety standards for IFR certification. Based on the successful AW119 helicopter – in service in 40 countries and selected by military and government customers such as the Portuguese Air Force and New York City Department of Environmental Protection Police – the TH-119 is manufactured on an FAA-certified Part 21 production line within the United States. Leonardo's Philadelphia plant also is building the U.S. Air Force MH-139 for Boeing.

Navy Awards Two Contracts for MQ-4C for Upgrades, Advance Acquisition

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded two contracts to Northrop Grumman Systems Corp. to advance the fielding of the new MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle.

Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) on April 1 awarded a $12.8 million contract modification to upgrade three Tritons "from a baseline Integrated Functional Capability (IFC) 3 software configuration to a Multi-IFC 4 software configuration," the contract announcement said. "This modification updates drawings and associated technical data in support of the MQ-4C IFC software configuration upgrade."

Northrop Grumman also was awarded a $7.2 million acquisition contract modification to extend “the period of performance and provides additional funding to procure long-lead components, material, parts and associated efforts required to maintain the MQ-4C Triton Unmanned Aircraft System planned low-rate initial production Lot 4 production schedule.”

Two MQ-4Cs have been delivered to the Navy’s Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 detachment at Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California. The Triton was slated to reach Early Operational Capability last year with a deployment to Guam, but the deployment was put on hold after one of the MQ-4Cs was damaged in a landing mishap at Point Mugu.

Marine Pilots Killed in AH-1Z Helicopter Crash; First Naval Aviation Loss of 2019

ARLINGTON, Va. — The loss of a Marine Corps AH-1Z helicopter March 30 was the first crash of a U.S. naval aviation aircraft since the beginning of the calendar year.

Two Marine pilots were killed when the AH-1Z Viper helicopter gunship crashed in the vicinity of Yuma, Arizona, at about 8:45 p.m. March 30, according to a Marine Corps release.

“Both pilots were conducting a routine training mission as part of the Weapons and Tactics Instructor course 2-19,” the release said.

The training was being conducted by Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron One based at Marine Corps Air Station

Yuma. The helicopter was assigned to a Marine helicopter light attack squadron, but the identity of the specific squadron has not been released.

An AH-1Z carries a crew of two.

The cause of the crash is under investigation. The names of the deceased pilots have been withheld pending notification of their next of kin.