

Coast Guard, Local Agencies Rescue 46 from Ice Floe in Western Lake Erie



CLEVELAND, Ohio – The U.S. Coast Guard and local agencies rescued 46 ice fishermen from an ice floe that broke free near Catawaba Island in Lake Erie on March 9, the Coast Guard 9th District said in a release of the same date.

An additional estimated 100 people were able to self-rescue from the ice floe either by swimming or walking on ice bridges that were still connected to the floe.

At 8:13 a.m., Coast Guard Station Marblehead received notification from an Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) representative that there were approximately 100 people stranded on an ice floe and that there were an additional 30 to 40 people in the water. Coast Guard District 9 Command Center launched two 20-foot Special Purpose Craft–airboats from Station Marblehead, two MH-65 Dolphin helicopters from Air Station Detroit, and two MH-60 Jayhawk helicopters from Air Station Traverse City to respond for a mass rescue.

Catawaba Island Fire, Put-in-Bay Fire and Southshore Towing also responded with airboats, while ODNR, North Central Emergency Medical Services and Danbury EMS assisted in the search-and-rescue efforts.

Coast Guard Station Marblehead arrived on scene at approximately 8:50 a.m. and there were no persons in the water. Those who had fallen in or intentionally entered the water to try to swim to land were all back on the ice or land.

Approximately 100 people were able to walk to shore via portions of ice that were still unbroken; however, as the

temperature continued to rise, the ice broke into multiple separate ice floes. The remaining fishermen were rescued by the airboat crews and helicopter crews.

By approximately 11:15 a.m., all persons who had been stranded on the ice were rescued.

As temperatures begin to rise, the Coast Guard strongly urges people not to go out onto ice. Ice may look safe, but it is difficult to determine the thickness visually and the increase in warm weather will continue to melt and weaken the ice.

Surge Sealift Force in Need of Urgent Recapitalization, Officials Say



CHUK SAMET, Thailand (Jan. 27, 2019) A Soldier attached to U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) directs a vehicle down the ramp of the Military Sealift Command chartered ship M/V Cape Hudson (T-AKR 5066) during an offload at Chuk Samet, Thailand, Jan. 24, 2019.

WASHINGTON – The nation's seaborne logistics capability is atrophying and in need of rejuvenation, senior government officials said in testimony before Congress. Maintaining older ships is proving more costly than anticipated, driving officials to seek new or used ships to replace some in the current inventory.

Testifying March 7 before a joint hearing of the Seapower and Projections Forces subcommittee and Readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Service Committee were Army Gen. Steve Lyons,

commander, U.S. Transportation Command, and retired Navy Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, administrator of the Maritime Administration (MARAD), a Department of Transportation agency that maintains the Ready Reserve Force (RRF), a fleet of sealift and specialized ships available on a reduced operational status for call up to service.

Of interest are the 46 ships of the RRF and the 15 sealift ships operated by the Military Sealift Command. The average age of the RRF ships is 44 years and are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Of the RRF ships, 21 are steam-powered, an obsolescent propulsion technology for which qualified mariners to operate it are decreasing in numbers.

Lyons noted that commercial ship companies look to retire ships at the 15-year mark to avoid the maintenance and repair costs of older ships.

He said the readiness of the 15 surge sealift roll-on/roll-off ships currently is only 65 percent.

“The need to recapitalize is urgent,” Lyons said. “I believe accelerating the used vessel purchases with the authority ... Congress provided in the last two years is the most practical way ahead.”

Buzby said the key to sustaining sealift capability is the “acquisition and conversion of used ships for the RRF, beginning with the purchase of two vessels as authorized by the FY [fiscal year] '18 NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act].”

He said that in January the Navy, in coordination with U.S. Transportation Command, “provided MARAD with the desired characteristics for replacement ships to be acquired from the commercial market. MARAD then released a request for information to identify suitable ships, and responses are due back [on March 16].”

Buzby said that of the 50,000 large, oceangoing commercial vessels in the world, 181 sail under the U.S. flag, including 82 vessels operating exclusively in international trade and the remainder in domestic trade. He said that these commercial ships are critical to sustaining the employment base for mariners for the RRF. He also noted that of 82 U.S.-flag ships in international trade, MARAD's Maritime Security Program helps sustain a fleet of 60 militarily useful ships with mariners fully qualified for sealift operations.

"I am deeply concerned about our ability to muster an adequate number of mariners to operate the sealift fleet for surge and sustainment operations during a mobilization lasting about six months," Buzby said.

Buzby said the Navy is funding some service-life extensions (SLEPs) of MARAD ships, but "the pace of repair is outpacing the pace of service-life extension," noting that many of the repairs involve structural steel repairs. "We're not making any headway toward extending that service life."

He said that the SLEPs for each ship cost from \$800,000 to \$3.5 million, and often three times what was budgeted.

Service-life extensions are not returning the investment that we thought," Lyons said.

Buzby said that used ships vary in cost "from \$25 million, maybe to \$60 million" depending on age "and a new ship is 26 times that."

"If you look at the investments the Navy in the out-years, it's very, very hard to compete a sealift new-build that is 26 times as expensive as an acquired used [ship] solution," Lyons said.

New or used roll-on/roll-off ships are the primary recapitalization requirement for sealift, Buzby said.

Mercury Systems Receives \$2.8M Order for Modular Rackmount Servers for Naval Weapon System Application

ANDOVER, Mass. – Mercury Systems Inc. has received a \$2.8 million order from a leading defense prime contractor for modular rackmount servers to be used in a naval weapon system, the company said in a March 7 release. The order was booked in the company's fiscal 2019 third quarter and is expected to be shipped over the next several quarters.

Currently deployed on over 40 naval programs, Mercury's EnterpriseSeries rackmount servers are designed for mission-critical applications.

"Performance, availability and versatility are extremely important to our customer," said Scott Orton, vice president and general manager of Mercury's Trusted Mission Solutions group. "Designed to meet both current and future deployment needs, our composable servers not only minimize cost but also offer long-term sustainability."

Navy

Awards

AARGM-ER

Development Contract to Northrop Grumman



ARLINGTON, Va. – The extended-range version of the AGM-88G Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile – Extended Range (AARGM-ER) is proceeding into engineering and manufacturing development (EMD) with the March 7 Defense Department contract announcement of a contract award to Northrop Grumman.

Northrop Grumman Innovation Systems, Northridge, California, was awarded a \$322.5 million cost-plus-incentive-fee contract from the Naval Air Systems Command to provide for the EMD phase, which will include “the design, integration and test of a new solid rocket motor for the AARGM-ER.”

The AARGM-ER will be integrated on the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter and EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft and configured for internal carriage on the F-35AC Lightning II joint strike fighter.

“AARGM-ER extended range coupled with AARGM lethality will meet a critical defense suppression requirement while protecting our strike aviators,” said Cary Ralston, vice president, defense electronic systems, Northrop Grumman, in a March 8 release.

“The AARGM-ER program is leveraging the AARGM that is currently in production,” the Northrop Grumman release said.

The AARGM is an improved version of the AGM-88 High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM), an air-launched missile used to suppress and destroy enemy air defenses. The AARGM is currently deployed with the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps on the F/A-18C/D Hornet; the U.S. Navy F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler aircraft; and the Italian Air Force’s Tornado electronic combat aircraft.

Work on the EMD phase is expected to be completed in December 2023.

General Atomics Successfully Demonstrates Aluminum Power system to Power Remotely Operated Underwater Vehicle

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems (GA-EMS) announced today that it has successfully completed the first end-to-end demonstration of its Aluminum Power System (ALPS), powering an underwater remotely operated vehicle (ROV) at a GA-EMS test tank facility in San Diego. During the demonstration, a submerged ALPS provided hydrogen and oxygen to a Teledyne Energy Systems fuel cell, which provided electrical power to propel an ROV.

“This demonstration marks a major milestone for us, illustrating for the first time that ALPS can be successfully integrated to supply hydrogen and oxygen to fuel cells to generate electrical power and drive an underwater vehicle,” stated Scott Forney, president of GA-EMS. “ALPS is a unique, high energy density system intended to provide up to 10 times the energy output of similar battery volume. With its unlimited shelf life, safe handling and high energy density, ALPS can truly enable underwater ‘refueling stations’ to support long-term underwater vehicle operations.”

“We view fuel cells as an important component in supporting challenging mission requirements for large UUVs [unmanned underwater vehicles] and other undersea platforms,” said Rolf

Ziesing, vice president of Programs at GA-EMS. "Prior to this demonstration, we had successfully tested ALPS using only load banks. Working in cooperation with Teledyne, we were able to integrate an end-to-end system and test under real-world conditions. The results and data gathered during the demonstration will allow us to continue testing and advance ALPS to meet future undersea platform energy requirements."

ALPS provides an energy-dense, cost-efficient power source for manned and unmanned undersea vehicles. The system significantly reduces safety concerns while providing a clean, reliable power source for long-endurance missions and underwater operations.

House Panel's Dissatisfaction With President on Afghanistan, Syria, Africa Cuts Across Party Lines

Members of the House Armed Services Committee expressed bipartisan concern and opposition to President Donald Trump's policies and statements on Afghanistan, Syria and Africa, with Republicans and Democrats throwing critical questions and opinions at the commanders of those crucial areas on March 7.

The criticism started at the top, with committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) saying the "decisions by the administration appear to be uninformed, without the consultation of senior leaders in the [Defense Department] and – importantly – without consulting our allies and partners," which "are clearly impacting our alliances and partnerships."

U.S. Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican, said he “shared” Smith’s concerns about “where we are going from now” in the fight against the ISIS extremists in Syria and Iraq. “We need to keep pressure on the terrorist networks,” despite the liberation of most of the ISIS territory, Thornberry said.

That line of questions and statements continued down to the most junior members of the panel, many of whom are veterans of those conflicts.

Army Gen. Joseph Votel, commander of U.S. Central Command, and Marine Corps Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, commander of Africa Command, tried to strike a positive tone in assessing conditions in their areas of responsibility, but conceded under the persistent questioning that some of the president’s decisions and statements could have negative effects.

Votel, who is set to relinquish his command later this month, was particularly concerned about the president’s repeated declarations that ISIS has been defeated in Syria and Iraq, which justified major reductions in U.S. forces there.

While noting that the U.S.-led coalition had reduced ISIS’ self-proclaimed caliphate from 243,000 square miles to less than one mile, “the fight against violent extremists is far from over,” Votel said.

What we are seeing now is not a surrender of ISIS” in the shrinking pocket of land in Syria, but “a calculated decision” to protect its fighters “while waiting for a chance to re-emerge,” he said.

Votel, who has said he was not consulted before Trump declared ISIS beaten and ordered all U.S. forces withdrawn from Syria, said he is proceeding with a phased withdrawal of his forces with a primary focus of protecting the small number who now are expected to remain.

Asked how the Russians reacted to Trump’s decision to leave

Syria, Votel said it was "positive" as the Russians believed they would be "filling the vacuum" and perpetuating their relations with Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Votel said he was "confident" that the small U.S. force, now expected to be about 400, that Trump later decided to retain in Syria could keep ISIS from regaining ground. But, he added, it would be "not just U.S. forces, but our partners."

Asked if he agreed with the president's decision to remove most U.S. forces from Syria and at least half of its troops from Afghanistan, Votel said, "most of us would say these decisions have to be based on conditions at that time."

As for Afghanistan, he said his advice would be that any decision on forces "should be done in full consultation with our partners." He added: "We have not received any orders to withdraw" forces from Afghanistan.

Pressed repeatedly about the negotiations with the Taliban, conducted by Zalmay Khalilzad with no involvement by the Afghan government, Votel said those talks are in the early stages and any agreement would have to be made by Kabul. U.S. goals in the negotiations are to protect U.S. interests and ensure the security of the Afghan government.

Waldhauser was more sanguine about the troop reductions ordered in his command, noting that his initial instructions were to withdraw about 10 percent of his counter-terrorism forces, which are primarily special operations personnel, while keeping the 6,000 conventional troops advising and assisting local forces. Those troops would be distributed based on the status of efforts to improve the capabilities of local forces, he said.

Asked if he considered that enough of a force, he said, "adequate."

Coast Guard Interdicts 23 Illegal Migrants



POMPANO BEACH, Fla. –The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Bernard C. Webber (WPC-1101) on March 2 interdicted 23 illegal migrants with multiple nationalities 11 miles east of Pompano Beach attempting to illegally enter the United States, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a March 6 release.

The Bernard C. Webber crew sighted a 25-foot cabin cruiser with six adult Chinese females –three of whom were interdicted by the Coast Guard less than year ago for illegal entry into the United States –one adult Guyanese female, one adult Colombian female, five adult Haitian females, six adult Haitian males, three accompanied Haitian male minors and one unaccompanied Haitian male onboard.

“These illegal maritime migration voyages are extremely dangerous and put the safety of those aboard in great jeopardy. The Coast Guard remains poised to intercept these smuggling events in an effort to prevent the unnecessary loss of life,” said Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Etelmaki, boarding officer for the Bernard C. Webber.

Six of the migrants interdicted –four Chinese nationals, one Guyanese national and one Haitian national –were handed over to U.S. Customs and Border Patrol for processing and Homeland Security Investigations is looking into the case. The remaining 17 migrants were transferred to the Royal Bahamian Defense Force and appropriate child services in Freeport, Bahamas, on March 3.

Navy Establishes New Program Executive Office for Columbia Submarine



WASHINGTON (March 6, 2019) An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines.

WASHINGTON – The Navy has established Program Executive Office Columbia (PEO CLB) to focus entirely on its No. 1 acquisition priority, Research, Development and Acquisition Public Affairs said in a March 6 release.

PEO CLB will provide oversight of the construction of 12 Columbia-class submarines (SSBN) that will help the Navy maintain a credible, survivable and modern sea-based strategic deterrent into the 2080s.

“This is the Navy’s most important program and establishing a new PEO today will meet tomorrow’s challenges head on,” said James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for acquisition, research and development.

“The evolution from initial funding to construction, development and testing to serial production of 12 SSBNs will be crucial to meeting the National Defense Strategy and building the Navy the nation needs. PEO Columbia will work directly with resource sponsors, stakeholders, foreign partners, shipbuilders and suppliers to meet national priorities and deliver and sustain lethal capacity our warfighters need.”

Geurts announced that Rear Adm. Scott Pappano will assume the first office of PEO Columbia.

PEO Columbia will be part of Team Subs and will work closely with PEO Submarines and the Naval Sea Systems Command's In-Service Submarine Directorate (SEA 07) on all submarine and affiliated programs, including life-cycle support. PEO CLB will focus on the design, construction and sustainment of the Columbia program and associated efforts that include interface with Strategic Systems Program and the United Kingdom for the Dreadnought Program.

The Columbia-class is a critical shipbuilding program and must deliver on time to meet U.S. Strategic Command nuclear deterrence requirements due to the Ohio-class submarines reaching maximum extended service life. The first Columbia-class ship is on track to begin construction of USS Columbia (SSBN 826) in fiscal year 2021, deliver in fiscal year 2028, and on patrol in 2031.

EA-6B Prowler Naval Electronic Attack Aircraft Set for Retirement



CHERRY POINT, N.C. (Feb. 28, 2019) Two U.S. Marine Corps EA-6B Prowlers assigned to Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (VMAQ) 2, fly off the coast of North Carolina, Feb 28, 2019.

ARLINGTON, Va. –The Northrop Grumman EA-6B Prowler electronic attack aircraft will be retired from naval service on March 8 in ceremonies at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.

The last squadron to operate the Prowler, Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron Two (VMAQ-2) will say farewell to

its last two –which reportedly are bound for museums–of six Prowlers as the squadron is deactivated.

VMAQ-2 returned to Cherry Point in November from its final deployment at a base in the Central Command area of responsibility.

VMAQ-2 is the last of four VMAQ squadrons to operate the Prowler. The other three squadrons –VMAQ-1, VMAQ-3 and VMAQ-4, two of which were formed from detachments of VMAQ-2 and one of which became a fleet replacement training squadron (VMAQT-1) until it was no longer needed –have been deactivated, one each year –over the past three years.

The VMAQ squadrons have deployed their EA-6Bs to numerous bases and aircraft carriers over their service, providing electronic jamming and attack in support of joint forces, including participation in combat operations in Libya, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

The Marine Corps is not fielding a direct replacement for the EA-6B, instead relying on other platforms like the F-35B, organic electronic warfare systems such as the Intrepid Tiger pod and the Navy's electronic attack squadrons.

The Navy retired the EA-6B from operational squadron service in 2015. The Prowler entered combat during 1972 over North Vietnam and served in numerous conflicts and crises since, most notably in Operations El Dorado Canyon, Desert Storm, Southern Watch, Allied Force, Desert Fox, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The service now flies the EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft from aircraft carriers and in expeditionary roles from land bases to support joint forces.

Marine Corps Seeks Ideas, Information for Optical Communication Transmission System



A U.S. Marine with Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Africa performs a radio check during a training event with German soldiers in Seedorf, Germany, Dec. 6, 2018. This event, which focused on infantry tactics and maneuvers, marked the first time U.S. Marines have trained with German Fallschirmjäger Regiment-31. SPMAGTF-CR-AF is a rotational force deployed to conduct crisis-response and theater-security operations in Europe and Africa. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Katelyn Hunter)

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. –Marine Corps Systems Command (MCSC) has released a Request for Information (RFI) to identify a nondevelopmental solution to provide a complete Line of Sight (LOS) Optical Communication Transmission System (OTCS), the command said in a March 5 release

.According to the RFI, released on the Federal Business Opportunities website, the OCTS system must be capable of providing a high-bandwidth transmission path used for voice, video and data communications

.For program officials, this capability will consolidate capabilities into a complete LOS transmission capability

."The adage, 'Move, shoot, communicate' hasn't changed, but how we communicate is rapidly changing," said Maj. Eric Holmes, MCSC project officer. "Given the rapid pace of innovation in technology, the Marine Corps is currently evaluating maturing capabilities.

"Optical communications support greater bandwidth and provide

additional relief for frequency allocations in an already constrained spectrum

.“The Marine Corps is turning to industry to help rapidly develop and field this technology to protect vital command and control emissions from advanced adversaries,” Holmes said. Responses to the RFI must be received by 1 p.m. on March 19.