Navy Commissions LCS USS Wichita

NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Fla. – The U.S. Navy commissioned USS Wichita (LCS 13) – the nation's seventh Freedom-variant littoral combat ship (LCS) – at Naval Station Mayport Jan. 12 before a crowd including active-duty and veteran sailors. This milestone places the ship, built by the Lockheed Martin-led team into active service.

"We are confident that LCS 13 will be what the Navy needs, when the fleet needs it, and we are proud to mark this day with her crew as the Navy welcomes its newest combat ship," said Joe DePietro, vice president, Small Combatants and Ship Systems, Lockheed Martin. "We remain focused on delivering these ships as quickly as possible with increasing capability and lethality."

The LCS is a highly maneuverable, lethal and adaptable ship, designed to support focused mine countermeasures, anti-submarine warfare and surface warfare missions. It is enabled with the COMBATSS-21 Combat Management System, built from the Aegis Common Source Library, which drives commonality among the fleet. The Freedom-variant LCS integrates new technology and capability to affordably support current and future mission capability from deep water to the littorals.

"Like a proud parent, I am so excited to share with you how awesome this ship really is," said LCS 13's Commanding Officer, Cmdr. Nathan Rowan. "People ask me about littoral combat ship. Is it a new cruiser or destroyer? Actually, it's neither. It's an entirely new category of warship. The LCS packs quite a hefty punch for such a small package."

There are seven ships in various stages of production and test at Fincantieri Marinette Marine in Wisconsin, where the

Freedom-variant LCS is built. The next Freedom-variant in the class is LCS 15, the future USS Billings, slated for delivery this spring.

“We consider it a privilege to support the men and women who will sail this great ship, protecting the United States and our allies,” said Jan Allman, president and CEO of Fincantieri Marinette Marine. “On behalf of the 2,000 individuals that crafted the LCS 13, we congratulate the U.S. Navy and the outstanding crew of the USS Wichita.”

Navy to Deploy Two Littoral Combat Ships This Year; East Coast LCSs to Deploy in 2020

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will restart overseas deployments of its littoral combat ships (LCSs) this year after a hiatus of more than a year, the Navy’s surface warfare boss said. Two LCSs will deploy this year from San Diego, followed by two from the East Coast in fiscal 2020.

“It’s happening,” Vice Adm. Richard A. Brown, commander, Naval Surface Forces, and Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, told reporters in a Jan. 11 teleconference, noting that from then on “there will always be LCS forward-deployed.”

Brown said that the Independence-variant LCSs USS Montgomery and USS Gabrielle Giffords will deploy this year. These deployments will mark the second and third for the Independence variant. He declined to narrow down the deployment windows for operations security reasons.

Brown said the first LCS deployments from the East Coast, departing from Naval Station Mayport, Florida, would be undertaken by the Freedom-variant LCS USS Detroit in 2020, followed by sister ship USS Little Rock.

For all of these deployments, the ships will carry the full Surface Warfare mission package, Brown said.

He said the naval component commanders of the regional combatant commands were asking for the LCSs to deploy.

The gap in LCS deployments after the deployments of USS Freedom, USS Fort Worth and USS Coronado was the result of the Navy taking time out to revamp its operational and crew concepts for the LCS. In September 2016, the Navy announced several significant changes to the LCS program based on operational experience.

The original 3:2:1 crew concept – three crews, two ships, one deployed – was changed to a Blue/Gold concept similar to that used by the ballistic-missile submarine force, with two crews dedicated to each LCS. The mission package detachments are merging with the LCS crews. The ships are being organized in four-ship divisions specializing in a single warfare specialty, with three deployable ships and the fourth a dedicated training ship that will remain in local waters to train and certify the crews.

The first four LCSs will be dedicated to research, development, test and evaluation and, like the training ships, they will be single-crewed, but could be deployed as fleet assets if needed on a limited basis.

The Navy also decided to base the LCSs according to class, with the Independence variant based in San Diego and the Freedom variant in Mayport. The decision to base the Freedom variant on the East Coast was a matter of pier support. The Freedom class, due to its size, is a better fit for the port loading requirements of Mayport.

LAV Anti-Tank Weapon System to Reach FOC By End of 2019

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. – The Marine Corps continues to upgrade the turret system for one of its longest-serving fighting vehicles – the Light Armored Vehicle-Anti-Tank (LAV-AT).

In September 2017, Marine Corps Systems Command's (MCSC's) LAV-AT Modernization Program Team achieved initial operational capability by completing the fielding of its first four Anti-Tank Light Armored Vehicles with the upgraded Anti-Tank Weapon Systems (ATWS) to Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion Marines.

The ATWS fires the tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided – or TOW – missiles. It provides long-range standoff anti-armor fire support to maneuvering Light Armored Reconnaissance companies and platoons. The ATWS also provides an observational capability in all climates, as well as other environments of limited visibility, thanks to an improved thermal sight system that is similar to the Light Armored Vehicle 25 mm variant fielded in 2007.

"Marines using the new ATWS are immediately noticing the changes, including a new far target location capability, a commander/gunner video sight display, a relocated gunner's station, and an electric elevation and azimuth drive system, which replaced the previous noisy hydraulic system," said Steve Myers, LAV program manager.

The ATWS also possesses a built-in test capability, allowing the operators and maintainers to conduct an automated basic systems check of the ATWS, he said.

The LAV-ATM Team continues to provide new equipment training (NET) to units receiving the ATWS upgrade, with the final two training evolutions scheduled for early this year. Training consists of a 10-day evolution with three days devoted to the operator and seven days devoted to maintaining the weapon system. Follow-on training can be conducted by the unit using the embedded training mode within the ATWS.

“This vehicle equips anti-tank gunner Marines with a modern capability that helps them maintain readiness and lethality to complete their mission,” said Maj. Christopher Dell, LAV operations officer.

Full operational capability for the ATWS is expected at the end of fiscal year 2019.

“Currently, there are 58 in service within the active fleet,” said Myers. “The original equipment manufacturer delivered 91 of the 106 contracted kits and is ahead of schedule. Now MCSC’s focus is directed at the Marine Corps Forces Reserve, ensuring they receive the same quality NET and support as their active counterparts.”

General Dynamics NASSCO Commissions New Panel Line

SAN DIEGO – General Dynamics NASSCO held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Jan. 11 to commission its new panel line, which expands steel production capabilities for the construction of commercial and government ships in San Diego, the company said in a release.

The new panel line enables distortion-free welding of plates

as thin as five millimeters to produce lighter, more energy-efficient ships. The cutting-edge facility uses hybrid laser arc welding and numerically controlled robots to mill, seam and weld steel panels in a highly automated production line. These features improve capacity, quality, accuracy and cycle time, and are expected to double steel processing rates.

“Our team scouted thin plate welding technology and processing facilities from around the world to identify the components that would allow NASSCO to stay at the forefront of shipbuilding manufacturing technology,” said Kevin Graney, president of General Dynamics NASSCO.

“This facility, the only one in the world with this unique combination of technologies, is already beginning to transform our business while reducing energy consumption and emissions,” said Graney. “This facility is a win for NASSCO, our customers and our region.”

Four ships are currently under construction at the San Diego shipyard, including two containerships for Matson Inc., and the first TAO-205-class oiler for the U.S. Navy, all of which will feature steel from the new panel line. An expeditionary sea base for the Navy is also under construction.

Representatives from NASSCO, the U.S. Navy and Matson Inc. attended the ceremony.

Marine Special Task Force Deployed with Colombian

Deputy Commander

ARLINGTON, Va. — A Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SP-MAGTF) returned from a five-month deployment to Latin America last month as the first to deploy with a deputy commander from a partner nation.

“We were the first SP-MAGTF to incorporate a partner-nation officer into our formation,” said Col. Michael H. Oppenheim, commanding officer of SP-MAGFT-Southern Command for the 2018 deployment, speaking Jan. 11 at the Potomac Institute. “He was a lieutenant in the Colombian Marine Corps, [recently] out of battalion command.”

The unnamed officer in the Personnel Exchange Program joined the SP-MAGTF at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for predeployment training and returned to Colombia last week.

“We were able to effectively incorporate him into the formation,” Oppenheim said, noting that the Colombian officer was very helpful in untangling bureaucratic and diplomatic situations that cropped up and smoothed the way.

“He was able to dovetail right into our efforts,” Oppenheim said.

The SP-MAGTF-Southern Command deployed to several Central American nations from June to December, operating mostly in small teams for Theater Security Cooperation, such as weapons training and humanitarian aid. The U.S. Marines and Sailors in the force consisted of 113 active-duty and 117 Reserve personnel, plus one U.S. Army officer and the Colombian officer. The force included four CH-53E heavy-lift helicopters and one KC-130 tanker/transport aircraft.

The deployment was timed for hurricane season to be available to provide disaster relief, but no hurricanes savaged the region. There was one volcano eruption in Guatemala that

caused hundreds of casualties. A group of Marine engineers working with the SP-MAGTF was deployed to aid in the relief efforts.

This deployment also was the first of an SP-MAGTF-Southern Command to venture into South America, operating with the armed forces of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Colombia.

The Colombian officer “helped seal the deal for us in many cases,” Oppenheim said.

“He has more combat experience than I have,” Oppenheim said, noting the officer’s long experience fighting guerrillas in Colombia’s long counter-insurgency war in-country.

Oppenheim pointed out that deployments like the one recently concluded helped to build readiness as the Marines were “doing real-world things,” and that the interaction with partner nations would yield immeasurable benefits in the future by building trust among the militaries and civil officials and providing material assistance in the form of humanitarian and disaster relief.

Coast Guard, Partners Recover Section of Downed Jet off Oahu

HONOLULU – Personnel from the Coast Guard and the State of Hawaii oversaw local salvor’s recovery of a section of the fuselage from a Hawker Hunter aircraft, downed initially in December, off Honolulu, Jan. 8.

“Using a blend of local salvage assets, remote engineering

guidance, and advanced sensing technology sourced from the mainland, the locally based salvage company Parker Marine Corp. has completed the next stage of the aircraft salvage," said Chief Warrant Officer Russ Strathern, a marine safety specialist, and response officer at Sector Honolulu. "The main section of the fuselage containing residual oil and potentially hazardous substances has been salvaged and transported to a staging location for the ongoing National Transportation Safety Board-led investigation."

Strathern also noted, "Because of the incident complexity and operational environment, this evolution was technically challenging. The aircraft owners worked tirelessly with the salvor and jurisdictional authorities to safely mitigate the threat to the public and environment, all while preserving evidence critical to future root-cause analyses. I'm pleased to note that there were no reported injuries after the initial accident or impacts to wildlife, these are great measures of success, and indicative of the hard work of the involved parties."

Following exhaustive searches, the fuselage was positively identified in 260-feet of water by a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) in early January. After analyzing the data from the ROV, the salvor consulted with an engineer, formulated a plan, and received concurrence from the Coast Guard to proceed.

Using the ROV, the salvage company lassoed the tail of the aircraft wreckage with line and slowly raised it to the surface. The team towed the section to a haul-out point designated by the State's Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation Division. Following the section's removal from the water, it was transported by truck to Marine Corps Base Hawaii, where the National Transportation Safety Board will continue its investigation into the cause of the crash.

Throughout the operation, the Coast Guard worked closely with

representatives from the Hawaii State Department of Health Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response and Department of Land and Natural Resources offices to monitor the salvage and recovery efforts.

“With the removal of this section, which contained the aircraft’s engine, any oil or hazardous substances from the aircraft has either been removed or naturally dissipated and the remaining pieces do not pose a significant or substantial threat to the public or environment,” Strathern said. “Any future actions related to the crash site or remaining debris will be coordinated with the State’s Department of Land and Natural Resources.”

The privately owned aircraft crashed in December while participating in the Hawaii Air National Guard-sponsored training exercise Sentry Aloha. The pilot ejected before the crash and was rescued by the Coast Guard with the assistance of nearby good Samaritans.

Alion Awarded SeaPort Next Generation Contract

WASHINGTON – The Department of Navy has awarded Alion Science and Technology, headquartered in McLean, Virginia, an indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity, multiple-award SeaPort Next Generation contract vehicle, the company said in a Jan. 10 release.

This contract has a five-year base period of performance, with an additional five-year ordering period option. Under this vehicle, Alion will compete for individual task orders for engineering and program management support services.

Engineering services consist of supporting the research and development of new and existing naval platforms and systems. Innovative warfighting capabilities are introduced through the design and complex integration of hardware and software into ships, submarines and aircraft during new construction, maintenance and modernization availabilities. These efforts include the analysis and evaluation of foreign as well as nondevelopmental systems, equipment and technologies.

Program management services consist of the application of acquisition, business, financial, technical and quality-control expertise within large and small Navy programs. These services enable Navy leaders to manage the design, development, production, training, deployment, sustainment and disposal of equipment, systems and platforms.

“Alion has been a trusted partner of the Navy for many years and as a company we are humbled and thrilled to be able to continue this work so vital to our country.” said Vince Stammetti, Alion senior vice president. “In concert with our Navy customers, our singular mission is to ensure that fleet assets are on station and our Sailors, Marines and Airmen are equipped to do the nation’s bidding – simple as that.”

Coast Guard Academy Announces Next Superintendent

NEW LONDON, Conn. – The Coast Guard Academy announced in a Jan. 10 release that Rear Adm. William G. Kelly to be its 42nd superintendent.

Kelly will relieve current Superintendent Rear Adm. James E. Rendon this summer.

Kelly currently serves as the assistant commandant for Human Resources since April 2016. He also oversees the Coast Guard's human resources field activities, from accession of new military personnel to retirees' pay and benefits. His previous flag assignment was as the commander, Personnel Service Center.

Kelly is a 1987 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy and he earned his master's degree in Instructional Systems Design from Florida State University and a Certificate in Human Resource Management. He has extensive experience in personnel development as the director of the Coast Guard's Leadership Development Center in New London, and also served as the school chief for Officer Candidate School.

Ranked among the nation's most prestigious institutions of higher learning, the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London is proud to educate future leaders of America's multimission, maritime military force. Each year, approximately 200 graduates are commissioned as Coast Guard officers to help ensure the safety, security and stewardship of our nation's waters.

Coast Guard, Partners Stop Multiple Smuggling Events off Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard interdicted a vessel Jan. 7 with 35 Dominican migrants and 4 kilograms of heroin approximately 34 miles west of Desecheo, Puerto Rico, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

The crew of a Coast Guard Air Station Miami HC-144 Ocean Sentry, deployed to Air Station Borinquen, Puerto Rico, detected the vessel on the evening of Jan. 7. Watchstanders with Coast Guard Sector San Juan diverted the Cutter Heriberto Hernandez, which arrived on scene, embarked the 35 migrants and discovered a backpack with 4 kilograms of heroin floating near the vessel.

“While this interdiction is certainly a success of Coast Guard operational units through Operation Unified Resolve partnered with the Caribbean Border Interagency Group, it is also a symptom of a serious threat to our national security and maritime borders where narcotics smuggling is paired with illegal migrant ventures.” said Capt. Jason Ryan, chief of enforcement for the 7th Coast Guard District.

“Together with other DHS [Department of Homeland Security] components and local law enforcement partners, we will continue to diligently patrol throughout the Caribbean Basin and Florida Straits to stem the flow of maritime smuggling and criminal organizations that bring violence to our shores and fuel the growing epidemic of drug use and overdoses throughout our country.”

On Jan. 10, 27 of the migrants were repatriated to the Dominican Republic, while the remaining eight were transferred into the custody of the Department of Justice’s District of Puerto Rico for further investigation and possible prosecution. One of the individual’s is a suspected smuggler who is being investigated for participation in prior smuggling operations in which several migrants lost their lives.

In the past month, the Coast Guard and partners have made multiple interdictions in the Caribbean. Heriberto Hernandez is a 154-foot fast-response cutter homeported in San Juan.

MCPON: Sailors Must Be 'Qualified, Astute Technicians'

WASHINGTON – The Navy needs to capture the best talents resident in its Sailors to meet the needs of a future fight, the service's senior enlisted adviser said.

The Navy needs to "find ways to best capture that talent and set it up for success in the fleet," said Master Chief Petty of the Navy (MCPON) Russell L. Smith, speaking Jan. 10 along with Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green at an event sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Smith pointed out that the Navy needs recruits who are comfortable with high technology.

"The Navy is a STEM service," he said, referring to science, technology, engineering and math as the skills Sailors need to man the ships, aircraft, weapons, networks and other electronic systems used in the modern Navy. "We have to be qualified, astute technicians."

Smith said "bringing that [STEM] talent forward is one of our biggest lines of effort."

He also emphasized that sea-going skills such as damage control and firefighting remain just as important now as ever, noting that Sailors must "first meet the mission, then save their shipmates."

Smith noted that the Navy is in stiff competition with other

military services and the other high-tech sectors of the U.S. economy for tech-savvy young adults. However, Smith said that the Navy's retention of Sailors is the highest it has ever been, upward of 70 percent, better even than after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Green said the Marine Corps, which recruits 30,000 people each year, continues to achieve its quotas, attributing that to the ethos of the Marine Corps that attracts people looking to be something special.

Green said that while the Marine Corps is adopting new technology, the focus is "maximizing lethality and not compromising the standard."

He said that the Corps' focus is on the lethality and readiness of the individual Marine.

"The robot is not kicking in the door, the Marine is," Green said.

Smith said that child care for Sailors' families is becoming a conundrum for the Navy. Green seconded that, noting that 49 to 50 percent of today's Marines are married, a situation much different from decades ago.