As Part of Investment Plans, Coast Guard Creating Major Base in South Carolina



A Coast Guard Air Station Savannah MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew conducts a search-and-rescue demonstration on Feb. 19 in Charleston, South Carolina. The demonstration was performed for members of the media attending the State of the Coast Guard address in Charleston. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Dickinson

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Coast Guard is expanding its Charleston, South Carolina, station into a major Atlantic base and home to its newest class of cutters.

In addition to five 418-foot national security cutters, the Coast Guard's largest and newest sea-going patrol vessels, Charleston will be the homeport for a complement of yet to be built offshore patrol cutters.

"Charleston is a first stop to nationwide investment in our service, our facilities and our people," Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said in his State of the Coast Guard address, which was live streamed from Charleston on Feb. 20.

Over the next five years the Coast Guard plans to consolidate its campus along one waterfront, starting with $140 million to begin upgrading shoreside facilities.

The improvements could turn Charleston into one of the nation's largest concentrations of Coast Guard assets and people. The port of Charleston is experiencing unprecedented change, Schultz said, noting that by 2021, Charleston will have the deepest harbor on the East Coast.

However, 40% of Coast Guard buildings around the country are over 50 years old, leading to a $2 billion backlog of facility repairs for mold, leaky roofs, flooding and outdated building standards. The Coast Guard's fiscal year 2021 budget request is $12.3 billion, $77 million more than the $12.2 billion approved last year.

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>
> *Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz*

There are also problems with the agency's 1990s-era computer hardware and software. "Years of investment tradeoffs have brought our information technology to the brink of catastrophic failure," Schultz said. Over the summer, more than 95 vital systems went off-line for several days due to a single server malfunction.

To address information technology issues, Schultz released the Coast Guard's Tech Revolution Road Map

for digital modernization. Upgrades are planned over the next three years,
starting with increasing Coast Guard external internet speeds and doubling
connectivity for major cutters in 2020.

Communication
is also a problem in the Arctic, Schultz noted. The medium icebreaker Healy is
without reliable communications for a large part of its multimonth patrol above
the Arctic Circle. Last month the harsh environment in Alaska knocked out
communications equipment.

“As commandant, I need my operational commanders to be able to communicate with every Coast Guard asset – anytime, anywhere,” Schultz said. “We are exploring new satellite communications capabilities with the Department of Defense and industry, as well as renewing land-based communications capabilities in Alaska.” Arctic communications, however, are a “whole-of-government” issue, he said, adding “we must work together to solve our communication blackout in the Arctic now.”

The first of the 360-foot offshore patrol cutters, the Argus, is under construction with delivery planned in 2022. The OPC program calls for 25 hulls, ultimately making up almost 70% of the Coast Guard’s offshore presence.

They will replace the service’s 210-foot medium-endurance cutters and become “the backbone of our modernized fleet,” Schultz said. They will also play a critical role in the Coast Guard’s campaign against narcotics trafficking in the Western Hemisphere.

In a move to expand maritime domain awareness across the Pacific Ocean, the service is partnering with Global Fishing Watch, an international, no-profit big data technology

platform that leverages satellite data to track global commercial fishing activity.