

AUSTAL USA DELIVERS USNS APALACHICOLA (EPF 13) TO THE NAVY



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MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA delivered Expeditionary Fast Transport USNS Apalachicola (EPF 13) to the U.S. Navy, today. This is the 2nd Navy ship named after the coastal Florida city; both ships were built in Mobile.

EPF 13 is now the largest surface ship in the U.S. Navy fleet with autonomous capability. EPF 13 went to sea five times over a several-month duration allowing Austal USA and their industry partners, L3Harris and General Dynamics Mission Systems, to test and analyze not only her typical ship systems but those resulting from autonomous design and construction contract modifications required by the Navy to establish EPF 13 as an autonomous prototype.

“Austal USA is proud to deliver this ship to our Navy – it’s innovative and is going to be a critical asset as unmanned capabilities continue to push boundaries and redefine how missions are achieved,” commented Austal USA President Rusty Murdaugh. “Apalachicola will also be the first EPF with the ability to conduct V-22 flight operations, and launch and recover 11 meter Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats (RHIBs). A lot of capability is being delivered to our warfighters with this ship and I’m incredibly proud of our team of shipbuilders.”

With a shallow draft and high-speed, the EPF’s agility provides a positional advantage in the littorals and makes it an ideal candidate to prototype large vessel autonomous operations, including logistics, tendering and adjunct magazine mission profiles.

Fundamental to the autonomy effort was Austal USA’s highly automated in-house designed machinery control system (MCS), which allows the ship to be minimally manned by centralizing machinery operations to the bridge. All Spearhead-class EPFs built to date incorporate the Austal USA MCS design which is secure, scalable, distributive and reconfigurable for multiple propulsion configurations.

Combined with the already highly automated hull, mechanical & electrical systems installed on EPF class ships, Austal USA added automated maintenance, health monitoring, and mission readiness to provide EPF 13 with the capability to conduct up to 30 days of operation without human intervention.

EPF 13 is also the first Expeditionary Fast Transport vessel to be delivered to the Navy with enhanced capabilities to support V-22 flight operations and launch and recover 11 meter RHIBs. These upgrades along with EPF’s speed, maneuverability and shallow water access are key enablers for support of future Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations around the world.

Autonomous vessel capability has been identified as an area of strategic importance by the Navy. Austal USA is working to advance autonomous capability and is partnered with L3Harris on the MCS upgrade of Overlord vessel, Mariner (OUSV 3), and construction of Vanguard (OUSV 4), and with Saildrone, Inc. on the manufacture of Surveyor unmanned surface vehicles. Combined with investments from academia in uncrewed technology, south Alabama is quickly becoming the epicenter of autonomous naval architecture.