

Sea-Air-Space: TRANSCOM Chief Touts Navy, Merchant Marine Cooperation



Air Force General Randall Reed, commander of U.S. Transportation Command, discussed the strength of the Navy-Merchant Marine connection on April 8. *Photo credit: Dan Goodrich*

Air Force General Randall Reed, commander of U.S. Transportation Command, walked attendees at the Navy League Luncheon on April 8 through a history lesson of national and international conflicts to show the importance of the team of the U.S. Navy and Merchant Marine.

As a boy growing up in the Hampton Roads, Virginia, area, he

would ride his bicycle to the historic Fort Grove and watch commercial ships sail by, followed by gray Navy ships from Norfolk Naval Base.

“The inextricable link between Navy combatants and our commercial Merchant Marine, the combination of those two makes our country great and that is what also makes TRANSCOM great,” he said.

Throughout American history, the Navy, often at incredible odds, has made the waterways safe so merchant ships could carry supplies. Some of the historical issues are familiar to the audience at Sea-Air-Space, Reed said.

During this year’s conference, “We’ve talked about trouble with shipbuilding, we’ve talked about supply chains, we’ve talked about contested logistics, long distances. And the next fight we have coming up, there’s this thing about blockades we have to consider. We have very capable adversaries with very large fleets. There’s a need for shallow draft ships and we have to get the mission done for sustainment. If this isn’t enough to keep you up at night, then you probably miss the fact that I’m not talking about today. I’m actually talking about the challenges that we had during the Revolutionary War,” Reed said.

“And the message here, ladies and gentlemen, is we’ve been here before, and during that time we had just as much uncertainty.”

Lessons from other periods in history are also still relevant, Reed said, such as during the War of 1812, when the U.S. Navy swept away threats on the water, in this case Lake Erie, so the Merchant Marine could supply the front lines from behind.

“So, in this case, once again, it’s the Navy being able to fight, set the conditions to get some kind of sea control, to allow the Merchant Marine to provide the sustainment that’s needed for the rest of the force.”

That carried on through two world wars, and especially World War II, when the Merchant Marine was called upon to perform sustainment heroics, at great cost to its ships and crews.

“And with that, we became the nation that the world needed us to be, to have great influence to partner with allies, partners and friends, in order to create a period of peace for the last 80 years that has delivered for all of us, I’m told, economic prosperity that the world has never seen,” Reed said. “And so with that, I want to take a moment to pause and say the combination of the Navy and the Merchant Marine at that time was really incredible and actually changed the world.”

Going forward, Reed said sustainment is still the “name of the game,” only now it’s contested by groups such as the Houthi rebels from Yemen who don’t have to have a lot in the way of resources.

The Merchant Marine needs newer ships and better equipment, Reed said, and he’s been telling that to supportive members of the U.S. House and Senate.

“I’m telling them that the ages of our ships right now are way too old, and we need to get younger ships and I’ll take them however I can get them. But the main thing is, it’s not necessarily for the ships and the platforms, it’s also for the proof force because we have a very capable proof force and they need the best in the biggest equipment that we can absolutely get for them.”

This was brought home to him during a recent visit to the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, Reed said. There, he witnessed 14 cadets receiving expeditionary medals from the secretary of transportation, a scene he said nearly brought him to tears.

“Think about that. Expeditionary medals on a cadet because as part of their education they take to sea, and these cadets have actually seen combat. They’ve actually been in harm’s

way. They were actually telling us stories of what it's like to sail past Yemen and watch things go over their head or to watch the Navy actually engage targets to protect them. And they were not afraid. In fact, they were ready to go back for more. And so, ladies and gentlemen, we need to do this for them."



Medal of Honor winner Edward C. Byers Jr. was awarded the Admiral Arleigh Burke Leadership Award.

Photo Credit: Dan Goodrich

Awards

Following the lunch, the annual Navy League Awards were presented:

- The Admiral Vern Clark Individual Award went to Angelo

Owens, the safety and occupational health division director at the Fleet Readiness Center East.

- The Admiral Vern Clark Unit Safety Award went to Airborne Command & Control (VAW) 117 Wallbangers.
- The General James L. Jones Individual Award went to Deputy Chief Ryan Tworek at Marine Corps Logistics Base Barstow, California.
- The General James L. Jones Unit Safety Award went to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California.
- The Albert A. Michelson Award went to Robert Taylor of Bardex Corp.
- The Fleet Chester W. Nimitz Award went to Robert “Scott” Forney III of General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems.
- The Admiral Arleigh Burke Leadership Award went to Master Chief Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) Edward C. Byers Jr., U.S. Navy, retired.

“I really do look out at this room and I see the fabric of America, the threads that hold our nation together during our most precious times” Byers said upon accepting the award.

Sea-Air-Space: U.S., Canada Support Investment to Maintain Arctic Security



Vice Admiral Angus Topshee, commander of the Canadian Navy, right, and Coast Guard Vice Admiral Tom Allan discuss polar security in a changing world. *Photo credit: Seapower magazine*

The U.S. Coast Guard was pleased to hear of President Trump's interest in acquiring as many as 40 new icebreakers, said Coast Guard Vice Admiral Tom Allan, the acting deputy commandant for operations.

"Whenever your boss is interested in 40 icebreakers, you are very happy, right?" he said in response to a question during the April 7 panel on "Demanding Presence in the Poles: How a Good Arctic Strategy is Part of our National Security."

"I mean, this has been something that we've been trying to do for a long time, I'll tell you that," Allan said.

They wouldn't all need to be heavy icebreakers like the aging Polar Star, in service since the 1970s, he said, as studies have shown the Coast Guard wouldn't need more than eight or nine of those. There are smaller ships that could do icebreaking as part of their other functions, and some could

be used on the Great Lakes.

Adding those in, “you get up to that 40 number pretty quick,” Allan said,” because that’s what we need ... to make sure that domestic operations continue and that we are poised to have that presence in the high Arctic and Antarctic. So, I’ll just say it’s very exciting to see your boss point towards a vision that we’ve had for a long time.”

Blue Water and Commercial Activity

The United States and Canada must maintain a strong presence in the poles, especially as warming trends lead to more commercial activity, including shipping and mining, speakers from those nations said during the panel.

Operating in the region is challenging, the panelists said, not only because of ice but also from wind and fog, which can hamper aviation.

“So, having properly equipped vessels, training crews, and most importantly, [having] icebreakers is essential to giving the U.S. assured access to these critical areas,” Allan said.

“We must meet presence with presence, or even better, meet presence with strength. If we aren’t present, others will fill that void, nations whose interests may not align with ours or our allies. Russia controls nearly half of the Arctic, and we’re seeing increased cooperation between Russia and China in this space,” Allan said. “From resource shipments to military operations, we must lead the polar region ... if we fail to act, we’ll be left on the sidelines, watching others shape the future of the region in ways that cannot serve our national interest.”

This is true for Canada as well, said Vice Admiral Angus Topshee, commander of the Canadian Navy.

Canada has made substantial investments in domain awareness in

the region, from over-the-horizon radars to a network of subsurface sensors “designed to make sure we know what’s going on in that region,” he said, which includes adding six ice-breaking warships to its fleet.

The Arctic is remote to Canada as well, he noted. Going from Halifax, Nova Scotia, across the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean is a quicker trip than visiting the Arctic, he said.

“That’s a shorter trip than up into our Arctic. So, for us, it’s an expeditionary theater,” which means working closely with the territorial governments in the region to understand the security challenges they face.

Vice Admiral Doug Perry, commander of U.S. 2nd Fleet, said his fleet was stood up in 2018 “in recognition of there are some real threats that come from the Arctic and through the Arctic,” similar patterns of activity to the Cold War.

“We’re back to needing to be there with persistence today,” Perry said. That includes using space assets and radars for domain awareness and having ships in the region when needed.

“There’s less and less sea ice. There’ll be more and more blue water every day of the year going forward,” he said. “And so, that demands that if we value international freedom of the seas and international rules-based order, if you will, then we actually have to be there and be present and have persistent presence to demonstrate that we will enforce international law” even in some countries illegitimately claim to own particular sea routes.

Perry said seven of the eight Arctic nations are members of NATO, “all of whom are thoroughly invested in Arctic security” and are making investments in their capabilities.

Sea-Air-Space: ThayerMahan's Outpost TM001 Christened on Show Floor



Australian Ambassador to the U.S. Kevin Rudd speaks as Courtney and ThayerMahan CEO Michael Connor look on. *Photo credit: Brett Davis*

After speaking on a panel about AUKUS, the partnership to build submarines and share technology between the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Connecticut) took to the show floor to celebrate an early technology partnership.

Courtney broke a bottle of “champagne” against the hull of an unmanned surface vessel, the Bluebottle USV from Australia’s

Ocius Technology Ltd. The vehicle is equipped with a towed sensor array and related technology from Connecticut-based ThayerMahan (Booth 2039).

That vehicle is the first of six to be delivered from Ocius to ThayerMahan and is now named the ThayerMahan Outpost, TM001, aimed at performing persistent surveillance. (Because the event was on the show floor, the bottle was plastic and not filled with bubbly.)

Outpost can be built and deployed quickly and for less than 1% of the cost and personnel compared with legacy acoustic surveillance platforms, the company said. In fact, the Outpost can usually be operated by just one person sitting before a monitor, said retired Navy Vice Admiral Michael Connor, CEO of the company he founded in 2016.

“We were just having a great conversation about AUKUS Pillar 2, and this is it, in three dimensions,” Courtney said before the christening.

He said Connor, the former commander of U.S. submarine forces who became enthusiastic about unmanned systems before they were mainstream is “a prophet, ahead of his time.”



Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut prepares to christen the TM001 USV on the show floor. *Photo credit: Brett Davis*

Kevin Rudd, the Australian ambassador to the United States, said the Outpost is “innovation writ large,” with a “cheap, usable, deployable, flexible, all-purpose platform” equipped with a sail, solar power and the ability to generate power from wave motion.

“This is quite extraordinary, but also it becomes this wide-area surveillance platform for multiple applications, both civilian and military,” Rudd said, later joking that TM001 should be christened with a bottle of Foster’s lager and the use of champagne is “possible un-Australian activity.”

Robert Dane, CEO of Ocious Technology Ltd., said the second platform sold to ThayerMahan, TM002, is already in the country and TM003 is on its way, “and it’s our job to get 4, 5 and 6 here by the end of the financial year, which is June in Australia.”

Dane also described the partnership with ThayerMahan an “AUKUS

Pillar 2 success.”

Speaking earlier to Seapower, Connor said, “the thing that we produce is valuable for both countries in that we do wide-area acoustic surveillance for surface ships and submarines for about a penny on the dollar relative to how we do it with ships, aircraft and submarines. The fact that we do it together with an Australian partner is, I think, a very positive aspect of relations between the countries. We bring a best-of-breed sonar and they bring a best-of -breed vehicle.”

He said ThayerMahan had tested its sonar array on virtually every one of the USVs on display at Sea-Air-Space, but “only this one can really handle the size of the array that you need to get the performance.”

Sea-Air-Space: Shipbuilding, Industrial Base Concerns Come to the Fore for SECNAV, Congress



New Secretary of the Navy John Phelan addresses the audience on the final day of Sea-Air-Space. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

Fourteen days into his tenure as the 79th secretary of the Navy, John Phelan said he plans to focus on three things: strengthening the shipbuilding industry and defense industrial base; creating an accountable, adaptable warfighting culture; and improving the health, welfare and training of Department of the Navy personnel.

“My number one priority as SECNAV is readiness,” Phelan said in a breakfast address on the last day of Sea-Air-Space. “I wake up every day focused on our readiness, our ability to fight, and a modernization strategy going forward.”

For decades, the United States has enjoyed the benefits of being the world’s pre-eminent maritime power, he said, but that lack of competition, a bureaucratic inertia and a rigid adherence to the “old way of doing things” has led to complacency, he said.

“China constructed more ships last year alone than we have since World War II,” he said. “Our adversaries are not waiting on us to get our act together.”

Fourteen days in, “I may have underestimated just how complex this job is,” he said. “As everyone in the room knows, leading the Department of the Navy is anything but easy, but I didn’t come here for easy. I came here to solve problems.”

Among those problems are shipbuilding backlogs. Phelan has already visited the government shipyards in Connecticut and plans to visit the rest, public and private, to help understand the scope of the issue.

When he sat down with the shipyard workers, he was struck by their dedication and sense of mission, Phelan said.

“I said to them, you’re not just building ships. You’re contributing to our national security, and the president and I thank you for that. In my view, investing in people is as critical to our success as any weapon system or fighting strategy. We’re facing a serious shortage in our shipbuilding workforce, which is stressing our performance schedules, exacerbating the strain on our current forces, therefore leading to extended deployments” that put stress on the crews.

“These challenges are not hypothetical. They affect the lives of our Sailors and their families who feel the weight of these pressures every day. The Department of the Navy, working closely with industry, must offer a clear vision for the future of our shipbuilding workforce, one that includes career growth, competitive compensation and a strong sense of purpose,” Phelan said.

Acquisition reform is a perennial challenge for the Department of the Navy and the military at large. Phelan, with a background in business, said he wants to understand why the processes move so slow and why some programs cost so much.

He cited the construction of military barracks that cost \$2 million per key, when his company was able to build a luxury hotel in Hawaii for \$800,000 per key.

“In the coming weeks I’ll review our acquisition systems and identify how we can streamline and reform them. I’ll work across the department and especially with industry to find solutions,” Phelan said. “We’ll restore and maintain operational readiness, fiscal responsibility. In order to do so, I’ll rely on experience and insight from the people around me. I’m not interested in echo chambers. I want honest perspective and real results. General Patton said if everyone is thinking alike, someone’s not thinking.”

Asked how he plans to revitalize shipbuilding and growing the maritime industry, Phelan pointed out he’s still new on the job.

“I would say to that question, stay tuned. I’m on day 14. I intend to meet with all of our major contractors, and those who would like to become contractors. I think we have to really ensure that we have a huge, strong base, but we also have competition. And I think we need to provide that by expediting some of our processes and making it easier.”



Members of the House Armed Services Committee address the issues facing the maritime services. From left: Moderator Bryan Clark of the Hudson Institute and Reps. Trent Kelly, Jenn Kiggans and Rob Wittman. *Photo credit: James Peterson*
Congressional Insight

Some members of Congress with defense oversight duties spoke shortly after Phelan and said rebuilding the defense and shipbuilding industrial base means rebuilding the workforce and giving them steady demand signals.

Reps. Trent Kelly (R-Mississippi), Jennifer Kiggans and Rob Wittman, both Republicans from Virginia, and all of whom are members of the House Armed Services Committee, appeared on a panel and said there are options to revitalize shipbuilding and the industrial base.

“I think that the speech that you just heard from the secretary of the Navy, and what he reiterated from the president’s direction to him, was shipbuilding, shipbuilding, shipbuilding,” Wittman said. “I love it. But the key is, you

have to get left of that enterprise. And being to the left of the enterprise means if you're going to do shipbuilding, shipbuilding, shipbuilding, it starts with workforce, workforce, workforce."

The Office of Management and Budget needs to give contractors the ability to move money payable at the end of a contract to the beginning to boost workers' salaries and make the jobs more competitive, Wittman said.

"And listen, Congress can do that, but I can tell you by the time the Congress gets through the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] and appropriations and it gets in the hands of the Pentagon, that's a 24-month window. Today, it could happen immediately by OMB allowing in those contracts for that money to be moved to the left."

Kelly said the workers also need a steady demand signal, not working on multiple ships one year and none the next.

"We've got to have consistency," Kelly said. "... If you don't have a consistent demand, you can't pay workers, you can't make infrastructure investments, you can't do any of that."

Kiggans and Kelly also said the Navy shouldn't be so quick to decommission ships at a time when it needs more to counter the burgeoning Chinese navy.

"I need the Navy again to come out and say, I want every ship I have. We're keeping our older ships. Every single one of 'em. Now is not the time to be decommissioning ships that we just sent on deployment," Kiggans said.

Kelly blamed Navy officials for ignoring congressional directives to keep ships in play.

"We should not retire a ship, any ship, if we don't have a replacement. Any," Kelly said. "... And I'll tell you, I've seen this ... but a lot of times when we tell the Navy you're not

retiring a ship, the answer is, is we'll just make sure it's broke and we'll just say it didn't work, and see, we told you. So, there is no effort to actually make that piece of equipment work. It's, we don't want to do it and we're going to ignore you, Congress, we're going to ignore you, president, we're just going to make sure that it doesn't work.

"We have got to be committed to making sure that everything that we have can be operational at a moment's notice and that we keep them operational and that we keep training those crews."

Sea-Air-Space: USMC is Ready to be Tip of the Spear, but Needs Steady Funding, Smith Says



Commandant of the Marine Corps Eric Smith was the luncheon keynote speaker on April 7 at Sea-Air-Space. *Photo credit: Dan Goodrich*

The U.S. Marine Corps is expanding its expeditionary capability and investing heavily in neglected resources to improve its warfighting prowess and the lives and effectiveness of Marines, but unpredictable funding from Congress is making that difficult, the service's leader said April. 7.

U.S. Marine Corps Commandant General Eric Smith was the luncheon keynote speaker at Sea-Air-Space and described the tools and constructs the service is using to project forces.

"I'll begin with what makes the Navy and Marine Corps team the premier expeditionary fighting force on the planet," he said. And that is the ARG/MEU, the Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit. An Amphibious Ready Group with an embarked

Marine Expeditionary Unit is the coin of the realm," he said. "It's the Swiss Army Knife of the DoD inventory."

His top priority, he said, is restoring a "3.0 MEU presence worldwide." That means one ARG/MEU off the East Coast, handling the Mediterranean and the coast of Africa, one off the West Coast, handling the Indo-Pacific, and the "episodic deployment" of a MEU out of Okinawa, Japan. Three such ARG/MEUs is the minimum, he said, while the demand signal is for 5.5.

MEUs include light infantry, artillery, light armored reconnaissance, combat aviation, combat service support, medical support and command and control, and "operate as one. They blend themselves into a chainmail fist," he said.

The Amphib Fleet

One challenge for the Marines is reconstituting its amphibious ship fleet, which he said the USMC allowed to atrophy as it turned its attention to combat in Iraq in recent years.

"We didn't look back at our amphibs," he said. They weren't maintained because they hadn't been used in a decade, but "without those ships, Marines can't get to the fight."

The Corps has also been investing in equipment such as the AN/TPS-80 Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar, or G/ATOR radar, and the Navy/Marine Corps Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS), a remotely operated missile battery, as well as MADIS, the Marine Air Defense Integrated System, which provides the service's first organic air defense system.

"We used to be armed with a Stinger [missile], and that is not enough to get it done against the PRC," he said, referencing China.

Barracks Spending

The USMC is also moving to address longstanding issues with

its infrastructure, namely rebuilding crumbling barracks as part of Barracks 2030, which Smith described as a “heavy lift” that will cost \$5 billion over the five-year defense program.

It’s difficult to plan such long-term efforts – 11 barracks renovations were started last year with another dozen planned this year – without steady funding. Members of Congress are supportive of these and other efforts, Smith said, but the reliance on continuing resolutions instead of passing new funding bills causes problems.

“I’ll stay out of politics,” he said. “But I will say we need predictable, on-time funding that only Congress can provide. Meaning, continuing resolutions aren’t continuing anything, they stop our progress.”

Sea-Air-Space: Fighting from the MOC Requires Standardization, Speakers Say



Vice Admirals Kurt Thomas, Michael Vernazza and Craig Clapperton and Rear Admiral Susan Bryer-Joyner discuss what needs to be done to fight from the MOC. *Photo credit: Dan Goodrich*

The concept of “fighting from the MOC” will require much greater standardization of Maritime Operations Centers, in training, equipping, resupplying and data management and protection, speakers said at a panel April 7 at Sea-Air-Space.

The MOCs are purpose-built for fleet commanders, but that makes them difficult to coordinate, said Vice Admiral Karl Thomas, the director of Naval Intelligence, who moderated the Monday panel on “Fighting from the MOC.”

“We would like to have them all configured in a standard manner ... so we can modernize them in a better way,” Thomas said. “There’s a little tension in that, but it’s a good tension. In the pace of the fight today, we need to modernize.”

MOCs are how the Navy executes fleet-level warfare and facilitates mission command at lower echelons, but the Navy is

seeking to use them as the centerpiece for the type of distributed warfare likely in the vast Pacific.

“We will treat and resource MOCs like the warfighting systems that they are, capable of operating on a decentralized and global battlefield just like all other weapons systems,” the Navy’s 2024 Navigation Plan says.

Vice Admiral Michael Vernazza, commander of Naval Information Forces, said his team is working with Navy personnel officialsto conduct a manpower review of each MOC, starting in the Pacific, focusing on the exact manning each will need to carry out the seven joint tasks outlined in the chief of naval operation’s Navigation Plan.

“By 2027, all fleet headquarters, starting in the Pacific Fleet, will have ready MOCs certified and proficient in command and control, information, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment functions as assessed by our MOC Training Teams,” the NAVPLAN says.

Investments

Admiral Susan BryerJoyner, director of the Warfighting Integration Directorate, said the main investment that needs to be made to be ready for 2027 is cloud infrastructure and supporting “zero trust” technology to make sure data going into and from MOCs is protected, and available to commanders who need it.

Data visualization doesn’t need to be standard, “but what does need to be standard is the data that underpins it,” BryerJoyner said.

“Every commander should not be able to pick and choose what data he or she wants to use for a specific warfighting function, because as soon as you start to add that variability in, now different commanders are going to see different things and come to different conclusions,” she said.

“This shift from MOC as a commander’s personalized way of fighting to a more standardized way of feeding into the joint force, is the journey that we’re going on now,” she said.

Sea-Air-Space: Mad Science, Marine Mammal Medicine Highlight 7th STEM Expo



A young attendee at STEM Expo is excited to learn about science. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

Hundreds of energetic students packed into the RiverView Ballroom at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center for the seventh year of the STEM Expo to kick off Sea-Air-Space 2025.

The event featured more than three dozen exhibits to help interest students in grades five through 12 to pursue a STEM career. It also threw in a little fun from presentations by Mad Science, which delivers innovative, educational science demonstrations aimed at children, and the National Marine Mammal Foundation, which showcased the Navy's marine mammal program and let students get up close with an inflatable dolphin stand-in.

The STEM Expo drew not only students but high-level attendees from the sea service, including Chief of Naval Research Rear Admiral Kurt J. Rothenhaus.

"ONR is honored to be a part of this STEM event to get the word out to young folks around the country to think about a career in science, technology, engineering and mathematics," Rothenhaus said. "I'm excited to see the many industry partners out this afternoon as well as our Naval Research Lab, all here to inspire the next generation to help build the future."



The National Marine Mammal Foundation discussed how to keep Navy dolphins healthy. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

HII was the Champion Sponsor for the event and CACI sponsored the science stations.

Hands-on Fun

“In my section, we’re over there making a mess. We’re trying to teach them some buoyancy” by having students build small boats that carried weight, said HII’s William Abraira, a structural engineer at Newport News Shipbuilding, who works on submarine pressure hulls.

“We’re trying to explain water displacement to them but fun gets in the way and it quickly turns into a competition of who can hold the most marbles,” he said. “But it’s super important, it’s one of those basic principles in shipbuilding, and it just gets kids really excited.”

Perry Haymon, with HII’s Ingalls Shipbuilding, was helping hand out brightly colored plastic “hard hats” to students to emphasize the importance of safety.

“I work in research and development. So, I see the importance of those new things, those new technologies. To see young minds come in and get interested in what we do at the shipyard, as well as all of HII ... is very important to us. We enjoy coming and seeing the faces of young people,” he said. “There’s a lot of energy here, from the people coming in, just getting hard hats, and also seeing the other events that we’ve got going on, from welding to virtual reality, and also building a boat to see how much weight you can actually carry.”

CACI had set up a booth where children could design their own hovercraft from common materials and test them in a wind tunnel. “It’s been such a fun experience getting to watch them do it,” said Sidney Finkenbinder, a media relations specialist at CACI. “Make one, test it out, see what they can change and

make it better. That's what it's all about, getting to learn new things and try out new activities ... getting to see their faces

Phelan to Focus on Navy Recruiting, Shipbuilding



Sen. Roger Wicker, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, met with Secretary of the Navy nominee John Phelan in January. *Photo credit: Sen. Wicker's office.*

WASHINGTON – Businessman John Phelan, nominated by President Trump to be secretary of the Navy, appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Feb. 27 and said he wants to focus on Navy recruitment and training, get shipbuilding back on track and set up an “accountable warfighting culture” is approved.

Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi), chairman of the committee, said Phelan had a “distinguished career in the private sector” although he has no Navy experience, and said “his background showcases his ability to manage complex business deals to drive efficiency and to deliver results. Our Navy will need someone with all three of those skills and more to get our

Navy back on the right track.”

“I understand why some question why a businessman who did not wear the uniform should lead the Navy,” Phelan said, pledging to “step outside the status quo and take decisive action with a results-oriented approach.”

Wicker’s first question to Phelan was what he would do to improve Navy recruiting. The service met its goals last year, he said, but “only by lowering standards. Last year, nearly 20% of Navy recruits were considered category IV – they tested below the 30th percentile on the military aptitude test.”

Phelan said some recruiting numbers have gone up, “which is a reflection of the president’s victory and return to the warfighting ethos,” and said he would take advantage of the upcoming 250th anniversary of the Navy to highlight the benefits of life in the service.

He also said the Navy should “do better from a digital perspective outreach” to young people, and take a page from the Marine Corps, which has worked with the same advertising company for three decades to build its brand.

Wicker said if Congress “threw a zillion dollars at the Navy” it still couldn’t build enough ships because the industrial base doesn’t have enough workers.

Phelan said he would visit the shipyards and spread best practices, including borrowing some from international shipyards, and also “telegraph demand” for shipbuilding to incentivize the private sector to invest in shipbuilding.

Echoing Wicker’s comment that some shipyard salaries are so low a welder could get the same salary working at a convenience store, Phelan said, “you can’t have those kinds of wage differentials for those kinds of jobs.”

Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island) asked about Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's recent announcement that the Pentagon should be ready to cut 8% from the defense budget in each of the next five years in addition to laying off thousands of defense workers. Reed said such "disruptions" could jeopardize any gains the shipbuilders might make in recruiting workers.

Phelan said he is "not privy" to the details of the cuts, but "I do think the shipbuilding force is critical. If confirmed, will set with the secretary of defense and president and very quickly talk about that."

Later, he said he understood the potential cuts to be "a planning tool – where would we cut if we need to cut?" that would move resources from nonlethal to more lethal activities.

"Do I view the construction of submarines and ships as lethal? The answer is yes, because we need to have these ships and we need to get them out there quickly," he said.

Navy CNO Franchetti Fired



Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti presents an award to a Sailor at Naval Support Activity (NSA) Crane, in Crane, Indiana, Feb. 10, 2025. Photo Credit: U.S. Navy | Senior Chief Petty Officer Elliott Fabrizio

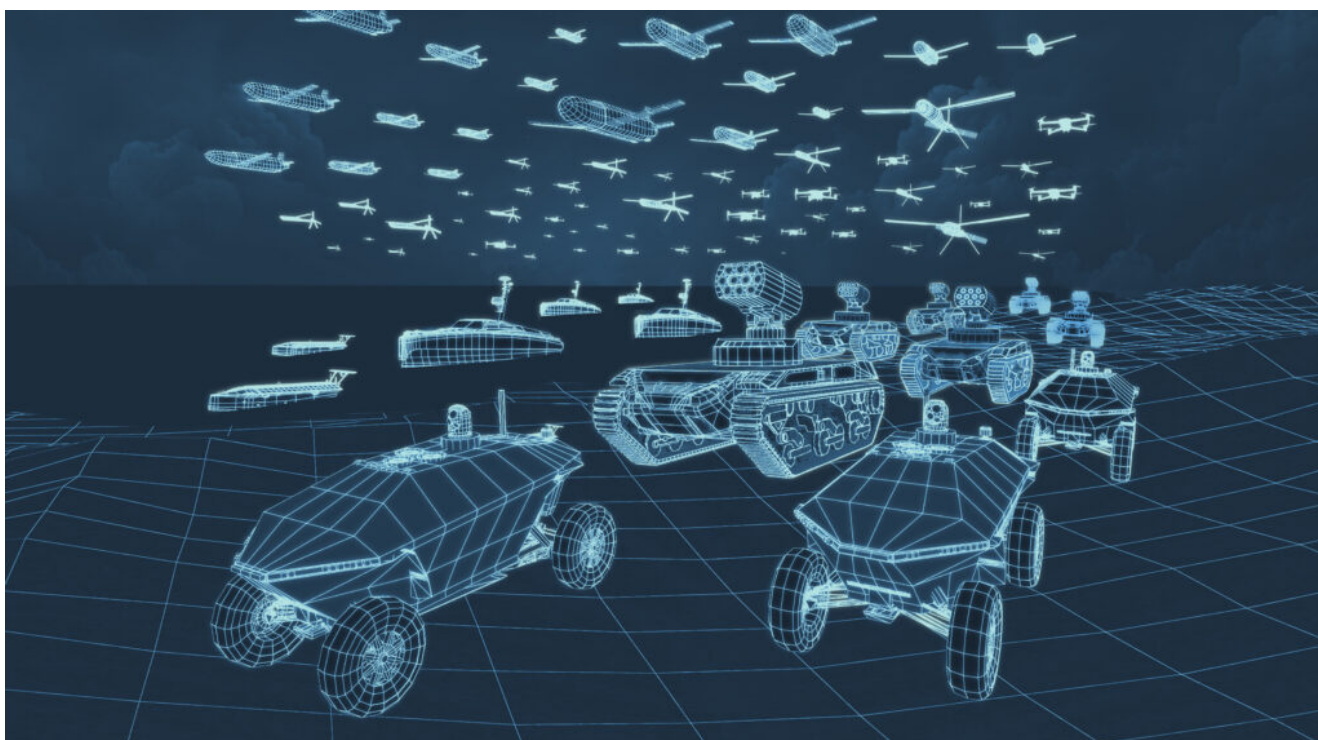
Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced he was firing Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti on Friday, the same day as he relieved Air Force General Charles Q. Brown as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, according to the New York Times.

According to the Times and other reports, Hegseth said Franchetti and Air Force General James Slife, the service's vice chief of staff, also fired, had "distinguished careers," and "we thank them for their service and dedication to our country."

Franchetti was the 33rd chief of naval operations, the first woman to be CNO and the first woman to serve on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She entered the Navy after earning a degree in journalism at Northwestern University and joining the Naval ROTC program there.

She later commanded the destroyer USS Ross, commanded U.S. Naval forces in Korea, served as commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean and director of strategy, plans and policy for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

L3Harris Unveils AMORPHOUS C2 Software



An L3Harris graphic illustrating the types of autonomous systems AMORPHOUS could control.

WASHINGTON – L3Harris has taken the wraps off AMORPHOUS, a new software that uses a single user interface to control thousands of autonomous, uncrewed platforms simultaneously, across all domains.

Officials from the Melbourne, Florida-based company briefed reporters on Amorphous on Feb. 6 in Washington, where they also purchased public advertising touting the new system.

AMORPHOUS stands for Autonomous Multi-domain Operations Resiliency Platform for Heterogenous Unmanned Systems and includes a distributed command-and-control interface.

“Autonomy is a force multiplier, which is why we have designed AMORPHOUS as a multi-domain, multi-mission capability that rapidly integrates a variety of uncrewed systems across the battlespace,” said Jon Rambeau, president of L3Harris’ Integrated Mission Systems. “This project also highlights L3Harris’ partnerships with venture-backed and non-traditional companies to mature emerging defense capabilities more quickly and affordably.”

L3Harris is currently developing prototypes using the AMORPHOUS architecture on contracts for the U.S. Army and the Defense Innovation Unit. The company has demonstrated the system’s flexibility and interoperability by controlling multiple, separate assets across multiple vehicle types operating in different domains during government-managed tests.

The software allows one operator to oversee multiple platforms, which can make their own decisions within the network – for instance, if one drone is damaged or lost, the others in a swarm can adjust formations to compensate.

Although the system has just been publicly revealed, Rambeau and Toby Magsig, the vice president and general manager of Enterprise Autonomous Solutions, said AMORPHOUS is under “multiple contracts” to military customers.

And, although it has so far controlled a few systems, it is aimed at being able to control and oversee thousands, they said.

To do that at speed, AMORPHOUS relies on what Magsig called “thin messages,” akin to SMS text message on a phone, to communicate at speed with dispersed systems in multiple domains. The system could be used for counter-UAS operations;

intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting; swarming kinetic effects; electromagnetic spectrum operations and even autonomous breaching.

“All the services are asking for the same thing,” Magsig said. “This is not service specific.”

Underwater systems have traditionally posed communications problems, and Magsig was vague on how the company has addressed and possibly overcome them, saying when it comes to the underwater domain, “what happens there needs to stay there.”

Rambeau said AMORPHOUS is open architecture and platform and sensor agnostic, and training time can be very short due to its intuitive interface.