Navy Transferred Remaining RQ-4A BAMS-D UAVs to NASA

The RQ-4A Broad Area Maritime Surveillance Demonstrator returned from 5th Fleet to Patuxent River, Maryland, last summer after accruing more than 42,500 flight hours and over 2,000 oversea missions during a 13-year deployment. *NORTHROP GRUMMAN*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy has transferred its three remaining RQ-4A BAMS-D high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

"All three currently reside at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center and will be operated by NASA for the DoD Test Resource Management Center (TRMC, the new aircraft custodian)," said Jamie Cosgrove, a spokeswoman for the Navy's Program Executive Office — Strike and Unmanned Aviation and Strike Weapons. "The remaining ground control equipment for the system, as well as all the RQ-4A non-payload spares, have likewise been transferred to TRMC."

The last of the three RQ-4As had returned to its home base,

Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland, last summer from deployment to the U.S. 5th Fleet area of responsibility, culminating a 13-year span of operations that began as a six-month experiment.

The Navy had deployed the RQ-4A to Southwest Asia since 2009 as a component of the BAMS-D program. Five Block 10 RQ-4As were acquired from the U.S. Air Force and were based at Patuxent River and operated in sequence over the years by detachments of Patrol Reconnaissance Wings 5, 2 and 11. The detachment kept at least one RQ-4A in the rotation to a base in the Persian Gulf region. One was lost in a mishap in Maryland in June 2012. Another was shot down June 19, 2019, in an unprovoked attack in international airspace over the Strait of Hormuz by an Iranian surface-to-air missile.

BAMS-D provided more than 50% of maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance in theater accruing over 42,500 flight hours in 2,069 overseas missions, the Navy said.

In the Navy’s 2022 budget request, divestment of the RQ-4A Global Hawk Broad-Area Maritime Surveillance-Demonstrator UAV had been planned for acceleration from 2023 to 2022, with the savings invested in higher priorities.

The BAMS-D is being replaced by a Global Hawk derivative, the MQ-4C Triton, which has been deployed to the Western Pacific in an Early Operational Capability deployment. The Triton with an upgraded sensor capability will be deployed in 2023.

Navy EA-18G Squadron Home from Emergency EUCOM Deployment

A U.S. Navy EA-18G Growlers assigned to the "Garudas" Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 134, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington, waits to receive air-to-air refueling from a Royal Air Force Voyager tanker assigned to 101 Squadron, RAF Brize Norton, United Kingdom, during a Red Flag-Nellis 22-1 mission Feb. 3, 2022, at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. *U.S. AIR FORCE / Airman 1st Class Zachary Rufus*

ARLINGTON, Va. — A squadron of U.S. Navy EA-18G Growler electronic warfare aircraft has returned to its home base after more than six months deployed to the European Command as part of the build-up of forces in support NATO's eastern flank.

Electronic Attack Squadron 134 (VAQ-134) has returned home to Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington, from U.S

European Command, according to a source. The squadron had deployed to Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany in late March 2022.

“The purpose of this deployment is to bolster readiness, enhance NATO’s collective defense posture and further increase air integration capabilities with our allied and partner nations,” said then- Defense Department spokesman John Kirby said in a release that month. “They are not being deployed to be used against Russian forces in Ukraine. They are being deployed completely in keeping with our efforts to bolster NATO’s deterrence and defense capabilities along that eastern flank. The deployment is not in response to a perceived threat or incident.”

The Navy has five-land-based expeditionary VAQ squadrons in addition to nine carrier-based VAQ squadrons, all equipped with EA-18Gs. For many years they deployed to bases in Southwest Asia to support combat in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and currently deploy to Misawa, Japan. The Navy’s Growlers provide electronic attack support for all of the armed services. The aircraft can jam enemy radars and communications and fire anti-radiation missiles at radar sites.

It has not been announced if VAQ-134 was replaced in Europe by another VAQ squadron. A carrier-based squadron, VAQ-140, currently is deployed to the region on board the USS George H.W. Bush.

In its 2023 budget proposal, the Navy proposed de-activating the five expeditionary VAQ squadrons. While the budget has yet to be passed, the proposal has met heavy opposition in Congress.

Navy Invests in Land-Based Test Site for New Frigate

An artist's conception of the future USS Constellation. *FINCANTIERI MARINETTE MARINE*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has invested funding toward building the land-based engineering test site for the Constellation-class guided-missile frigate (FFG).

The Navy's Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Conversion, and Repair, Bath, Maine, has awarded to Fincantieri Marinette Marine, Marinette, Wisconsin, a $76.7 million firm-fixed-fee contract modification "for procurement of long-lead time material for the land-based engineering site for the Constellation-class frigate," the Defense Department contract announcement said.

The land-based test site to be built in Philadelphia will be used to test the propulsion system and other machinery of the frigate design to reduce risk and identify and fix problems before they would be manifest in the lead ship of the class.

The land-based engineering test site was mandated by the

Fiscal 2021 National Defense Authorization Act as an expression on Congressional intent regarding solving engineering problems as construction proceeds.

The construction of the U.S. Navy’s next class of guided-missile frigates officially began Aug. 31 with the first steel for the ship cut in a small ceremony at the Fincantieri Marinette Marine Shipyard in Marinette, Wisconsin.

The future USS Constellation (FFG 62) will be the lead ship of a class of at least 20 frigates and is slated for delivery in 2026. The hull of the frigate is be based on the Italian FREMM-class frigate and will be equipped with proven weapons and combat systems.

Work on the contract is expected to be completed by October 2025.

Gerald R. Ford Deploys After One-Day Weather Delay

The Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) departs Naval Station Norfolk, Oct. 4. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Anderson W. Branch*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The lead ship U.S. Navy's newest class of nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Gerald Ford (CVN 78), delayed a day for weather, departed Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, Oct. 4 on its first major deployment.

"This afternoon the Navy's newest and most advanced aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) set out on deployment," said Lt. Danielle Moser, deputy public affairs officer for Commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet, in an Oct. 4 release.

The Ford is making what the Navy calls a "service-retained" deployment, meaning it is operating by the authority of the chief of naval operations under command and control of the U.S. 2nd Fleet, rather than under the command and control of a regional combatant commander under the Global Force Management Concept.

Vice Adm. Daniel Dwyer, commander of the U.S. 2nd Fleet, said

Carrier Strike Group 12 (CSG 12), of which the Ford is a part, will range throughout the Atlantic Ocean operating with navies of allied and partner nations.

Dwyer, speaking to reporters Sept. 26, said the deployment would provide the Ford CSG commander "a chance to test the carrier's air operability prior to embarking on its first Global Force Management deployment next year. This historic service-retained deployment is an opportunity for the U.S. Navy to come together with other members of the NATO Alliance to exercise and train together within the Atlantic and its littorals while testing out advanced technologies on the first new class of U.S. aircraft carrier in more than 40 years."

CSG-12 and Destroyer Squadron Two staffs will be embarked in the Ford, as will Carrier Air Wing Eight. Deploying with the group will be Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy (CG 60); the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Ramage (DDG 61), USS McFaul (DDG 74), and USS Thomas Hudner (DDG 116); the Legend-class national security cutter USCGC Hamilton (WMSL 753); the Henry J. Kaiser-class fleet replenishment oiler USNS Joshua Humphpries (T-AO 188), and the Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS Robert E. Peary (T-AKE 5).

Units from eight allied and partner nations will operate with the CSG and include ships from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. The CSG includes 17 ships and one submarine.

While deployed, the Ford CSG will conduct group steaming, air-defense exercises, maritime domain awareness, long-range maritime strike, distributed maritime operations, antisubmarine warfare exercises and naval integration, Dwyer said.

All eight squadrons of Carrier Air Wing Eight will be onboard for the deployment but some will not be at full strength in

terms of numbers of aircraft.

“It won’t be the full complement, but it will be nearly the entire air wing,” Dwyer said. “And that is not because of any lack of capacity aboard Ford, but only where the air wing is in the Global Force Management process. We’re still sizing the numbers, but it will be a fairly full air wing, but not the complete air wing.”

New Technology

The Ford, commissioned in 2017, is deploying with 43 new technologies, including the Electro-Magnetic Aircraft Launch System, and the Advanced Arresting Gear.

The Ford’s commanding officer, Capt. Paul Lanzilotta, said in a Sept. 29 interview that all systems have been tested and are ready to go, and some will go through further operational testing.

Lanzilotta, a native of Long Island, New York, is an E-2 Hawkeye naval flight officer. He said the Ford has “incredible network connectivity.”

Navy Awards Advance Acquisition for Low-Rate Initial Production of MQ-25

A Boeing unmanned MQ-25 aircraft is given operating directions on the flight deck aboard the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77). *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Hillary Becke*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has awarded Boeing a contract for advanced acquisition of the MQ-25A Stingray aerial refueling unmanned aerial vehicle.

The Naval Air Systems Command awarded Boeing a $47.5 million "firm-fixed-price advance acquisition contract for the production and delivery of MQ-25 Stingray low-rate initial production lot 1 for the U.S. Navy," a Sept. 28 Defense Department contract announcement said.

Boeing was selected Aug. 30, 2018, for the design, development, fabrication, testing, delivery and support of four MQ-25As, followed in April 2020 with an order for three more, according to the Navy's program office. The MQ-25 test asset, known as T1, made its first flight Sept. 19, 2019. In summer 2021, the MQ-25 T1 test asset successfully refueled

three different carrier-based aircraft: F/A-18F, F-35C and E-2D aircraft in 2021. The Unmanned Carrier Aviation Demonstration was conducted in December 2021 on board the USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77). This event marked the first time the MQ-25 T1 test asset was tested aboard an aircraft carrier.

The MQ-25 will leverage existing line-of-sight and beyond-line-of-sight communications links and interface with existing ship- and land-based command and control systems.MQ-25 will be an integral part of the future carrier air wing, increasing the mission effectiveness range with its enhanced refueling capabilities and increasing the number of F/A-18E/Fs available for the strike fighter mission by relieving them of the tanking role. The MQ-25 will also pioneer manned-unmanned teaming and pave the way for future unmanned systems to pace emerging threats.

The MQ-25 Stingray is designed to deliver a robust aerial refueling capability and secondary intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability that extend the range and operational capability of the carrier air wing and carrier strike group, according to the Navy’s program office. The MQ-25 will leverage existing line-of-sight and beyond-line-of-sight communications links and interface with existing ship- and land-based command and control systems.

The MQ-25A is scheduled to achieve initial operational capability in 2025. It is anticipated that 72 air vehicles will be procured.

Work under this contract is expected to be completed in September 2026.

Gerald R. Ford to Deploy at Last, With Slightly Reduced Air Wing

Sailors assigned to the first-in-class aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) and the "Tridents" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 9 conduct an ammunition onload, Sept. 25, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class William Spears*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The lead ship U.S. Navy's newest class of nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Gerald Ford (CVN 78), will depart Norfolk, Virginia, next week on its first major deployment. The carrier is scheduled to deploy next year in support of regional combatant commanders.

The Ford is making what the Navy calls a "service-retained" deployment, meaning it is operating by the authority of the chief of naval operations under command and control of the

U.S. 2nd Fleet, rather than under the command and control control of a regional combatant commander under the Global Force Management Concept.

Vice Adm. Daniel Dwyer, commander of the U.S. 2nd Fleet, said Carrier Strike Group 12 (CSG 12), of which the Ford is a part, will range throughout the Atlantic Ocean operating with navies of allied and partner nations.

Dwyer, speaking to reporters Sept. 26, said the deployment would provide the Ford CSG commander "a chance to test the carrier's air operability prior to embarking on its first Global Force Management deployment next year. This historic service-retained deployment is an opportunity for the U.S. Navy to come together with other members of the NATO Alliance to exercise and train together within the Atlantic and its littorals while testing out advanced technologies on the first new class of U.S. aircraft carrier in more than 40 years."

CSG-12 and Destroyer Squadron Two staffs will be embarked in the Ford, as will Carrier Air Wing Eight. Deploying with the group will be Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy (CG 60); the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Ramage (DDG 61), USS McFaul (DDG 74), and USS Thomas Hudner (DDG 116); the Legend-class national security cutter USCGC Hamilton (WMSL 753); the Henry J. Kaiser-class fleet replenishment oiler USNS Joshua Humphpries (T-AO 188), and the Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS Robert E. Peary (T-AKE 5).

Units from eight allied and partner nations that will operate with the CSG and include ships from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. The CSG includes 17 ships and one submarine.

While deployed, the Ford CSG will conduct group steaming, air-defense exercises, maritime domain awareness, long-range maritime strike, distributed maritime operations,

antisubmarine warfare exercises and naval integration, Dwyer said.

“Innovation and interoperability are the key focal points of this deployment,” Dwyer said. “And we will work together with allies and partner nations to strengthen our collective defense of the Atlantic by maturing our integration for future maritime operations.”

All eight squadrons of Carrier Air Wing Eight will be onboard for the deployment but some will not be at full strength in terms of numbers of aircraft.

“It won’t be the full complement, but it will be nearly the entire air wing,” Dwyer said. “And that is not because of any lack of capacity aboard Ford, but only where the air wing is in the Global Force Management process. We’re still sizing the numbers, but it will be a fairly full air wing, but not the complete air wing.”

New Technology

The Ford, commissioned in 2017, is deploying with 43 new technologies, including the Electro-Magnetic Aircraft Launch System, and the Advanced Arresting Gear.

The Ford’s commanding officer, Capt. Paul Lanzilotta, said in a Sept. 29 interview that all systems have been tested and are ready to go, and some will go through further operational testing.

Lanzilotta, a native on Long Island, New York, is an E-2 Hawkeye naval flight officer. He said the Ford has “incredible network connectivity.”

Several Ford crew members were made available for interviews on Sept. 29 pierside in Norfolk.

Chief Machinist’s Mate (select) Kera Archambeault, who accrued two previous deployments on the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier

USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), said the Ford has better amenities for the crew, “like all spaces having better air conditioning, the food is really good, the gallies are really open to bring everyone together.”

“We’re very by the book here,” said Boatswain’s Mate Second Class Patrick Schlosser, for whom this will be his first deployment, asked about the ease of maintenance on a new ship. “There are a lot of new systems – this is the biggest, the baddest, the newest ship in the fleet – there are a lot of learning curves that we have to get across. We are able to conduct and do what we need to do regularly with a relative amount of ease and we’re pretty efficient at it. … This crew is ready for anything that comes at us. Everybody would overcome any obstacle that they deal with as far as maintenance goes and any equipment that we deal with.”

USS Zumwalt Operates with 7th Fleet for the First Time

USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000) approaches the Gov. William Preston Lane Memorial Bridge, also known as the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, as the ship travels to its new home port of San Diego, California, in 2016. *U.S. NAVY / Liz Wolter*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The guided-missile destroyer USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000) is operating under the command of the U.S. 7th Fleet for the first time, according to a Navy release.

The Zumwalt completed its first port call in Guam on Sept. 19, according to Commander, Task Force 71/Destroyer Squadron 15 Public Affairs. This "marks the farthest it's ever been from its home port of Naval Base San Diego since its commissioning," the squadron's release said.

While in the region, the Zumwalt is assigned to Task Force 71/Destroyer Squadron 15, the 7th fleet's principal surface force.

The Zumwalt is the lead ship of a three-ship class of DDGs, two of which have been commissioned and one is still under construction. All three are or will be assigned to Surface

Development Squadron One in San Diego.

The Zumwalt class has been selected to be the initial platform for the Navy's Conventional Prompt Strike capability. The ships' Advanced Gun Systems will be removed to make way for Large Missile Vertical Launch Systems to handle hypersonic missiles because the ship's existing Mk57 launchers for its Standard and Tomahawk missiles are too small to accommodate the CPS missile.

The Zumwalt will be the first ship to receive the modifications. The Navy's Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Conversion, and Repair, Bath, Maine, awarded General Dynamics Bath Iron Works a $20 million cost-plus-fixed-fee contract modification "for procurement of long-lead time material for the Large Missile Vertical Launch System [LMVLS] launch module fabrication on DDG 1000," an Aug. 18 Defense Department contract announcement said. Work is expected to be completed by June 2024.

The Navy plans to field the Conventional Prompt Strike capability on the Zumwalt in 2025. The Conventional Prompt Strike capability will be fielded later in the decade on the Block V version of the Virginia-class attack submarine.

The Zumwalt is commanded by Capt. Amy McInnis.

CNO: Navy Needs to Maintain the Lead on Ship Design

An artist’s conception of the future USS Constellation (FFG 62). *FINCANTIERI MARINETTE MARINE*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The chief of naval operations praised the trend of the Navy leading the teams developing its ship designs in a recent interview, citing a recent success, and looking forward to more with the next-generation frigate and destroyer designs.

“We’re learning a lot, as we can see with FFG [the FFG 62 Constellation-class frigate program],” said Adm. Michael Gilday, speaking in a Sept. 14 interview with Deputy Editor Bradley Peniston during Defense One’s State of Defense webinar, commenting on the subject of the Navy’s DDG(X) next-generation destroyer program.

“We’re beginning to make progress on that first ship [FFG 62],” Gilday said.

“I think it’s important that the Navy maintain the lead on design,” he said. “So, what we’ve done with DDG(X) is we’ve brought in the private shipbuilders so that they can help inform the effort. So, it’s a team, but it’s Navy-led. So, both of the companies that produce DDGs are involved in that initial design. Our intent is to go into build with a mature

design. So, that would mean at more than the 80% complete point when we actually start bending metal.

“We have seen great success of that, with Columbia [-class ballistic-missile submarine] as an example, where we were at more than 80% design that we began that first hull,” Gilday said.

“So that’s going to be something that we’re going to play close attention to, because it actually drives down technical risk,” he said. “Technical risk has been a challenge for us, whether it has been Zumwalt [DDG 1000], LCS [littoral combat ship] or Ford [aircraft carrier] in particular. [With] those three builds, we have accepted technical risk, and it has cost us in terms of keeping those ships not only on budget but also on schedule.”

The CNO said the design plan for DDG(X) will be to migrate the Arleigh Burke-class DDG combat systems to the larger-hull DDG(X), much as with the successful migration of the combat systems of the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser to the Arleigh Burke in the late 1980s. He said the DDG(X) also will have increased space, weight, and power to handle future capability growth over time, possibly to include hypersonic missiles, which require larger launchers than the current Mk41 and MK75 vertical launching systems.

Navy, Marine Corps Set to Reach 2022 Recruiting Goal,

Raven Says

A U.S. Marine Corps drill instructor with Lima Company, 3rd Recruit Training Battalion, introduces himself to new recruits on Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., Sept. 2. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Bradley Williams*

ARLINGTON, Va. — As fiscal 2022 approaches its close, the Navy and Marine Corps are set to reach their recruiting goals, the Navy Department's undersecretary said. But the department is not resting, looking ahead to future years to sustained campaigning in the face of demographic challenges.

"The latest information that I have is that both the Navy and Marine Corps are set to meet their targets for this year," said Erik Raven, undersecretary of the Navy, speaking Sept. 7 at the Defense News Conference in Arlington.

"We are looking very carefully at what the next fiscal year — 2023 — will mean," Raven said. "There are some challenges there. Secretary [of the Navy Carlos] Del Toro has directed that we have an organized campaign to make sure that we are able to meet our recruiting goals, not just in '22 but in '23 and beyond. That means keeping very close track. I've made some really good friends at the recruiting commands because we're talking almost all the time about where we are on our

numbers, what we're hearing from recruiting stations across the nation. I've talked with recruiters and understand the headwinds that they're facing."

Raven said the headwinds involve several issues.

"When unemployment is low, recruiting is more challenging," he said. "We're also seeing the propensity of Americans to serve — and the ability to serve — has been declining over time.

"We really to engage with the public in a new way to help explain what the value of military service is to our nation, not just as a Navy and Marine Corps equity, but in terms of the career opportunities young people can pursue, what the compensation benefits of military service are, and what we can provide for, not just a career in the military, but outside the military," he said.

"We're pulling out all the stops to be able to do that, and a lot of this will also be engaging with schools," he said. "We need to make sure that our recruiters have access to schools, to just have that conversation and offer up opportunities to young Americans who may be looking at their options as they graduate."

Also speaking at the conference was Gen. Eric Smith, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, who was asked by an attendee what keeps him up at night.

"As a father of a Marine, what keeps me up at night is people and recruiting," Smith said. "We are at a point now where recruiting is a challenge and I think we are all collectively not doing a good enough job of explaining the virtue and value of military service. … Military service is not just a good thing. It is an honorable thing.

"There's this narrative out there that you come in, you're going to leave broken, you're going to leave damaged," the general said. "A small percentage, yes. We put our lives on

the line, as you know for certain, when we go to war. But in the main, you come in, and you leave four to 35 years later, with a skill that you didn't have. What keeps me up at night is trying to remind people, is that we are warfighters, we bring lethality, that's what we do: we defend the Constitution. … the value of military service is that you defend your Constitution, defend your nation, gain a skill, and return to civil society as, hopefully, a better person than we found you.

"But that narrative seems to be getting lost, and that concerns me, because we do have to recruit and retain our people, because people are the most valuable thing," he said. "That's who fight and win wars. Machines don't do that; it's people."

First Steel Cut for Navy's Constellation-Class Frigate

An artist’s conception of the future USS Constellation. *FINCANTIERI MARINETTE MARINE*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The construction of the U.S. Navy’s next class of guided-missile frigates officially began Aug. 31 with the first steel for the ship cut in a small ceremony at the Fincantieri Marinette Marine Shipyard in Marinette, Wisconsin.

The future USS Constellation (FFG 62) will be the lead ship of a class of at least 20 frigates and is slated for delivery in 2026. The hull of the frigate will be based on the Italian FREMM-class frigate and will be equipped with proven weapons and combat systems.

“There is no doubt that the future USS Constellation and the 19 follow-on ships will bring an out-sized punch to surface warfare patrols with our cruisers, destroyers and littoral combat ships as well as with our allied and partner navies,” said Tommy Ross, performing the duties of the assistant secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition, speaking to reporters in an Aug. 29 roundtable at the Pentagon. “We need the capabilities these ships will bring now, and we will need them for decades.”

Ross said the frigate program “reflects many hard lessons learned in proven shipbuilding practices, mature designs in combat systems such as Aegis Baseline 10 to modern life-cycle improvements like land-based testing, conditions-based maintenance, and a fully cyber-resilient architecture. The supporting infrastructure also is well developed.”

The production go-ahead was given by Capt. Kevin Smith, the FFG 62 program manager, after completion of the critical design review in May and the production readiness review in July, said Rear Adm. Casey Moton, program executive officer for Unmanned and Small Combatants.

“We’re excited to begin production,” Moton said.

The admiral said the FFG program strove to reduce risk by using a proven parent design for the hull and non-developmental systems and government program-of-record combat and C4I (command, control, communications, computers and intelligence) systems.

Ross said getting the first ship “up and going” and getting the builder’s shipyard “up in cadence” is step one in building the class of 20 frigates.

“We are in a good place to meet the requirements we have in coming years,” he said.

The Navy has the option of building more than the current program of 20 frigates but is not ready to move on that option, which Moton said would depend on requirements, industrial capacity, and the budget topline.

The admiral stressed that the FFG 62 program is a team effort of the PEO, Fincantieri Marinette Marine, and Gibbs & Cox, which produced the 3D model digital design of the ship. He said the design team met and exceeded the goal of 80% completion at construction start.

The Constellation will be a multi-mission warship that Ross said “gives commanders a lot more options.”

Three Constellation-class FFGs – Constellation (FFG 62), Congress (FFG 63), and Chesapeake (FFG 64) currently are on order. In June, the Navy exercised a contract option to order FFG 64. Marinette Marine is now under contract for those first three FFGs with options for seven more.

Although based on the FREMM frigate, the Constellation will have a longer hull and features modified to meet U.S. Navy standards on reliability, survivability, maintainability, habitability and lethality. The 496-foot-long steel ship will displace 7,300 tons and have a beam of 64.6 feet and a draft of 18 feet. It will be powered by a combination diesel electric and gas turbine propulsion system.

The FFG will feature a Mk41 Vertical Launching System, canister-launched Naval Strike Missiles, Mk110 57 mm gun, RAM Mk49 launcher, CAPTAS-4 variable-depth sonar, TB-37 Multi-Function Towed Array, SQQ-89(V)16 undersea combat system, SLQ-25E Nixie, SLQ-32(V)6 SEWIP Block 2, SPY-6(V)3 FFG Radar, Aegis Baseline 10 combat system, one MH-60R helicopter, one MQ-8C unmanned aerial vehicle, and two 7-meter rigid-hull inflatable boats. Delivery of Constellation is anticipated for 2026.

Smith said the ship was equipped to operate two MH-60Rs or two MQ-8C unmanned aerial vehicles if needed.

The CAPTAS-4 variable-depth sonar (VDS) was selected to replace the Raytheon DART VDS, which was developed for the littoral combat ship’s anti-submarine warfare mission package and which Moton said had some “technical challenges principally in hydrodynamics and transducers.”

Moton made the VDS decision in concert with the shipbuilder and noted the CAPTAS-4 was “pretty close in cost” with the DART VDS.