P-8 Mishap in Hawaii Is Possible First Loss in Aircraft's Career

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

*****

ARLINGTON, Va. – A U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft ran off a runway at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii on Nov. 20, likely resulting in the first loss of one of the aircraft in the 10 years since it achieved initial operational capability.

"At approximately 2 p.m. local (Hawaii), a U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon overshot the runway on landing at Marine Corps Air Station, Kaneohe Bay, and ended up in nearby water," the U.S. Third Fleet public affairs office said in a Nov. 20 release. "All personnel safely evacuated the aircraft. First responders

and emergency crews acted immediately to conduct an initial assessment and employed a temporary floating barrier, which is used to protect the environment."

The P-8A, shown in news photographs sitting partially submerged in the surf of Kaneohe Bay – is assigned to Patrol Squadron Four (VP-4), based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington. No P-8s are permanently based at Kaneohe Bay but frequently rotate in for exercises and for detachments in support of homeland defense.

The P-8 equips 12 U.S. fleet and two reserve patrol squadrons. The Poseidon made its first operational deployment nearly a decade ago, in December 2013, with VP-16. Until now, none have been destroyed in mishaps. The Navy has not yet made a determination if the P-8A in Kaneohe Bay suffered strike damage.

"An investigation will be initiated," the 3rd Fleet release said. "More details will be released as they become available."

USS Thomas Hudner Shoots Down Drone from Yemen

NAVAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY SOUDA BAY, Greece (Oct. 2, 2023) The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Thomas Hudner (DDG 116) moors at the NATO Marathi Pier Complex as part of a scheduled visit to receive fuel and logistical support from Sailors and personnel assigned to Naval Support Activity (NSA) Souda Bay. NSA Souda Bay is an operational ashore installation which enables and supports U.S., Allied, Coalition, and Partner nation forces to preserve security and stability in the European, African, and Central Command areas of responsibility. (U.S. Navy photo by Nicholas S. Tenorio)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

*****

ARLINGTON, Va. – A. U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer (DDG) shot down a drone over the Red Sea, the Department of Defense said in a Nov. 15 release.

The release, relayed by Cmdr. Rick Chernitzer, force public affairs officer for U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, reads as follows:

“On November 15th and while transiting the international waters of the Red Sea, the crew of the USS Thomas Hudner (DDG 116) engaged a drone that originated from Yemen and was heading in the direction of the ship. The Hudner’s crew engaged and shot down the drone to ensure the safety of U.S. personnel. There were no U.S. casualties or any damage to the ship.”

The engagement is the second in the Red Sea is the second within the last month in which cruise missiles or drones have been shot down by U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class DDGs. On Oct. 19, the USS Carney (DDG 64) engaged and shot down four land-attack cruise missiles and approximately 15 drones launched by Houthi forces over the Red Sea in Yemen.

The Houthi missiles launched on Oct. 19 apparently were headed in the direction of Israel or the Carney. Israel has been engaged in combat with Hamas terrorists since Oct. 7. The Iran-backed Houthis have a history of using drones and missiles against Saudi petroleum infrastructure and U.S. Navy and other ships in the Arabian Sea.

Coast Guard to Lay Up Some Cutters, Boats in Face of Recruit Shortfall

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

The Reliance-class medium-endurance cutter Reliance, shown here in 2022, will be decommissioned and three sister cutters will be laid up, pending decommissioning. *U.S. Coast Guard*

***

ARINGTON, Va.—The U.S. Coast Guard will lay up several cutters and patrol boats because of a service-wide manning shortage, moves that will reduce the Coast Guard's capacity for operations in the near term as the service grapples with the shortage of personnel.

The Coast Guard is short of some 3,000 personnel because in large part of shortfalls in recruiting in fiscal 2024.

"The Coast Guard is short nearly 10% of the entire enlisted workforce and cannot continue to operate as we have historically with fewer people," wrote AJ Pulkkinen in the October 31 announcement posted on the Coast Guard website. "To mitigate the workforce challenge risk in a deliberative and strategic fashion, the Vice Commandant, Adm. Steven Poulin, has provided specific temporary operational guidance to adapt

our operations while prioritizing lifesaving missions, national security and protection of the marine transportation system."

"The Coast Guard cannot maintain the same level of operations with our current shortfall – we cannot do the same with less. Conducting our missions is often inherently dangerous, and doing so without enough crew puts our members and the American public at increased risk," wrote Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Heath Jones.

"There will be no loss of search and rescue (SAR) capabilities," the announcement said. "However, we will temporarily adjust operations to prioritize our lifesaving missions, national security, and protection of the Marine transportation System. "

"As cutter crews are not scalable, the only way to reduce the workforce of the cutter fleet is to reduce the number of operating cutters," the announcement said. "Previously planned cutter decommissionings will continue, including the [Reliance-class] Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast [WMEC 623]. Some cutters will be placed in a special status awaiting either decommissioning or future reactivation. In some cases, the crews will do a hull swap to lay up the cutter with the largest pending maintenance requirement.

The cutters and patrol boats affected include:

- Three 210-foot Reliance-class medium-endurance cutters (WMECs) will be placed in layup, pending decommissioning.
- Seven 87-foot Marine Protector-class patrol boats (WPBs) will be placed in layup, pending reactivation.
- Five 65-foot harbor tugs (WYTLs) will temporarily not be continuously manned but will be kept in a ready status in case icebreaking is needed.

- Two 154-foot Sentinel-class fast response cutters (WPCs) will commence uncrewed Recurring Depot Availability Program (RDAP) at the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore, Maryland. The next 154-foot WPC scheduled for RDAP will deliver the hull to the Coast Guard Yard and swap hulls with a cutter that has completed drydock.

The cutbacks will affect 44 shore stations and 36 aids-to-navigation teams (ANTs) as well, which have more personnel than the prescribed staffing standards.

"The stations will be reduced to their staffing standards and the ANTs to one billet below their staffing standards," the announcement said.

Other shoreside changes include, but are not limited to:

- Crews at all 23 seasonal station smalls will transfer to their parent command.
- The six non-response units (boat forces units without SAR responsibilities) will suspend operations and their crews will be reassigned in assignment year (AY) 2024.
- The identified 19 stations whose SAR response capabilities are redundant will be deemed Scheduled Mission Units. Three of these 19 stations will be ports, waterways, and coastal security (PWCS) level one-Scheduled Mission Units."

"The 'Trackline to 10,000,' to have ten thousand members assigned to afloat units, is still the goal for our future fleet and we will get there," said Capt. John Driscoll, the Chief of the Office of Cutter Forces, in the release. "We need to adjust our operating capacity now so we can prepare for the future. We will gradually grow fleet capacity back through continued construction of ships with the latest technology and the best crew habitability. Our cutter fleet is in demand globally, and I can see our cuttermen continuing to explore

new locations as our ship operations are dedicated to the highest priority missions.

“The Coast Guard has always answered the call when faced with incredible challenges,” Driscoll said. “We will take this challenge head-on and use it as an opportunity to prepare for the future.”

USS Carney’s Success Showed Value of Aegis, SM-2, VLS, Alert Crew

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — The event of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-

missile destroyer (DDG) USS Carney (DDG 64) in intercepting and destroying on Oct. 19 four land-attack cruise missiles and several drones launched by Houthi forces over the Red Sea in Yemen was not routine, but it was a demonstration of naval operations and technology at its finest.

The Houthi missiles apparently were headed in the direction of Israel which had been engaged in combat with Hamas terrorists since Oct. 7. The Iran-backed Houthis have a history of using drones and missiles against Saudi petroleum infrastructure and U.S. Navy and other ships in the Arabian Sea.

The USS Carney, based in Naval Station Mayport, Florida, is one of the U.S. Navy's older destroyers, the 14th ship of its class, commissioned in 1996. It has since been equipped with ballistic-missile defense systems. At the time of the intercepts the ship was deployed to the Red Sea in support of operations of U.S. Central Command.

The Carney is equipped with the Aegis Combat System, a sophisticated digital, networked command-and-control system that links together the sensors and weapon systems of the ship. Its main sensor is the SPY-1 air search radar that enables the ship to detect, identify, track, and engage aerial targets and pass track data to other units. The Aegis system, which entered service in the 1980s, has been continuously upgraded to keep ahead of evolving threats.

The RIM-66 Standard SM-2 missile fired by the Carney entered service in 1979. It traces its developmental history from to the Terrier, Tartar, and Standard SM-1 family of surface-to-air missiles. The SM-2 already was combat proven in Operation Praying Mantis in the Persian Gulf in 1988, when an Iranian missile craft was damaged by one. More recently, in October 2016, the Arleigh Burke-class DDG USS Mason came under attack on three occasions by Houthi anti-ship missiles off the coast of Yemen. Of the seven missiles fired at the Mason, SM-2 missiles took down at least five of the missiles. The Houthi

missiles scored no hits.

The Mason’s action also was the first air defense conducted by the Mk41 vertical launch system (VLS). The rapid-fire capability of a bank of Mk41 cells enables a DDG to take on multiple incoming missiles much more capably than with a single- or twin-arm launcher of previous years. The Carney’s VLS system enabled similar success last week.

Equipped with well-designed, proven technology from the U.S. defense industry, the Carney was able to perform its mission successfully. Weapon systems with developmental troubles usually dominate the press coverage. Carney was a showcase of systems that worked.

Last but not least, the Carney’s crew was alert and ready when the test came. Bravo Zulu to the Carney and the American bluejacket.

Targeting Capability a Priority for Navy’s Triton UAV

******

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — Equipping the Navy's MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) with a targeting capability is a priority that would enhance the system's capabilities to support distributed maritime operations, the UAV's builder said.

The MQ-4C with the multi-intelligence Integrated Functional Capability 4 (IFC-4) achieved Initial Operational Capability (IOC) earlier this month when Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 (VUP-19) deployed a detachment to Guam to establish an orbit. The squadron had deployed a two-aircraft detachment to Guam in 2020 for Early Operational Capability (EOC) with the IFC-3 configuration.

Rho Cauley Bruner, Northrop Grumman's Triton program director, said in an interview with Seapower that her program office is now "fully immersed in delivering [the IFC-4] configuration"

in both retrofits to earlier-produced Tritons and “now we’re at that stage in the production line where we’re building the IFC-4 configuration from the ground up.”

“As we look to the future, one of the things that’s really important to us is to have the system be as readily modifiable to accommodate threats as they develop and technologies as they mature, so, in partnership with the U.S. Navy, we continue to execute our strategy for advanced development,” Bruner said. “That would enable advanced capabilities insertion and mission expansion to keep pace with the threat.

Triton sensors and other mission systems were deployed on a surrogate aircraft—a flying test bed—for targeting missions during Exercise Northern Edge.

“The goal of that was to demonstrate persistent long-range targeting capability,” Bruner said. “That demo was done around the Gulf of Alaska and really did demonstrate that Triton has incredible potential to enhance that Distributed Maritime Operations concept that has been evolving over the last several years.

“Adding the targeting capability to Triton [is] going to be a priority for our customer,” she said.

The Navy’s program of record currently is 27 MQ-4Cs, including the three development aircraft (including one formerly owned by Northrop Grumman for development), the two initial IFC-3 EOC aircraft, and 22 production versions. Australia, a key partner in the Triton program, is procuring four Tritons for the Royal Australian Air Force.

Bruner said that “we believe that six to seven Tritons would be optimal to help Australia conduct surveillance in its areas of interest.”

The U.S. Navy plans to establish three orbits with its Triton UAV force and establish a second squadron, VUP-11, in fiscal

2026.

Australia Announces Procurement of Fourth MQ-4C Triton UAV

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va.—The Australian Defence Force (ADF) will procure a fourth MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle UAV), the Australian government announced in a Sept. 19 release.

The Triton's builder, Northrop Grumman Corporation, is scheduled to deliver Australia's first Triton and its ground and support systems in 2024. The UAVs will be operated from RAAF Tindal, in the Northern Territories by 9 Squadron, which will be headquartered RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia.

"Defence Industry Minister Patna Conroy said the purchase of the additional Triton will enhance operations from Australia's northern bases, a priority under the Defence Strategic Review," the release said.

Northrop Grumman continues production of the latest configuration of the Triton, the multi-intelligence Integrated Functional Configuration 4 (IFC-4) for the U.S. Navy. Earlier this month, the U.S. Navy declared Initial Operational Capability for the Triton, which has been deployed to Guam to establish its first orbit. The Triton deployed to Guam in 2020 for Early Operational Capability. The Navy's program of record for the Triton calls for 27 aircraft, including the

development aircraft.

Australia also plans to upgrade its fleet of 14 P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft between 2026 and 2030 with "enhancements to anti-submarine warfare, maritime strike and intelligence collection capabilities," the release said.

F-35B Loss is the Fourth for the Marine Corps

*****

ARLINGTON, Va. – The pilot of a Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II strike fighter ejected safely near Charleston, South Carolina, on September 17, but search-and-recovery efforts for the aircraft are ongoing, a Marine Corps official said.

“The search-and-recovery efforts for the aircraft are ongoing, and we are thankful to the agencies assisting in this effort,” said Major Kevin Stephensen, a Marine Corps spokesperson in the Communication Directorate of Headquarters, Marine Corps, in a Sept. 18 update. “The mishap is currently under investigation. The Department of the Navy has a well-defined process for investigating aircraft mishaps. We are unable to provide additional details to preserve the integrity of the investigatory process.”

The pilot and aircraft were assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 (VMFAT-501) at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. The squadron is the East Coast fleet replacement squadron for the F-35B pilots and maintenance personnel.

The loss of the F-35B is the third for VMFAT-501. On Oct. 16, 2016, one of its F-35Bs caught fire and landed safely, but the aircraft was a write-off. On Sept. 2, 2018, the squadron lost an aircraft because of an engine failure.

On Sept. 29, 2020, an F-35B from another squadron collided with a KC-130J and crashed in southern California.

Another F-35B crashed on Dec. 15, 2022, at Naval Air Station-Joint Reservation Base Fort Worth, Texas, but the aircraft had not yet been delivered to the Marine Corps and was flown at the time by an Air Force pilot.

Marine Corps Looking at

Stealthy Autonomous Vessels for Logistics

*****

ARLINGTON, Va.—The U.S. Marine Corps is exploring a concept to enhance its ability to supply its forces its forces inside a contested environment: low-profile vessels used by drug-running cartels.

The Corps, however, is looking at autonomous low-profile vessels (LPVs), said Lieutenant General Karsten Heckl, deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration, speaking Sept. 6 at the Defense News Conference in Arlington, who advocated the use of autonomous unmanned systems wherever possible.

Drug runners have built and used manned LPVs frequently over

the last two decade to carry loads of illegal drugs from Latin America to the United States. The LPVs, called semisubmersibles, are fabricated in secret locations and, with a small crew, carry their payload along the transit lanes, trying to avoid visual and radar detection with their very low profiles.

"We just copy the drug lords down south running drugs," Heckl said. "They are hard to find, so now we figure, hey, it works, right?

The Marine Corps has recently focused on logistics in a contested environment as part of its Force Design 2030 to address the challenge of supplying its forces inside the enemy's weapons engagement zone – inside the first island chain off China, for example.

Heckl addressed the concept pairing it with uncrewed autonomy, noting the lower cost of unmanned systems without having to accommodate humans and the supplies and safety systems needed to sustain them.

The required scale of autonomous LPVs is so far undetermined, but Heckl pointed to the success of an unmanned expeditionary fast ship (T-EPF) in autonomous operations. Austal built the Miliary Sealift Command's 13th T-EPF, USNS Apalachicola – a fast catamaran logistics ship–with autonomous control systems to demonstrate the potential of autonomous operations of a ship of its size.

"T-EPF 13 went out and did 1,500 nautical miles completely autonomously," Heckl said. "They had human beings on board as back-ups, but what an amazing capability, a ship that can go 45 knots in Sea State 3 that can operate autonomously. Autonomous–from a logistics perspective–absolutely.

"I want autonomous everything, if we can get there," he said.

Marine Aviator Killed in F./A-18D Hornet Crash

EL CENTRO, Calif. (Sept. 28, 2020) Marines with Marine All Weather Attack Squadron 224 (VMFA 224), Marine Aircraft Group 31, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, prepare F/A-18s for flight operations aboard Naval Air Facility El Centro, Calif. on Sept. 28, 2020. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Nicholas Buss)

*****

ARLINGTON, Va. – A Marine Corps aviator was killed in the crash of his F/A-18D Hornet strike fighter on Aug. 24.

The two-seat Hornet, with only the pilot on board, crashed near Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California, at 11:54

PST, according to a release from the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing. The name of the pilot will not be released until the next of kin has been notified. The mishap is under investigation.

The aircraft was assigned to Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA (AW)) 224, based at MCAS Beaufort, South Carolina. The squadron is one of only two VMFA(AW) squadrons remaining in the Marine Corps, the other being VMFA(AW)-533. The Marine Corps is in transition from the F/A-18 Hornet to the F-35B/C Lightning II strike fighter.

Romania Seeks Former Marine Corps Assault Amphibious Vehicles

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. (June 30, 2021) U.S. Marines with Co. A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (1st MARDIV), and Co. B, 3d Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st MARDIV, prepare to evacuate a P7/A1 assault amphibious vehicle (AAV) during a surf qualification at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, June 30, 2021.
Release from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency

*****

Romania Seeks Former Marine Corps Assault Amphibious Vehicles

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. —The U.S. State Department has approved a possible sale of AAV7 assault amphibious vehicles to the Government of Romania, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a July 2 release.

Romania has requested the sale of 21 AAV-7s, including 16 AAVP-A1 personnel carrier versions, three AAVC-7A1 command vehicles, and two AAVR-7A1 recovery versions. The sale also would include armament, thermal sights, spare parts, manuals, data package, engineering support, ad other support. The total cost of the sale would be an estimated $120.5 million.

The AAV-7 family of vehicles, built by BAE Systems, is being replaced in the U.S. Marine Corps by the Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) family, also built by BAE Systems. The AAV-7 entered Marine Corps service in 1972.

A contract to deliver the vehicles and support to Romania in the event the sale is finalized has not yet been identified.

Romania, a member of NATO that borders the Black Sea, has increasingly joined in military ties and exercises with the United States.