Adding to the Fleet: Navy Evolves to Counter Changing Threats

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn (DDG 113), front, transits alongside the Military Sealift Command dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS Matthew Perry (T-AKE 9) during a replenishment-at-sea Feb. 4, 2021. John Finn is on a scheduled deployment to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. As the U.S. Navy's largest forward deployed fleet, with its approximate 50-70 ships and submarines, 140 aircraft, and 20,000 Sailors in the area of operations at any given time, 7th Fleet conducts forward-deployed naval operations in support of U.S. national interests throughout a free and open Indo-Pacific area of operations. *U.S. Navy/ Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jason Waite*

Last December, then-Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite announced plans to bring back the U.S. Atlantic Fleet in a

name change that was a deliberate message to the world – in particular the near-peer competitor nations of Russia and China as well as U.S allies – that the Atlantic Ocean and Arctic region were no longer quiet naval backwaters but areas of intense U.S. geopolitical focus.

The previous month, Braithwaite also announced plans to establish another numbered fleet for the Navy – the U.S. 1st Fleet – adding it to the seven other numbered fleets that are the main operational arms of the U.S. Navy. The service, which waged the Cold War with only four numbered fleets, has added three numbered fleets since then.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said on Jan. 11 in a webinar of the Surface Navy Association convention that then-President Donald Trump signed off on Braithwaite's proposed redesignation of U.S. Fleet Forces Command as the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. A timetable for the change has not been announced, but Fleet Forces Commander Adm. Chris Grady is "putting together an implementation plan for my review," Gilday said.

Venerable Pedigree

The original U.S. Atlantic Fleet has a long pedigree that began in 1906, when the North Atlantic Squadron and South Atlantic Squadron were combined. The fleet existed in various forms until 2006, when the chief of naval operations renamed commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, to commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, which assumed the duties of the former fleet plus the mission of the former commander, Fleet Forces Command, which was "to serve as the primary advocate for fleet personnel, training, requirements, maintenance and operations issues," according to the Fleet Forces Command website.

Sailors who had served in both Atlantic and Pacific Fleets often expressed the notion that the two fleets were like two different navies in their policies, traditions and the way

they operated. The role of Fleet Forces Command in part was to standardize administration, manning, training and equipping across the entire U.S. fleet.

The move to the return of the Atlantic Fleet moniker was deliberate. Braithwaite announced the redesignation plan Dec. 2 during testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee's Readiness and Management Support sub- committee, noting the changing world requires the Navy to evolve to meet the threat.

"Our existing structure operates on the premise that we still live in a post-9/11 state, where NATO's flanks are secure, the Russian fleet is tied to the pier and terrorism is our biggest problem," Braithwaite said. "That is not the world of today. As the world changes, we must be bold, evolved and change with it. Instead of perpetuating a structure designed to support Joint Forces Command, we are aligning to today's threat.

"To meet the maritime challenges of the Atlantic theater, we will rename Fleet Forces Command as the U.S. Atlantic Fleet and will refocus our naval forces in this important region on their original mission, to controlling the maritime approaches to the United States and those of our allies. The Atlantic Fleet will confront the re-assertive Russian navy, which has been deploying closer and closer to our East Coast with a tailored maritime presence, capability and lethality," Braithwaite said.

"It underscores the importance of the Atlantic in a way that the title 'Fleet Forces' doesn't," Gilday said. "It actually is a testament to recent tangible decisions that we made to increase our power in that body of water, to include bringing 2nd Fleet back, standing up SubGru 2 [Submarine Group Two]. It will also include standing up [NATO's] Joint Force Command Norfolk, which is focused on the Atlantic. In a day and age when the homeland is no longer a sanctuary and homeland defense is at the fore of every plan the combatant commanders

have put together, the name ‘Atlantic Fleet’ always carries some gravitas with respect to defense of the nation.”

He noted the complexity of the redesignation, saying the command “also has responsibilities as a component [command] for [U.S.] Northern Command and the Eastern Pacific that extend up to the Arctic as well as their role as component of the [U.S] Strategic Command. They really have a global responsibility with respect to the command and control of our SSBNs [ballistic-missile submarines].”

Grady seconded the complexity in a Jan. 13 webinar at the convention, noting the “downside “might be that we would lose emphasis on what we do for the homeland.

Indeed, I control forces in both the Pacific and down south [in U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility]. So, we will balance all that, and in the end the name change is an important branding opportunity, and we will move out on that.”

“We are walking through this very methodically and deliberately before we finally execute,” Gilday said.

A convoy of the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Vella Gulf (CG 72), right, MV Resolve, center, and USNS Benavidez (T-AKR 306), part of the 2nd Fleet, steam in formation in this 2020 photo. *U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Andrew Waters*

U.S. 1st Fleet Returning?

Braithwaite, noting the increasing Chinese hegemony in the South China Sea, the increasingly close relationship of the U.S. Navy to the Indian navy and the expanse of ocean covered by the Japan-based U.S. 7th Fleet, proposed a new fleet to cover Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, an area of extensive shipping traffic vital to world commerce.

“If we’re really going to have an INDOPACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] footprint, we can’t just rely on the 7th Fleet in Japan,” Braithwaite said during a Nov. 17 to webinar of the annual symposium of the Naval Submarine League. “We have to look to our other allies and partners like Singapore, like India, and actually put a numbered fleet where it would be extremely relevant if, God forbid, we were to get in any kind

of a dust-up."

Braithwaite proposed the new fleet be designated the U.S. 1st Fleet, a resurrection of a fleet staff which formerly was based in San Diego and disestablished in 1973 when the U.S. 3rd Fleet was established in Hawaii. (The 3rd Fleet headquarters later was moved to San Diego.)

He mentioned Singapore as a possible site for a headquarters for the U.S. 1st Fleet. The Navy has a logistics group staged there and has forward-deployed littoral combat ships to the base. As an alternative, the 1st Fleet staff could be "more expeditionary oriented and move it across the Pacific until it is where our allies and partners see that it could best assist them as well as assist us."

"The establishment of 1st Fleet is still in development," said Capt. Jereal Dorsey, special assistant for Public Affairs for the secretary of the Navy, in a Jan. 29 statement to *Seapower*.

"Establishing a new fleet dedicated to the Indian Ocean is a good idea," said Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. "India is a longtime maritime power that is modernizing its fleet and growing its cooperation with the U.S. Navy and the rest of the 'Quad' [Japan, Australia, United Stated, India]. A key question for the Navy to address is the area of responsibility for 1st Fleet. Incorporating East and South Africa in 1st Fleet rather than Naval Forces Europe and 6th Fleet, as they are today, would be a good idea because in many cases these countries have stronger ties to Asian countries than to Europe.

"I think including Australia or Southeast Asian nations under 1st Fleet would, in general, be disadvantageous because of the numerous maritime cooperation initiatives underway between these navies and those of the United States and Japan. However, the fleet has to be based some- where, so Myanmar, Singapore, and Malaysia could be included in 1st Fleet if the

fleet were based in Singapore.

“The more important issue is whether 1st Fleet will have a substantial naval presence or any permanently assigned ships. Every other fleet has both. Adding a 1st Fleet but then only deploying forces to it in transit or for exercises may defeat the purpose of having a dedicated staff focused on the region. When the LCS [littoral combat ship] is ready for more sustained deployments, the Navy could implement the rotational crewing concept it intended in Singapore, providing assigned ships to 1st Fleet that would change out every year to 18 months. To increase presence, DoD [Department of Defense] could adjust its Central Command footprint to use locally based air, ground, and naval forces to deter Iran and allow other ships to deploy more broadly throughout the Indian Ocean.”

Changing Realities

The expansion of numbered fleets since the Cold War may seem counterintuitive with the much-shrunken size of the U.S. fleet since 1991, now roughly half the size in terms of numbers of ships. During the Cold War, the 1st and later the 3rd Fleet covered the Eastern Pacific, including the antisubmarine patrols to counter the patrolling Soviet ballistic-missile submarines off the U.S. West Coast. The 7th Fleet covered the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans. The 6th Fleet patrolled the Mediterranean. The 2nd Fleet covered the North Atlantic Ocean.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Navy has disestablished and reestablished the 2nd Fleet and has reestablished the 4th, 5th and 10th Fleets, dormant since the early post- World War II period, to adjust to changing geopolitical realities. The 5th Fleet was established to replace the Middle Eastern Force in the Persian Gulf in July 1995 in recognition of the increased need for forces in the volatile Gulf, Southwest Asia and the North Arabian Sea, and became the naval component of U.S. Central Command. The 4th Fleet was reestablished in July 2008,

to serve as the naval component of U.S. Southern Command, to operate in the Caribbean Sea, and in Central and South America.

The 10th Fleet, which in World War II oversaw the campaign against German U-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic, was reestablished in July 2010 as the operational arm of Fleet Cyber Command. It commands no ships but oversees the operations of the cyber teams and other units for information warfare operations, including cyberwarfare and signals intelligence collection.

During September 2011, the 2nd Fleet was disestablished in recognition of the reduction of threats in the North Atlantic in the post-Cold War era. But with the resurgence of Russia and in particular its submarine forces, the 2nd Fleet was reestablished in August 2018.

Seapower correspondent John Doyle contributed to this report.

Ex-Navy Helos Providing Folding Rotors, Tails for Cutter-Deploying H-60 Helos

A crew prepares to power down a Coast Guard MH-60T Jayhawk helicopter after landing at Sector Columbia River, Oregon, in 2012. The service is shifting the focus of some of its MH-60T fleet to use on board its large cutters. *U.S. Coast Guard / Petty Officer 3rd Class Nate Littlejohn*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Coast Guard is shifting the focus of some of its MH-60T Jayhawk helicopter fleet to use on board its large cutters and is using components from some ex-U.S. Navy H-60 Seahawk helicopters to make that possible.

The Coast Guard operates a fleet of 45 Sikorsky-built MH-60Ts from eight air stations for medium-range missions that include search, rescue, drug interdiction and law enforcement. They can operate from the decks of the service's larger cutters but because they do not have folding tail rotors and tail booms, they cannot be hangered inside the superstructure of the larger cutters, such as the Legend-class national security cutters, future Argus-class offshore patrol cutters and the future class of Polar Security Cutters.

In his March 11 State-of-the-Coast Guard address, Coast Guard

Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said the service will convert some MH-60Ts with folding rotors and tail booms to enable them to operate from the larger cutters and give the cutters a longer reach with their embarked helicopters. Currently the Coast Guard deploys the smaller MH-65D/E Dolphin helicopters on its larger cutters.

“Two weeks ago, in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, I observed our first MH-60T Jayhawk outfitted with Blade-fold/ Tail-fold capability that will enable deployment aboard National Security Cutters, and our future Polar Security and Offshore Patrol Cutters,” Schultz said.

The commandant noted the range and endurance of the MH-60T would serve well on a polar security deployment to Antarctica, particularly for treaty inspections.

The Coast Guard has long used parts and structures from ex-Navy H-60 helicopters to help sustain its MH-60T fleet and even be rebuilt into MH-60Ts. Beginning in 2005, the Coast Guard Air Logistics Center (ALC) has converted six ex-Navy SH-60Fs to MH-60Ts. The ALC also has “overhauled and modified another SH-60F hull and four HH-60Hs (by July 2020) as part of the plan to retain the aircraft and extend the service life,” said Tom Kaminski, an expert on Coast Guard aviation. “They also are reactivating the mechanisms that permit the tail to be folded.

“The service acquired 65 retired SH-60F and HH-60Hs from the U.S. Navy and a number of the Seahawk airframes were stripped by the ALC in preparation for conversion, ” Kaminski said. “The plan is for a mix of reworked low-time hulls and the new production hulls from Sikorsky.”

Schultz also said in his address that MH-60Ts will replace MH-65s at two air stations.

“This year we will transition Air Station Borinquen in Puerto Rico from a Dolphin to Jayhawk unit, adding additional reach

and contingency response capability to the Eastern Caribbean, not to mention a likely land-based Aviation Use of Force capability," he said. "Air Station New Orleans will be the next to transition."

Double-Pumped Carrier Deployments Are Not Surges, Lawmaker Says

Aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) performs a replenishment-at-sea with fleet replenishment oiler USNS John Lenthall (T-AO 189). The carrier is one of several to have had "double pumped" deployments in recent years. *U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jacob Richardson*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy's recent practice of sending

nuclear-powered aircraft carriers (CVNs) on back-to-back deployments – termed "double-pumped" – is not an example of a surge capability, a member of Congress said.

"Surge is additional capability to respond in a time of crisis or for an unplanned operation," said Elaine Luria, D-Virginia, vice chair of the House Armed Services Committee, speaking March 15 in a webinar sponsored by the Hudson Institute. "What we are doing now is we are double-deploying – I won't even call it surging – double deploying these ships to fill a gap for other ships that should have been doing routine deployments at that time but are delayed in maintenance."

Under the Navy's Optimized Fleet Optimization Plan, a carrier is planned to make one scheduled deployment in a 36-month cycle and be available for a surge deployment later in the cycle.

At least three CVNs – USS Harry S. Truman, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and USS Theodore Roosevelt – each have made double-pumped deployments in recent years, Luria said.

Luria attributed the double-pumped deployments to a shortage of maintenance capacity in the Navy's shipyards, where most maintenance of nuclear-powered ships and submarines takes place.

She cited the current case of the USS George H.W. Bush, which has been in a maintenance availability for 27 months – more than 2.5 times the planned time – and still is not ready to sail.

"That lengthening of that availability came about because of the capacity at [Norfolk Naval Shipyard], and there were decisions made that there were other priorities that need to be clocked up," she said.

The shortage of maintenance capacity has caused the Navy to contract out nuclear submarine maintenance availabilities to

Newport News Shipbuilding, for example.

“When did we get to this point where we really couldn’t keep up with carrier maintenance?” she asked rhetorically. “When you look at the point at where we got to all nuclear carriers – when we got rid of [oil-fired carriers] Kitty Hawk, Kennedy and Independence – we had less [maintenance capacity and fewer yards for in-depth maintenance on nuclear carriers.] If we’re operating an all-nuclear fleet, we need to have the ability to maintain those carriers.”

Luria said the Navy’s Shipyard Integrated Optimization Plan, designed to upgrade the Navy’s shipyards over a 20-year period, which she said, “is way too long of a period for that and I think we should make that investment for those upgrades to our shipyards to be made more quickly.”

She also said that Norfolk Naval Shipyard also needs upgrades just to perform routine maintenance on the Navy’s newest class of aircraft carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford.

Coast Guard Reducing Some Marine Protector Patrol Boats for Budget Reasons, Commandant Says

U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ibis (WPB 87338), anchored in the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. in May, 2003. Ibis is an 87-foot Coastal Patrol Boat and part of the Coast Guard's Marine Protector Class of vessels. *U.S. Coast Guard / Joseph P. Cirone*

ARLINGTON, Va. — Budget constraints are the main reason the Coast Guard is decommissioning a few 87-foot Marine Protector-class patrol boats, the Coast Guard commandant said, but the capabilities of other boats will compensate for the change.

"We are taking some 87-footers out of service," said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz, responding to a question from *Seapower* during a March 11 in a teleconference with reporters following his State-of-the-Coast Guard address in San Diego. "That's a budget reality."

Schultz explained that, during the 1980s, 49 Island-class 110-foot patrol boats were built, but with six deployed to the Persian Gulf with Patrol Force Southwest Asia and six retired after a failed hull-length extension, the fleet in domestic waters was down to 34 and has been reduced since to less than 20. However, the 64 larger Sentinel-class 154-foot responses cutters (FRCs) being built — of which 58 will be stationed in the United States and its territories — have been replacing the Inland-class boats.

“So, there is a lot more new ship capacity,” Schultz said. “When you look at an FRC versus an Island-class patrol boat – significantly more linear feet across the waterline, significantly more tonnage, about 28 to 30-knot speed, eight more crew members, an over-the-horizon boat capability, just a lot more C5 [command, control, communications, computers, combat systems, intelligence capability]. So, there’s a lot more capability and capacity on the waterfront with the swap out.”

Schultz said the Congress funded more 87-foot patrol boats than the program of record’s requirement when the Marine Protector program started.

The commandant said some of the Marine Protectors may be declared excess defense articles and offered to foreign navies and coast guards, just as some Island -class patrol boats have been.

“We may hold some to bring back into service,” he said.

It is absolutely budgetarily influenced and informed within the topline, he said. “I’m the last guy as a cutterman who wants to remove a cutter from service, but I think we’ll have plenty of capacity. That fast response cutter – its seakeeping, its legs – is considerably more [capable] than the patrol boats it’s replacing.”

Referring to the March 10 decommissioning of the Marine Protector-class USCGC Dorado at Crescent City, California, Schultz pointed out that with the mission demands and capabilities in that area resident in the Coast Guard’s heavy-weather-capable 45-foot response boats and the nearby aviation capability, ‘taking out some of those 87’s was a relatively rational, hard choice we had to make.”

Naval Technology Processes Misaligned, Research Admiral Says

Jonathan Kwolek, Ph.D. (left), a U.S. Naval Research Laboratory research physicist, shows an atom interferometer to Chief of Naval Research Rear Adm. Lorin Selby (right) in 2020 at NRL facilities in Washington, D.C. *U.S. Navy / Jonathan Steffen*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The admiral in charge of naval technology research said he is looking hard at the processes of technology development to see how they can be refined to speed development.

"We are not structurally aligned to move that tech as fast as we need it moving," said Rear Adm. Lorin Selby, chief of naval

research (CNR), speaking March 8 in a webinar of the National Defense Industrial Association's Pacific Operations Science and Technology Conference. "We're going to develop the tech, and I'm convinced that more of this probably will happen on the industry side than the government. It will be a partnership but it's primarily going to be driven by the dollar, the profit of these things coming down the pike. I get concerned about the structural alignment of our processes – that I think are misaligned, with the pace we're trying to get at."

Selby said improvements can come through the budget and executive and legislative action, but "It's in the way we insert tech in the acquisition pipeline from different places" that he is focused on.

"Looking back over the last 20 years or so, we have tried to put in place 'HOV lanes' around the traffic, things like DIU [Defense Innovation Unit] are things primarily intended to go around the congestion," he said. "The problem is they invariably have to start in the congestion or they totally merge back into it just because they have to; that's the way it works. There are some structural issues there that we need to go after.

"Let's face it: we're still operating like it's 1985 or something," Selby said. "It worked great in 1985. For the most part, for big high-ticket things, it still works pretty well today – aircraft carriers, submarines, fighter-bombers. Could you make some tweaks? Yeah, you could. Fundamentally, when you talk about high-tech payloads, the software, the things that are really going to be the game changers – that's where we've really got to look hard at the structure and figure out ways to make some alterations."

Selby, said "there are some things that could be done within the existing lifelines, changing the way some of the A to B to C works. It has become so complex that it's hard for any one

program manager to figure out to manage all of this. There are so many relationships. We need to go back to a simpler, more linear approach. We'd actually go faster."

The CNR, a submarine officer who has been a program manager, chief engineer for the Naval Sea Systems Command and head of a warfare center, said his experience give him a perspective of the whole life cycle of technological systems.

"I've seen the entire flash of an idea all the way to the disposal of the thing at the end of its life," he said.

U.S. Will Fight from Guam and for Guam, U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander Says

Sailors deployed from Naval Beach Group 1 navigate Improved Navy Lighterage Systems in Apra Harbor, Guam. U.S. Navy / Chief Boatswain's Mate Daniel Nguyen

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy admiral in charge U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said building up the defenses of Guam is his highest budget priority and reminded observers Guam is not just a base for military operations but a part of the American homeland, and should be defended as such.

Guam, a large island southernmost of the Marianas island chain, is a U.S. territory and has been a U.S. base since before World War II – except for the Japanese occupation during 1941-1944.

"Guam is absolutely critical in maintaining deterrence and stability in the region," said Adm. Philip Davidson, commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, speaking March 4 during a webinar of the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington think tank. "It is our most critical operating location west of the International Dateline. Funding for the air and missile

defense of Guam is my Number 1 priority – most importantly because Guam is U.S. homeland.

“There are 170,000 Americans living in Guam, and their defense is homeland defense,” Davidson said. “Defense Department personnel comprise some 13% of the total population on Guam, a total of nearly 22,000 service members, civilians, contractors and family members that are supporting America’s of Guam. That doesn’t even include rotational forces [that deploy to Guam].”

Davidson said Guam is a “critical nexus for command and control, for logistics and sustainment, and for power. It has strategic deep-water ports and airfields. We have billions of dollars in military capability in Guam today and there are billions of dollars programmed by the United States to advance those capabilities tomorrow.”

He pointed to an example, Marine Corps Base Camp Blaine, established in November 2020 and built to garrison 5,000 Marines as the first new Marine Corps base established in the Pacific since 1952.

The admiral wants to establish Aegis Ashore missile-defense facilities in Guam to augment the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense radar system already in Guam and provide 360-degree missile defense of the island and “the full spectrum of detect-to-engage sequence, the sensing, the network and the delivery of fires to support our maneuver.”

He pointed out that an Aegis Ashore facility would accomplish what otherwise would require three Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers to defend Guam, ships that could be freed to employ their multi-mission capabilities elsewhere.

Davidson responded to critics who say that bolstering missile defenses of Guam would make the island a target, noting that “it already is one. China is making no secret of this fact, as evidenced in last fall’s widely circulated PLA Air Force

propaganda video which specifically depicted an attack on a mock-up of Andersen Air Force Base in Guam.

“In all, the Guam defense system will allow us to regain the advantage, help us to deter China, and will demonstrate our steadfast commitment to our allies and partners in the region that we are here to stay and to defend what is ours,” he said. “… It is not a de facto status that we only need to be able to fight from [Guam] – we’re going to have to be able to fight for it, and missile defense in the region is critical.”

Coast Guard Set to Retire Last High-Endurance Cutter, Commandant Says

Members from Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro stand in formation on the back of the cutter, July 24, 2020. The cutter's hull day, July 24, correlates with its hull number, 724. U.S. Coast Guard

WASHINGTON —The Coast Guard will retire USCGC Douglas Munro at the end of March, concluding 49 years of Coast Guard service for the cutter and 54 years for the Secretary-class 378-Foot cutters.

In a March 4 message to the Coast Guard, Commandant Adm. Karl L. Schultz said that on March 31 the Douglas Munro would be placed in In-Commission Special Status, which begins the decommissioning process.

The 12 Secretary-class cutters were the mainstay of the Coast Guard's ocean-going fleet until their replacement began 13 years ago by the new Legend-class national security cutters. Some deployed with carrier strike groups and operated in the Persian Gulf. They had an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability until 1992, when it was removed. The same year some were armed with Harpoon anti-ship missiles. The original 5-inch gun mounts were replace in the late 1980s to mid-1990s with Mk75 76mm guns.

The Douglas Munro, built by Avondale Shipyards in Louisiana, was commissioned on Sept. 27, 1971. It was named Munro until the Coast Guard's new Legend-class national security cutter USCGC Munro was built.

As the high-endurance cutters were decommissioned, they were transferred to foreign navies or coast guards. Hamilton, Dallas and Boutwell have been transferred to the Philippines; Chase and Gallatin to Nigeria; Jarvis and Rush to Bangladesh; Morgenthau to Vietnam; Sherman to Sri Lanka, and Mellon to Bahrain. John Midgette is in Seattle being prepared for delivery to Vietnam. Douglas Munro likely will serve in a foreign navy as well, though transfer has not yet been announced.

Navy Orders 20,000 SSQ-125 Sonobuoys

Aircrew Survival Equipmentman 3rd Class Alyssa Kozak, left, Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Austin Phillips, center, and Aviation Ordnanceman Airman Siane Nash load sonobuoys onto a P-8A Poseidon anti-submarine warfare patrol aircraft, Dec. 14, 2020. U.S. Navy/ Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Austin Ingram

ARLINTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered 20,000 SSQ-125 sonobuoys for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training and operations.

The Navy has in recent years placed renewed emphasis in ASW

and has increased its capabilities and capacity in view of the increased Russian and Chinese submarine activity and capabilities.

The Naval Air Systems Command awarded ERAPSCO – a joint venture of Sparton Corp. and Ultra Electronics – a $71.3 million firm-fixed-price contract modification for a maximum quantity of 20,000 SSQ-125s, according to a March 3 Defense Department contract announcement.

The sonobuoys will be used "in support of annual training, peacetime operations and testing expenditures and maintaining sufficient inventory to support the execution of major combat operations determined by the Naval Munitions Requirements Process for the Navy and Foreign Military Sales customers," the announcement said.

The SSQ-125 is used by U.S. Navy P-8A and P-3C aircraft and produces electronic (coherent) pulses of various types and lengths that enable Doppler processing to distinguish moving targets (such as submarines) from stationary features of the environment (such as shipwrecks).

The work on the order is expected to be completed in March 2023.

Naval Academy Increasingly Affected by Rising Tides, Superintendent Says

The U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, fly over the U.S. Naval Academy commissioning ceremony May 20, 2020. The academy's waterfront is being affected by rising sea levels. Video still by U.S. Navy / Petty Officer 1st Class Jess Gray.

WASHINGTON – The waterfront of the U.S. Naval Academy is more frequently being affected by rising sea levels, the academy's superintendent said.

Vice Adm. Sean Buck, testifying March 2 before the House Appropriations Committee's Defense subcommittee, said that rising sea level is causing more high-tide flooding of the academy's campus.

The Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland, is located at the estuary of the Severn River at the Chesapeake Bay.

"We're built on a lot of reclaimed land, Buck said. "We're at the confluence of one of Maryland's major rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, and we're also affected throughout the entire day, 365 days of the year, by the prevailing winds that have existed for centuries, easterly and southeasterly winds which, when you combine that weather with sea-level rise, with subsidence, which is pretty significant in the Chesapeake Bay

area … we are continuously experiencing negative effects of high tide almost on a regular basis."

Buck said in the entire decade of the 1990s the academy experienced 41 events of high-tide flooding.

"Now, we're experiencing 41 instances of high-tide flooding per year," he said. "As we look at all of the projections from all of the science, and those who are looking at this, especially on the East Coast looking at it for naval infrastructure, it is projected by 2050 that we will see this high-tide flooding negative effect every single day of the year."

Buck said some of the effects of the flooding are flooded-out roads – including commuting routes – parking lots, and entrances and exits to some of the campus buildings.

Buck said his predecessor formed the U.S. Naval Academy Sea-Level Rise Advisory Council in 2015, comprised of Naval Academy scientists and engineers and stakeholders in the Naval academy team, the city of Annapolis, and the state of Maryland. He said the council is informed by the Army Corps of Engineers and other experts who are working on a study expected to be completed by the end of 2021 "to help us create a military installation resiliency plan.

"They are going to present to us different courses of action – engineering solutions – that we can take around the yard," he said, noting the solutions might include building up sea walls, creating earthen berms, raising the level of roads and upgrading storm water drainage.

Second Navy Squadron Ready for F-35C Transition

An F-35C Lightning II carrier variant joint strike fighter launches from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68). U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Shauna C. Sowersby

ARLINGTON, Va. – The second Navy strike fighter squadron (VFA) slated for transition to the F-35C Lightning II strike fighter has made its last flight in the F/A-18E Super Hornet.

The Warhawks of VFA-97, based at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California, flew the Super Hornet for the last time on Feb. 26. For more than a year, the squadron has operated older F/A-18Es in an adversary role to help train sister VFA squadrons in aerial combat.

The Warhawks will receive transition training at Lemoore from VFA-125, the fleet replacement squadron for the F-35C.

VFA-97 will become the Navy's second fleet F-35C squadron. The first, VFA-147, is scheduled to deploy later this year with

Carrier Air Wing Two on USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70).

VFA-97 had operated the F/A-18 Hornet since 1991, and the F/A-18E Super Hornet since 2013.

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314 (VMFA-314) also has completed transition to the F-35C and is scheduled to deploy on a carrier in fiscal 2022.