

Navy Orders Four Additional CMV-22B Osprey COD Aircraft



A CMV-22B Osprey from the "Titans" of Fleet Logistics Multi-Mission Squadron (VRM) 30 approaches the flight deck of Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Aaron T. Smith

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered four additional CMV-22B Osprey carrier-onboard delivery aircraft, according to a Feb. 26 Defense Department contract announcement.

The Bell Boeing Joint Project Office, Amarillo, Texas, was awarded a \$309.6 contract modification by the Naval Air Systems Command for the four CMV-22Bs," the announcement said.

The Navy's CMV-22B replaces the C-2A Greyhound for the Carrier On-Board Delivery (COD) mission. Its mission is to transport personnel, mail, supplies and cargo from shore bases to

aircraft carriers at sea. Forty-four of the 48 Navy program of record aircraft will be delivered under the June 2018 multiyear procurement contract.

The CMV-22B differs from the MV-22B by having a high-frequency radio, extra fuel capacity, improved fuel dump capability, improved lighting for cargo handling and a public address system. The aircraft can carry up to 6,000 pounds up to a range of 1,150 nautical miles. It is capable of internally carrying the F-135 engine power module for the F-35 Lightning II.

The CMV-22B made its first flight on Dec. 19, 2019 at Bell Flight's Amarillo, Texas assembly facility and later flew to Naval Air Station Patuxent River to continue flight testing in February 2020. The first CMV-22B squadron, VRM-30, is working up a detachment to deploy on board USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70).

Operational Test and initial operation capability are scheduled for 2021; full operational capability is scheduled for 2024.

DoD Adds Two Mark VI Patrol Boats to Ukraine Aid Package



A Mark VI patrol boat, shown here in the Arabian Gulf in March 2020. U.S. Army / Pfc. Christopher Cameron
ARLINGTON, Va. – The Department of Defense has added two more modern patrol boats for Ukraine in a new security assistance package.

“The Department of Defense announces a new \$125 million package for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative that includes training, equipment, and advisory efforts to help Ukraine’s forces preserve the country’s territorial integrity, secure its borders, and improve interoperability with NATO, the department said in a March 1 release. “This action reaffirms the U.S. commitment to providing defensive lethal weapons to enable Ukraine to more effectively defend itself against Russian aggression.

“The USAI package includes two additional armed Mark VI patrol boats to enhance Ukraine’s capacity to patrol and defend its territorial waters,” the release said. “To date, the U.S. has committed a total of eight Mark VI patrol boats.”

The Mark VI boats are being built by SAFE Boats International LLC of Bremerton. Washington.

The U.S. State Department has approved the possible foreign military sale of up to 16 Mark VI patrol boats and related equipment to Ukraine for an estimated cost of \$600 million, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said in a June 17, 2020, release.

The patrol boats will be operated by the Ukrainian navy to defend territorial waters and other maritime interests. They each will be armed with two MSI Seahawk A2 gun systems and two Mk44 cannons and equipped with electro-optical/infrared sensors and loud-speaker systems.

The sale will “improve Ukraine’s capability to meet current and future threats by providing a modern, fast, short-range vessel,” the DSCA said.

Mark VI patrol boats are used by the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command for escort of high-value ships, coastal patrol, and other maritime security missions.

Admiral Praises Marine Corps’ Last Hornet Carrier Deployment



An F/A-18C Hornet, from the “Death Rattlers” of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 323, makes an arrested landing on the flight deck of the USS Nimitz (CVN 68). Nimitz, flagship of Nimitz Carrier Strike Group, is currently conducting routine operations in U.S. 3rd Fleet. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Charles DeParlier

ARLINGTON, Va.—The last deployment of the F/A-18C Hornet on an aircraft carrier ended last week with the return of the “Death Rattlers” of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 323 (VMFA-323) from a deployment with Carrier Air Wing 17 on board USS Nimitz (CVN 68).

The Death Rattlers returned to their home base, Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, California on Feb. 25, the day before Nimitz arrived at San Diego to offload CVW-17 personnel before heading to its homeport of Bremerton, Washington.

Rear Adm. James Kirk, commander, Carrier Strike Group 11 and the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group, told reporters in a Feb. 26 teleconference that VMFA-323, despite flying the oldest jets deployed on a carrier, “performed fantastic yeoman work. Obviously with older aircraft, they do have challenges, but they rose to those challenges. Those maintainers did a great job, and those Marine pilots executed those missions, whether it was in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, Operation

Octave Quartz, or Operation Resolute Support, or the just-presence missions we did or the operations we did during dual-carrier ops in the South China Sea with the Ronald Reagan Strike Group of the TR [Theodore Roosevelt] Strike Group.

“That Marine squadron met the mark, hit the mission,” Kirk said.

The deployment of Marine Corps F/A-18A and F/A-18C squadrons on carriers over the last two decades was a manifestation of the TACAIR Integration Plan, originally designed to provide one Marine VMFA squadron for each of 10 carrier air wings. Because of heavy commitments to wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq, the plan never fielded more than four VMFAs in the carrier air wings. With the transition of some VMFA squadrons to the F-35B and F-35C Lightning II strike fighters, the number of VMFAs on carriers dwindled to just one, VMFA-323.

The program is alive, however, with VMFA-314 – the Corps’ first F-35C squadron – preparing to deploy with a carrier air wing in 2022. The Corps is procuring 67 F-35Cs, a number that will allow it eventually to field four VMFAs equipped with the type in carrier air wings.

VMFA-323 will continue to operate the F/A-18C and will form a fleet replacement detachment to assume the role of training pilots and maintainers for Marine Corps F/A-18C/D squadrons after the fleet replacement squadron, VMFAT-101, is deactivated during fiscal 2023, as the Hornet training load decreases as the type is retired in 2030. According to the Marine Corps’ latest training plan, promulgated in 2019, VMFA-323 will be the Corp’s last active-duty Hornet squadron and will upgrade to the F-35B.

The Death Rattlers were activated in 1943 with F4U Corsair fighters and flew combat missions against Japanese forces during World War II. They flew Corsairs again in the Korean War and F-4B Phantom II fighters in the Vietnam War. They flew

Phantoms from carriers after the Vietnam war and were one of the Corps' first Hornet squadrons. Together with VMFA-314, they made the Corps' first carrier deployment in the type, flying in combat from USS Coral Sea (CV 43) in 1986 against Libyan targets during Operations Prairie Fire and El Dorado Canyon.

The last F/A-18C carrier deployment of a Navy squadron ended in April 2018 with the return of Strike Fighter Squadron 34 (VFA-34) with Carrier Air Wing Two from USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). VFA-34 was the Navy's last active-duty deploying squadron to operate the legacy Hornet and has since upgraded to the F/A-18E Super Hornet.

The Navy is divesting itself of the legacy Hornets as fast as procurement of the F/A-18E/F and F-35C permit. The Blue Angels flight demonstration squadron recently completed the transition to the Super Hornet and soon the Navy's sole reserve VFA squadron will make the transition.

Navy Orders 15th
Expeditionary Fast Transport
from Austal



Expeditionary Fast Transport vessels, USNS Spearhead (T-EPF 1), USNS Choctaw County (T-EPF 2) and USNS Fall River (T-EPF 4) shown at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in this 2015 photo. U.S. Navy / Brian Suriani

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has awarded Austal USA a contract to build the 15th Spear-head-class expeditionary fast transport (EPF).

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded Austal a \$235 million “undefinitized” contract action modification on Feb. 26, 2021, for the detailed design and construction of EPF 15, the company said in a release.

The EPF, designated T-EPF in service to the Military Sealift Command, originally was designated a joint high-speed vessel, but has proven versatile in performing a number of roles in support of regional combatant commanders. Those roles have included humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, maritime security, surveillance, command and control, and counter narcotics, among others.

“With a draft of only 13 feet and waterjet propulsion, the EPF is able to access austere and degraded ports with minimal external assistance providing flexibility to fleet and combatant commanders,” the Austal release said. “With its maneuverability, large open mission bay and ability to achieve speeds greater-than 35-knots, the EPFs have the capability to support additional missions such as special operations and medical support.”

The Spearhead class originally was intended to be 10 ships: five for the U.S. Army and five for the Navy. The five Army ships later were reallocated to the Navy. The lead ship was delivered in December 2012. As the utility and success of the ships was demonstrated in operations, Congress has approved an increase in the number of hulls authorized, now at 15 ships. Austal has delivered 12 to the Military Sealift Command to date.

EPF 15, like EPFs 13 and 14, will include an expeditionary medical capability. The EPFs are operated by civilian mariners of the Military Sealift Command.

“At its core, the EPF is designed to be highly capable, flexible and affordable,” said Rusty Murdaugh, Austal USA’s chief financial officer and interim president. “With this baseline, we’ve been able to deliver multiple ships that are performing different missions for the U.S. military. The award of EPF 15 allows the Navy to leverage a hot production line and highly trained workforce to continue producing ships that are meeting the needs of warfighters today and into the future.”

Families Welcome Nimitz Carrier Strike Group Sailors after 331 Days of Separation



Aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68) arrives Naval Air Station North Island on Feb. 26. Nimitz Carrier Strike Group returned after a more than 10-month deployment to U.S. 5th Fleet and U.S. 7th Fleet, which included freedom of navigation operations and participation in operations Freedom's Sentinel, Inherent Resolve and Octave Quartz. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Timothy Heaps

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Nimitz Carrier Strike Group (CSG) returned to San Diego Feb. 26 after nearly 11 months deployed in the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleet areas of operation (AOR), the Navy said. The strike group was the first to deploy after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

USS Nimitz departed its homeport, Naval Base Kitsap – Bremerton, on April 27, 2020, for integrated training and

began its deployment heading west on June 8. The crew began sequestering April 7, resulting in a separation from families of 331 days by the time the strike group returned.

During the deployment, the strike group supported operations Inherent Resolve, Freedom's Sentinel and Octave Quartz in the U.S. Fifth Fleet area of operation, said Rear Adm. James Kirk, the strike group commander, in a Feb. 26 teleconference with reporters.

The strike group includes Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 11, aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68), embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17, Destroyer Squadron 9, Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton (CG 59) and Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Sterett (DDG 104). The USS Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John Paul Jones also operated with the group but remains in the 5th Fleet AOR.

The strike group made the lengthy deployment with no liberty port calls, a necessity in the COVID era. The Nimitz and Princeton pulled alongside a pier four times and the Sterett two times during the deployment, but only for pier-side logistics.

During the deployment, the Nimitz CSG conducted dual carrier operations twice with the USS Theodore Roosevelt CSG and thrice with the USS Ronald Reagan CSG. The Nimitz CSG also operated with ships of the Indian navy, Royal Australian Navy and Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Nimitz disembarked CVW-17 and began its return to its homeport at Naval Base Kitsap – Bremerton. CVW-17 includes Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 137, VFA 94, VFA 22, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 323, Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 139, Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 116, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 6, Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 73 and Fleet Logistics Support Squadron

Rebalanced Navy Can Push Back on Chinese Assertiveness, Analyst Says



U.S. Navy Airman Christopher Rodriguez signals to an MH-60S Sea Hawk to launch from the USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), on a deployment to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. The 7th Fleet routinely operates and interacts with 35 maritime nations while conducting missions to preserve and protect a free and open Indo-Pacific Region. One naval analyst says the Navy can more effectively counter Chinese rivalry in the area by designing its fleet more for competition than combat. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Erik Melgar
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy can more effectively counter the growing Chinese capabilities by rebalancing its fleet to one designed more for competition than for intense combat, a

naval analyst said.

“China and Russia are obviously pursuing an approach to achieving their objectives that is different than what we envisioned from the Soviet Union, which was more of an existential threat, that they were going to pursue armed aggression of a conventional kind against their neighbor,” said Bryan Clark, a former U.S. Navy submarine officer and a naval analyst at the Hudson Institute, speaking in a Feb. 24 webinar sponsored by the Center for Security Policy. “China and Russia are pretty much content to use this gray-zone approach to achieve their objectives over a longer period of time.

“That creates a challenge for the U.S. because we’ve tended to build militaries for World War III and not to fight this protracted series of low-intensity engagements that might ebb and flow in terms of how severe they become because we’ve built a set of high-end platforms and capabilities that are really designed for intense combat but are expensive to operate in peacetime during a competition phase,” Clark said.

Clark said he sees “the need to rebalance the military, in particular the Navy, to deal with competition more than conflict ... because that seems to be where China and Russia are really hanging their hats.”

The analyst pointed out that “even as the Chinese navy has grown, you can see that the way it has grown it is one that is designed more for competition. The Chinese navy is predominantly smaller platforms with smaller numbers of missiles. They’re designed to keep the pressure on their neighbors than maintain a presence in the region or around the world. They have a lot lower percentage of larger combatants than the U.S. does. So, I think we need to fundamentally rethink how we organize the military to deal with competition.”

Clark said that “for the [U.S.] Navy that gets us to this idea of rebalancing. How do we increase the number of ships so we can sustain presence overseas, keep up the pressure on our adversaries, not offer them opportunities to take advantage of their neighbors, and also to present them a set of options at various escalations?”

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and the U.S 7th Fleet have said they need this adaptability and optionality and want to build a strategy around that idea, Clark said. “If they have more optionality, they’ve got more choices at more rungs of the escalation ladder, they can push back on Chinese assertiveness and aggression.”

“The drives us toward a Navy that’s different from the one we have had, and in our Hudson study we show that you can even build that kind of Navy within the fiscal constraints of PB21 [President’s Budget 2021] plus inflation over the next 30 years. You can rebalance the Navy and build one that’s going to be effective in that competition phase even if it accepts a little risk in its ability to fight the high-end conflict.”

Clark said the Chinese fleet is “still oriented toward the near-seas defense mission, focused on missions like sea control with a relatively small number of missiles. “It’s not designed to go and project power overseas yet. That is something that is still an aspiration, even with the [Chinese] navy having improved in size and quality over the last decade or so.”

He said the U.S. Navy could try to improve its ability to push back on the perception of the Chinese that their near seas are secure by continuing to field capable small surface combatants – and large surface combatants to a lesser degree.

Clark asserts that such a pushback would distract the Chinese attention from developing power-projection platforms “like large aircraft carriers and amphibious assault ships that the

Chinese have just begun to field.”

The U.S. Navy’s shift to a larger fleet with more combatants that are smaller than their predecessors of smaller ships reflects this, he said.

Work Praises Navy League’s Maritime Policy Statement



Former Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work praised the policy positions of the 2021-2022 Maritime Policy Statement of the Navy League of the United States during a webinar on Feb. 24. U.S. Navy / Chief Mass Communication Specialist Mike DiMestico

ARLINGTON, Va. – Former Deputy Secretary of Defense and former Under Secretary of the Navy Robert O. Work praised the policy positions of the 2021-2022 Maritime Policy statement of the

Navy League of the United States (NLUS) during a webinar. He also noted aspects that the policy statement did not address.

The Maritime Policy statement is a document produced biennially by the Navy League to advocate for national support for a strong Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine.

The keynote speaker of a Feb. 24 webinar conducted by the Navy League and sponsored by Crowley Marine, Work gave four "big Bravo Zulus" (BZs) to the Navy League for focusing on policy.

Work's first BZ praised the Navy League from avoiding getting dragged into the ship numbers game. He ran through the various studies of naval force structure assessments that were conducted over five years and noted that the ship force level made law by Congress is the one the Navy League policy supports. That level is 355 ships.

"The Constitution says that Congress should provide and maintain a Navy, and unstated is that these naval forces need to preserve and protect the interests of the United States," Work said. "So, I'm very happy that the Navy League didn't jump into a big argument over the exact number of ships. They focused on policy, which is where they should have focused."

Work did note that the Navy League should have recommended "forthrightly" a position on whether unmanned ships are to be counted in the battle force or not, noting that "Congress is not fully convinced that we should do so. So, it's a policy question that is very, very important, and the Navy League's voice is very important, and by not saying anything I found that to be significant."

In his second BZ, Work said the Navy League's policy is the "closest thing we have to a description to what I'll call the National Fleet."

He noted that the focus on the counting rules of the Navy's

battle force often obscures the “tremendous maritime capabilities of the United States.”

Work said given the new presidential administration’s expansion of national security, such as countering pandemics, the force should count hospital ships. He also said the count might include unmanned ships and craft, coastal patrol ships, patrol boats, prepositioning ships, Coast Guard cutters, surge sealift ships, the Ready Reserve Force of the Maritime Administration, the ships of the Maritime Security Program, the Tanker Security Program ships, cable repair ships and the ships of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The third BZ praised the Maritime Policy Statement’s emphasis on sealift.

“We’ve known that our sealift fleet is going to need recapitalization in the 2020s, but we never do anything about it,” Work said. “It’s always ‘next year.’ Another study. We’ve gotten to the point where we’ve got to do something, or we’re not going to have any sealift, which for a power projection nation is a bad thing.”

Work’s fourth BZ is that the Maritime Policy comes out “in support of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea [UNCLOS]. It is a disgrace that the United States has not acceded to that convention. The Chinese practice ‘lawfare’ against us all the time. Yes, we do freedom-of-navigation missions, but we are not a signatory to the policy, which undercuts what we’re saying. I was very happy to see that the Navy League come out four-square in support of signing UNCLOS.”

Work said he was disappointed that the key enabler of the National Fleet, the nation’s shipbuilding capacity in the industrial base, was not addressed in the policy statement. He said that, as a minimum, he would have expected the Navy League to come out in support of the Navy’s Shipyard

Infrastructure Optimization Plan.

He said given the looming maritime competition with China, it is more important to invest more in the shipyard industrial base “right now” than in increasing the number of ships.

“We simply have to have more submarine building capacity [and] more shipbuilding capacity,” he said. We have to be able to repair ships, more repair yards, more graving docks. This is an important part of a global navy.

Naval analysts Bryan McGrath and Bryan Clark, both of the Hudson Institute, praised the Maritime Policy statement.

McGrath emphasized that the nation needs more maritime power. He also questioned the Marine Corps plan to reduce its force by 12,000 Marines. He said the Navy League should “support what the Navy needs,” not just support the Navy’s budget as submitted, which is a consensus document.

Clark praised the policy statement’s emphasis on sealift, tankers and the other often neglected aspects of the National Fleet. He also said maritime air power needs to be re-examined, given the changing environment of great power competition.

The Navy League of the United States’ Maritime Policy statement can be found here:

<https://www.navyleague.org/programs/legislative-affairs/>.

Navy Begins Retirement of

Cyclone-Class Patrol Ships Without Replacement



Sailors conduct a decommissioning ceremony aboard the Cyclone-class patrol ship USS Shamal (PC 13) at Naval Station Mayport, Florida. Shamal is one of three Cyclone-class patrol ships being decommissioned at Naval Station Mayport. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Austin G. Collins
ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy held ceremonies this week to mark the decommissioning of three Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships this week, beginning the retirement of the class which has no direct replacement.

The three decommissioning ceremonies held over three days – Feb. 16, 17, and 18 – marked the imminent retirement of the Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships USS Shamal (PC 13), USS Zephyr (PC 8) and USS Tornado (PC 14), respectively, at Naval Station Mayport, Florida.

In recent years, the three PCs were used to train crews for the 10 PCs forward deployed to the Persian Gulf. They also participated in homeland security missions such as drug interdiction countering illegal immigration.

The Navy commissioned 14 Cyclone-class PCs between 1993 and 2000. They were built by Bollinger Shipyards and designed for coastal interdiction and support of special operations forces such as SEALs. They were built with a 15-year service life and even the newest already has operated for six years beyond that.

The lead ship, USS Cyclone, was transferred to the Philippine Navy after being briefly transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard, which did not operate the ship.

Several PCs operated in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and ultimately 10 were forward deployed to the U.S. Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf.

During 2004, five PCs were transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard to perform homeland security missions. All five were returned to the Navy by August 2008.

“The decision to decommission these three ships [Shamal, Zephyr and Tornado] stems from the fact that they have all exceeded their designed service life,” the Navy said in a Feb. 17 web article. “Based on the rising cost of modernization efforts, the Navy will receive a better return by decommissioning and freeing up funds to invest in other platforms.”

The PCs offer rare command-at-sea opportunity for lieutenants, one reason the ships will be missed. The ships will have no direct replacements, but their presence in the Persian Gulf eventually will be assumed by littoral combat ships.

“These three warships have served our Navy and our country well,” said Capt. Mike Meyer, commander, Naval Surface

Squadron Fourteen, in the Navy release. "Each of them has operated well past their designed service life, with their crews contributing demonstrably to meeting our national objectives."

The three PCs being retired are being transferred to the Navy's inactive ship facility in Philadelphia, where they will be decommissioned officially. The official decommissioning dates are Feb. 25, March 2 and March 4 for Shamal, Zephyr and Tornado, respectively. Tornado will be held for Foreign Military Sales; the other two will be scrapped.

Lawmakers Renew Push for Navy to Procure 3 Virginia Submarines Per Year



The Virginia-class attack submarine USS Vermont (SSN 792) makes its way up the Thames River and past New London, Connecticut on Feb. 3. Leaders of the House Armed Services Committee's Seapower subcommittee want the Navy to increase its procurement of Virginia-class boats to three per year. U.S. Navy / John Narewski

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy needs to increase procurement of its Virginia-class attack submarines (SSNs) to three per year in order to pace the potential threat of China and Russia, said the congressmen who lead the Seapower subcommittee in the House Armed Services Committee. The U.S. Navy also needs to push ahead with development of the follow-on to the Virginia class, they said.

Speaking Feb. 19 in a webinar sponsored by the Hudson Institute, Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Connecticut, chairman of the Seapower subcommittee, and Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Virginia, ranking member, were united in their reiteration of the need for more attack submarines and have renewed the push to include three in the 2022 defense budget, a level that nearly was achieved in the 2021 final budget.

Wittman noted a recent study that reinforced how “incredibly important getting to building three attack submarines per year will be for this nation going forward.”

Wittman said it was critical the Navy request a third SSN in the president’s 2022 budget proposal because “it is extraordinarily difficult to add things to the president’s budget.”

He recounted the effort to increase the procurement of a third SSN in the 2021 budget, which was ultimately unsuccessful when the proposed amendment was defeated in the House in a floor vote for the appropriations bill.

Wittman is optimistic the third submarine will be included in the 2022 budget, saying, “I think the glass is half full.”

Courtney also is optimistic, noting the recent statements by Defense Secretary Austin – a retired Army general – and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – an Army general – that the budget “pie” may need to be sliced more in favor of naval, aerial, and cyber capabilities.

The construction of the Columbia ballistic-missile submarine that began recently is pressuring the budget of the Navy and capacity of the submarine industrial base.

“Frankly, we’re going to need more facilities if we’re really going to get serious about going for three [SSNs] per year on a regular basis,” Courtney said.

The nation’s two submarine builders are General Dynamics Electric Boat in Courtney’s district and Huntington Ingalls Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia, Wittman’s home state.

Courtney said he also has concerns about the work force but is “bullish” on solving that challenge. He stressed the need to “keep performance of the shipyards at uppermost.”

Wittman supports the Navy’s plan to extend the service lives

of some Los Angeles-class SSNs as part of the formula to a submarine force large enough to meet the potential threat from near-peer competitors like China and Russia.

He also stressed the need for the Navy to focus on development of the next-generation of attack submarines to assure no gaps as the production of the Virginia-class SSNs ends.

Navy Details Revised 2021 Ship Decommissioning Schedule



USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6), due to be dismantled after its devastating fire in 2020. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Austin Haist

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has revised its ship decommissioning schedule for fiscal 2021, including the date for the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard, severely damaged by fire in 2020. The list also included the first two littoral combat ships.

In an Feb. 12 administrative message, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations announced the plans to decommission seven

ships from the fleet and remove from service one ship from the Military Sealift Command.

The ships to be retired and their 2021 retirement dates are listed below:

Ship Name	Projected Inactivation Date	Post Inactive Status
USS Zephyr (PC 8)	March 2	Dismantle
USS Shamal (PC 13)	Feb. 25	Dismantle
USS Tornado (PC 14)	March 4	Foreign Military Sales
USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43)	Apr. 16	Reserve
USS Freedom (LCS 1)	Sept. 30	Reserve
USS Independence (LCS 2)	July 31	Reserve
USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6)	April 15	Dismantle
USNS Sioux (T-ATF 171)	Sept. 30	Foreign Military Sale

The first two littoral combat ships are considered experimental and are of an earlier configuration than later production ships. They will be placed in a preserved status for re-activation if needed, as will the USS Fort McHenry.

The three Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships are the only ones of the class not based in the Persian Gulf.

The Navy also plans to retire 48 more ships during fiscal 2022-2026.