

# Navy Ship Days Delayed by Maintenance Reduced 80% in 2020



Damage Controlman 3rd Class Quiana Quezada, from St. Petersburg, Fla., assigned to Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey (DDG 97), disassembles the aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) concentrate pump during maintenance. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Andrew Langholf

ARLINGTON, Va. – The number of ship days delayed by maintenance has been reduced by 80% in fiscal 2020, a senior Navy engineering duty officer said, even with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting operations.

“The needle is really moving, and moving in a good direction,” said Rear Adm. Eric Ver Hage, commander, Regional Maintenance Center, speaking Sept. 15 in a webinar of the Virtual Fleet Maintenance & Modernization Symposium of the American Society of Naval Engineers. “Even with the challenges of COVID, we’ve achieved an 80% reduction in the days of maintenance delay in [fiscal] ‘20 as compared to [fiscal] ‘19.”

Ver Hage said, “It’s not just about on time, it’s also getting the required work complete. In our 2020 DDG [guided-missile destroyer] availabilities, we are tracking to complete 99% of all of our mandatory technical requirements, the things required to keep a ship operating to its full expected life cycle. That also is an improvement over last year.”

The admiral said that fiscal 2020 has been a super-busy year, with 50 CNO [chief of naval operations] availabilities and another 100 in planning; almost 700 emergent availabilities; 20,000 intermediate-level tasks; and 25,000 technical assists.

He said that also conducted were 157 ship readiness assessments, which help “our ships prepare for deployment and really importantly, on preparing for the next CNO avail.”

Ver Hage said the accomplishments were the result of “a great team effort,” while noting that “there has been steadily improving collaboration between industry and the government.”

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## Navy’s First New Berthing Barge Set for Delivery to Pacific Fleet



Sailors assigned to the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) walk across the ramp from Berthing and Messing Barge APL-65 to the pier at Naval Base San Diego in this 2010 photo. U.S. Navy / Joe Kane

ARLINGTON, Va. – The first of a new class of berthing barges is soon to be delivered to the U.S. Pacific Fleet, followed early next year by a delivery to the East Coast, a Navy official said.

The first one, APL 67, is nearing completion [and] is going to Pac Fleet,” said Rear Adm. William Greene, fleet maintenance officer, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, speaking Sept. 15 in a webinar of the Virtual Fleet Maintenance & Modernization Symposium of the American Society of Naval Engineers.

Greene said the second barge of the class, APL 68, will be delivered to the East Coast in February 2021. The subsequent deliveries will alternate between the West and East Coasts.

He said the 27 legacy berthing barges on the East Coast “are

reaching the end of their service lives.”

Officially designated non-self-propelled auxiliary personnel lighters (small) (APL(S)), the barges provide living space and berthing for the crew – particularly the duty section – of a ship that is going through extensive maintenance. Often the maintenance on a ship requires that berthing, climate control, food service, and water supply, and other services be shut down during renovation.

The new APL(S)-67-class barges will have a length of 269 feet, a beam of 69 feet, and a draft of seven feet. They will have berthing for 74 officers and 537 enlisted personnel. The messing facilities will be able to accommodate 56 officers and 228 enlisted personnel at a time. The barges also feature washrooms, classrooms, lounges, laundry facilities, offices, a barber shop, a fitness center and a medical facility.

The barges are not self-propelled but can be towed to the port or harbor area where the maintenance is to be performed.

VT Halter Marine was awarded a \$78 million Navy contract in September 2018 for two berthing barges with options for four more which, if exercised, would raise the contract value to \$244 million.

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## **Navy’s Future Carrier Air Wing Configuration Coming into Focus**



Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) returns

to its homeport in San Diego in this 2018 photograph. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Reymundo A. Villegas III

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has laid out the planned configuration of its carrier air wings of the future in a presentation to a convention of active and retired naval aviation personnel.

Speaking Sept. 11 at the Virtual Hook convention webinar of the Tailhook Association, Rear Adm. Gregory N. Harris, director of Air Warfare in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, addressed the future and specified to some degree the numbers and types of aircraft in the future air wing envisioned by the end of the 2020s.

As illustrated in a PowerPoint slide, the future wing would still include 44 strike fighters as it does now, but the mix of Block 4 F-35C Lightning II fighters and Block III F/A-18E/F Super Hornet fighters changes from 10 and 34, respectively, to 16 and 28. The strike fighters would equip one 16-aircraft F-35C squadron and three F/A-18E/F squadrons totalling 28 Super Hornets.

The other aircraft in the wing would include five-to-seven EA-18G Growler electronic combat aircraft, five E-2D Advanced Hawkeye command-and-control aircraft, six-to-ten MH-60 Seahawk helicopters, three CMV-22B Osprey carrier-onboard delivery aircraft, and five-to-nine MQ-25 Stingray aerial tanker unmanned aircraft.

Next year, USS Carl Vinson will deploy, taking a 10-aircraft F-35C squadron (Strike Fighter Squadron 147) on the aircraft's first carrier deployment. The ship also will carry two 10-aircraft F/A-18E squadrons and one 14-aircraft F/A-18F squadron, according to a source.

The deployment also will mark the first for the CMV-22B.

The second carrier deployment of the F-35C is scheduled in

# Marines to Operate Armed Reaper UAS in 'Coming Months'



An MQ-9 Reaper taxis on the flightline prior to take off on Ali Al Salem Air Base, Kuwait, June 10, 2020. U.S. Air Force / Senior Airman Kevin Tanenbaum

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps plans to deploy armed MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles in the “coming months,” the Navy’s program executive officer for Unmanned and Strike Weapons (PEO-UMW) said.

“The MQ-9 Reaper provides increased lethality to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force by providing persistent ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] and strike capability which the Marine Corps has not previously possessed in an unmanned system,” said Rear Adm. Brian Corey, program executive officer – Unmanned and Strike Weapons, speaking Sept. 9 at the Unmanned Systems Defense, Protection, Security virtual conference sponsored by the Association of Unmanned Vehicle Systems International.

The MQ-9 Reaper is a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle used for surveillance and strike operations. The Reaper is a battle-proven development of the RQ-1 Predator, upgraded for longer endurance, a heavier payload, and the ability to launch heavier precision munitions in a benign aerial environment.

“Last year, in response to an Urgent Needs Statement from the

U.S. Marine Corps, we helped them acquire an MQ-9 Reaper and operated it outside the continental United States in support of forces forward for persistent ISR,” Corey said. “We’ve recently transitioned to add a persistent strike capability which the Marines will operate in the coming months which will give them a capability that they have not had from unmanned systems.”

The Naval Air Systems Command ordered the two Reapers from General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI), of Poway, California, with a \$26.9 million firm-fixed-price contract, according to the June 22 Defense Department announcement. The contract also provides for one dual-control mobile ground-control station, one modular data center and one mobile ground-control station

The Marine Corps selected the Reaper in 2018 to fill an urgent needs request for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) in support of forward operations in Southwest Asia. GA-ASI has provided ISR services since September 2018 through contractor-owned/contractor-operated (COCO) Reapers and their teams to support Marine Corp forces in Afghanistan. Marine UAV squadrons (VMUs) have been learning to operate the Reaper in preparation for the Corps’ procurement of government-owned/government operated MQ-9s. On March 20, 2020, a Marine crew of VMU-1 controlled a COCO Reaper for the first time on an operational mission in support of forward-deployed ground forces.

Corey said the operation of the MQ-9 will help the Marine Corps learn how to operate a Group 5 UAS and inform its future MUX program.

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# Navy Asking Industry for Ideas to Meet Increased Range for UAVs



Rear Adm. Brian Corey, right, shown here during a tour in Point Mugu, California, in 2015. U.S. Navy / Kimberly Brown  
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s acquisition official for unmanned aerial systems said he is looking for ideas to meet a new requirement that has come down from regional combatant commanders (COCOMs).

“Now we have a new demand coming from the COCOM for increased range,” said Rear Adm. Brian Corey, program executive officer – Unmanned and Strike Weapons, speaking Sept. 9 at the Unmanned Systems Defense, Protection, Security virtual conference sponsored by the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International.

“There’s currently no product line that industry has designed that meets our requirements,” Corey said. “This is where we need industry’s innovative thinking to help us deliver this increased capability in the future and to do it quickly.”

Corey gave no additional details, but range has become a more precious characteristic in an era of great power competition, when standoff at greater ranges has become more crucial for forces in view of more sophisticated Chinese, Russian and Iranian weaponry.

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# Navy Looking at Upgrades to RQ-21 UAS



U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dominick Rollan and Cpl. Jose Reyes, both with Air Combat Element, Marine Rotational Force – Darwin, place the RQ-21A Blackjack on the launcher in preparation for its first flight in Australia at Bradshaw Field Training Area, Northern Territory, Aug. 8, 2020. The RQ-21 provides the Marine Corps a rapidly deployable surveillance asset able to operate in austere forward environments. U.S. Marine Corps / Cpl. Harrison Rakhshani

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy is planning a series of upgrades to the Boeing Insitu-built RQ-21A Blackjack unmanned aerial system, an acquisition official said.

“We’re continuing to look at upgrades for the system,” said Rear Adm. Brian Corey, program executive officer – Unmanned and Strike Weapons, speaking Sept. 9 at the Unmanned Systems Defense, Protection, Security virtual conference sponsored by the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International. “Some of our future initiatives include beyond-line-of-sight capability; a vertical-takeoff-and-landing kit; a bandwidth-efficient common data link, and a portable ground-control station.”

The Blackjack, built by Boeing’s Insitu, is a twin-boom, single-engine, small tactical unmanned aerial vehicle that carries modular payloads mostly for surveillance. It is pneumatically launched and is recovered using a skyhook arrestment system. A single Blackjack system includes five UAVs, two ground control stations, various payloads and a set of launch and recovery systems.

The fielding of the RQ-21A Blackjack unmanned aerial system achieved full operational capability in 2019. All 21 systems for the Marine Corps and 10 for the Navy have been delivered



to fleet and training units.

The Blackjack now equips four Marine UAV squadrons plus a fleet replacement detachment. The Marine Corps deploys the Blackjack with its Marine expeditionary units onboard amphibious warfare ships. The 10 systems for the Navy have been delivered to Navy Special Warfare Command and made two deployments in 2019.

“The RQ-21 has flown over 14,000 hours and has seen some of the highest readiness rates in all of naval aviation,” Corey said.

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## **U.S. Pacific Fleet to Conduct Unmanned Fleet Battle Problem in 2021 to ‘Drive Lethality’**



Sailors assigned to Coastal Riverine Squadron 3 and the expeditionary mine countermeasure company of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 5 retrieve a MK 18 Mod 2 unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) during a transit through the Northern Mariana Islands. The Navy is planning a Fleet Battle Problem that will include unmanned systems. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cole C. Pielop

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy’s U.S. Pacific Fleet is planning a Fleet Battle Problem next year that will feature unmanned systems in air, surface, and undersea domains, a Navy admiral announced, noting that “an unmanned Fleet Battle Problem is a pretty new concept.”

“We’re going to issue a PlanOrd [Planning Order] next week that we’re going to order an unmanned fleet battle problem,”

said Rear Adm. Robert Gaucher, director, Maritime Headquarters, U.S. Pacific Fleet, speaking Sept. 8 at the Defense, Protection, Security virtual conference sponsored by the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International.

Gaucher explained that Fleet Battle Problems are run “to get after one of these key operational problems. We’re going to do two for early 2021 to be able to run a Fleet Battle Problem centered on unmanned. It will be on the sea, above the sea and under the sea ... as we get to demonstrating how we can align to the [Indo-Pacific Command] directives to use experimentation to drive lethality.”

The admiral said “we haven’t worked out all the details. I know there will be a command-and-control aspect to it as we build and figure out what the best command-and-control is, working with [Chief of Naval Research Rear Adm.] Lorin Selby and seeing what his options are for some of the payloads and sensors that we can bring in, as well as demonstrating some autonomy in an actual fleet problem, run by either the shore and, at points, ships at sea as we try to press the advantage against our adversaries.”

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## Navy Orders H-1 Helicopters for the Czech Republic



U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Kaden Monnett, a firepower control team leader with 1st Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (ANGLICO), I Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group, provides security for Marines fast-roping out of a UH-1Y Venom at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, Aug. 5, 2020. U.S. Marine Corps / Lance Cpl. Ian M. Simmons

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has placed an order for two versions of the H-1 helicopter from Bell Textron for the Czech Republic, the Defense Department said in a Sept. 4 release.

The Naval Air Systems Command awarded Bell Textron a \$272 million fixed-price-incentive-firm-target contract for the production and delivery of eight UH-1Y Venom and four AH-1Z Viper helicopters for the government of the Czech Republic under the Foreign Military Sales Program.

The UH-1Y and AH-1Z both are front-line helicopters used by the Marine Corps. The production of 160 UH-1Ys for the Corps was completed in 2018, while production of 189 AH-1Zs continues. Pakistan also has received 12 AH-1Zs and Bahrain has been approved for 12 AH-1Zs.

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## **Navy to Increase Berthing on Future Expeditionary Base Ships**



The Expeditionary Sea Base USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) arrives at the Marathi NATO Pier Facility in Souda Bay, Greece, August 18, 2020. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kelly M. Agee

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy is increasing the berthing on its fourth and fifth expeditionary sea base ships (ESBs) to meet the increasing operational demand this class of ships has experienced since it first deployed.

The Navy’s supervisor of Shipbuilding, Bath, Detachment San Diego, San Diego, California, awarded National Steel and

Shipbuilding Co., San Diego, California, a \$35.6 million fixed-price-incentive modification to previously-awarded contract to incorporate a modification to the ships' forward house Habitability Modification in support of Expeditionary Sea Base (ESB) 6 and ESB 7, the Defense Department said in a Sept. 4 announcement.

"This Engineering Change Proposal is applicable to ESB 6 and ESB 7 to modify the existing ESB class berthing requirement to support an additional 100 military crewmembers and is deemed essential to Fleet operational requirements planned for this class of ships," the announcement said.

The Navy has forward-deployed its first two ESBs. USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3) has been in the Persian Gulf and has supported mine countermeasures and special operations forces, among other roles. The USS Hershel "Woody" Williams (ESB 4) deployed this year to the Mediterranean Sea. The third ESB, Miguel Keith (ESB 5) has been delivered to the Navy.

Work is expected to be completed by January 2024.

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## Two Submarines Shift Homeport to Groton



200831-N-GR655-170 GROTON, Conn. (August 31, 2020) – The Los Angeles-class submarine USS Newport News (SSN 750) arrives at Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn. for a scheduled homeport shift August 31, 2020. Photo: U.S. Navy / Chief Petty Officer Joshua Karsten

ARLINGTON, Va. –Two U.S. Navy nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSNs) have arrived at the Naval Submarine Base New London in

Groton, Connecticut, this week in a change of homeports for both.

According to images on the Defense Department's DVIDS imagery website, the Los Angeles-class SSN USS Newport News arrived on Aug. 31, and the Virginia-class SSN USS Texas arrived on Sept.1.

The Newport News was commissioned in 1989. It was built as the last of the basic Los Angeles class which is not equipped with vertical launch tubes. It can launch torpedoes and Tomahawk cruise missiles from its four torpedo tubes.

The Texas is the second built of the Block I of the Virginia class. It can launch torpedoes and Tomahawk missiles from its four torpedo tubes and Tomahawks from its 12 vertical launch tubes. The Texas was commissioned in 2006 and was homeported in Groton and then Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, before its return to Groton.