

EA-6B Prowler Naval Electronic Attack Aircraft Set for Retirement



CHERRY POINT, N.C. (Feb. 28, 2019) Two U.S. Marine Corps EA-6B Prowlers assigned to Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (VMAQ) 2, fly off the coast of North Carolina, Feb 28, 2019.

ARLINGTON, Va. –The Northrop Grumman EA-6B Prowler electronic attack aircraft will be retired from naval service on March 8 in ceremonies at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.

The last squadron to operate the Prowler, Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron Two (VMAQ-2) will say farewell to its last two –which reportedly are bound for museums–of six Prowlers as the squadron is deactivated.

VMAQ-2 returned to Cherry Point in November from its final deployment at a base in the Central Command area of responsibility.

VMAQ-2 is the last of four VMAQ squadrons to operate the Prowler. The other three squadrons –VMAQ-1, VMAQ-3 and VMAQ-4, two of which were formed from detachments of VMAQ-2 and one of which became a fleet replacement training squadron (VMAQT-1) until it was no longer needed –have been deactivated, one each year –over the past three years.

The VMAQ squadrons have deployed their EA-6Bs to numerous bases and aircraft carriers over their service, providing electronic jamming and attack in support of joint forces, including participation in combat operations in Libya, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

The Marine Corps is not fielding a direct replacement for the

EA-6B, instead relying on other platforms like the F-35B, organic electronic warfare systems such as the Intrepid Tiger pod and the Navy's electronic attack squadrons.

The Navy retired the EA-6B from operational squadron service in 2015. The Prowler entered combat during 1972 over North Vietnam and served in numerous conflicts and crises since, most notably in Operations El Dorado Canyon, Desert Storm, Southern Watch, Allied Force, Desert Fox, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. The service now flies the EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft from aircraft carriers and in expeditionary roles from land bases to support joint forces.

With Order, Trump Eases Path for Transition to Merchant Marine



ARLINGTON, Va. – President Trump has issued an executive order easing the path for active-duty military personnel and veterans who want to transition to service as merchant mariners, a move designed to open jobs to veterans while strengthening national security.

The executive order, issued March 4, stated its purpose as promoting “employment opportunities for United States military veterans while growing the cadre of trained ... mariners available to meet ... requirements for national and economic security.”

Many current and former sailors and Coast Guardsmen have extensive experience in ship-handling, navigation and

engineering applicable to service in the merchant marine, but in the past, they have faced bureaucratic obstacles and expenses in the thousands of dollars to make the transition.

“It is the policy of the United States to support practices and programs that ensure that members of the United States armed forces receive appropriate credit for their military training and experience, upon request, toward credentialing requirements as a merchant mariner,” the order stated. “It is further the policy of the United States to establish and maintain an effective merchant marine program by providing sufficient support and resources to active-duty and separating service members who pursue or possess merchant mariner credentials.”

The order continued: “A robust merchant marine is vital to the national and economic security of the United States. Credentialed United States merchant mariners support domestic and international trade, are critical for strategic defensive and offensive military sealift operations and bring added expertise to federal vessel operations. Unfortunately, the United States faces a shortage of qualified merchant mariners. As our strategic competitors expand their global footprint, the United States must retain its ability to project and sustain forces globally. This capability requires a sufficient corps of credentialed merchant mariners available to crew the necessary sealift fleet. Attracting additional trained and credentialed mariners, particularly from active-duty service members and military veterans, will support ... national security requirements and provide meaningful, well-paying jobs to ... veterans.”

Trump ordered the secretaries of defense and homeland security to, within a year, identify all military training and experience within the applicable service that may qualify for merchant mariner credentialing and submit a list of military training and experience to the Coast Guard National Maritime Center to determine whether such training and experience

counts for credentialing purposes.

The secretaries also are to provide for waiver of licensing fees for active-duty personnel and pay for Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) cards.

Navy Issues Draft RFP for New Guided-Missile Frigate

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has posted a draft Request for Proposals for its next warship design, the FFG(X) next-generation guided-missile frigate.

“The Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) intends to issue a solicitation under full and open competition in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2019 for the detail design and construction (DD&C) of guided-missile frigates under the FFG(X) program,” said the announcement posted on the FedBizOps website on March 2. “The solicitation will provide for DD&C of up to ten (10) FFG(X) ships, post-delivery availability support, engineering and class services, crew familiarization, training equipment and provisioned item orders.”

The Navy plans to purchase 20 new frigates, the first beginning in fiscal 2020, scheduled for delivery in 2023. The designs submitted by shipbuilders are required to be based on “an existing parent ship design that has been demonstrated at sea. ... FFG(X) ships must be constructed in a United States shipyard. Each offeror may submit only one proposal as a prime contractor. However, offerors may act as subcontractors under a prime contractor in one or more proposals.”

Five companies are expected to respond to the final RfP:

Austal USA, Fincantieri Marine, General Dynamics Bath Iron Works Huntington Ingalls Industries and Lockheed Martin, all of which were contracted to develop frigate designs. The competition is open to other builders as well. Unlike in the Littoral Combat Ship program, only one hull type will be selected.

The RfP is under the purview of the Program Executive Office – Unmanned and Small Combatants.

The FFG(X) will be equipped with the Raytheon-built Enterprise Air Search Radar; the Block II of the SLQ-32(V)6 SEWIP (Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Program), with a space reservation for SLQ-32(V)7 SEWIP Block III; the Cooperative Engagement Capability; the COMBATSS-21 combat system; the SQS-62 variable-depth sonar; the TB-37 multifunction towed array; the SQQ-89(V)15 antisubmarine warfare system; and data links 11, 16 and 22.

The new frigate's weapons will include a battery of over-the-horizon cruise missiles; a Mk110 57 mm gun, a 32-cell Mk41 Vertical Launching System – armed with the Standard Missile-2 surface-to-air missile and Block II of the Evolved SeaSparrow Missile, and, in the future, an ASROC-like anti-submarine missile – a Rolling Airframe Missile launcher, and, potentially in the future, a laser weapon.

The ship will be able to carry one MH-60R Seahawk helicopter, one MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned aerial vehicle, and two 7-meter rigid-hull inflatable boats.

Navy Orders Materials for 16 P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft



PHILIPPINE SEA (Feb. 4, 2019) A P-8A Poseidon assigned to the Golden Swordsmen of Patrol Squadron (VP) 47 performs a fly-by next to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Preble (DDG 88).

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded a \$429 million contract modification to Boeing for long-lead material and activities for 16 P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.

The contract modification, awarded by Naval Air Systems Command, will support the procurement of Lot 11 aircraft for six P-8As for the U.S. Navy, four for the Royal New Zealand Air Force and six for the Republic of Korea Navy.

New Zealand and South Korea are the latest nations to order the P-8A. Earlier international customers include Australia, the United Kingdom and Norway. India has acquired the P-8I version.

Last month, the Navy awarded Boeing a \$2.4 billion production contract for 19 P-8As, including 10 aircraft for the U.S. Navy fleet, all five ordered by Norway and the final four of nine P-8As for the United Kingdom, which will receive its first P-8A this year. Norway will receive its first aircraft in 2021.

All of the customers except the United Kingdom and India are replacing P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft with the P-8.

Navy Undersea Warfare Director: 'We Cannot Be Out- Escalated' in Nuclear Deterrence

WASHINGTON – The Navy's director for undersea warfare said the nation's nuclear submarine-based strategic deterrent is more important than ever and that the 12 planned Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) are needed to sustain a credible strategic triad for the future.

Speaking Feb. 2 at a discussion of the Columbia SSBN event at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank, Rear Adm. John W. Tammen pointed out that, with the new era of great power competition, "the need for deterrence has never been greater. That's based on the destructive [power] of modern-day weapons and the competitive landscape that we are seeing with [Russia's and China's attempts] to make their place in the global domain.

"We have to own the top rungs of the escalation ladder," Tammen said. "Our competitors must understand that we cannot be out-escalated in our part of the [strategic] triad and we must have the will and the credible capability to respond as necessary to their aggression and the cost that they would take would be greatly outweighed by any perceived gains."

Tammen said that all three legs of the U.S. strategic deterrent triad – bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles – are important, as are the command, control and communications systems associated with those weapons.

Tammen said the most survivable leg – the SSBN – "gives the president time to make a decision. He does not have to worry

that he is going to have an attack that will decimate his ability to respond.”

The requirement for at least 12 Columbia-class SSBNs is predicated on having 10 available for deterrence patrols while two are in deep maintenance. The 12 new subs, which replace 14 Ohio-class SSBNs, will have 42-year service lives because their reactors will never need refueling.

Tammen said that, with the Columbia class, the nation will get an ultra-quiet platform that will benefit from the success of the Virginia-class attack submarine program, that will leverage more than 50 years of SSBN experience, and that will deploy a weapon – the Trident D5LE missile – that has had 11 successful test launches.

Navy Admirals: SWO Proficiency Standards Toughened With New Checkpoints

WASHINGTON – The Navy’s efforts to improve training and the readiness of its surface warfare officers (SWOs) now include longer initial sea duty tours and a series of checkpoints that must be passed before an officer can command a ship.

The new standards result from the Navy’s reassessment of surface warfare training in the wake of the fatal collisions of the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers USS Fitzgerald and USS John McCain in mid-2017.

Testifying Feb. 26 before a joint hearing of the Readiness and the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittees of the House Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill, Adm. Christopher W. Grady, commander of U.S. Fleet Forces Command and U.S. Naval Forces Northern Command, and Adm. John C. Aquilino, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, also told Congress that ships will not deploy without having met the training standards.

Grady said the Navy is working to develop a culture where “we view standards as the absolute minimum.”

“If ships of the Pacific Fleet aren’t ready, they don’t get underway,” Aquilino said. Noting that manning challenges are being relieved by an additional 6,200 sailors earmarked fleetwide for ships, he said, “No [ship] deploys without the full complement of people that they will have.”

Aquilino, who is briefed on the status of his ships three times per week and talks to his commanders weekly, said that since he took command of the Pacific Fleet, he has terminated the deployments of two ships that were not ready. He also said he has granted no waivers.

“We adhere to those [standards] rigorously,” he said.

Grady said that commanding officers are required to submit letters to their type commander 90 days after assuming command on the readiness of their ships.

He said SWO training has lengthened, from 14 weeks to 23 weeks, with much more time in simulators. A few years ago, SWO school was only four weeks long and then was shut down altogether for a few years while officers learned via compact discs (“SWOs in a Box”).

“The total duration at sea for a young division officer is now going to be four years,” he said.

“We have recognized that it is all about the appropriate

experience,” Grady said.

Ten milestone checkpoints in a career have been established to track the progress of a SWO from ensign to captain toward command of a ship. Three of these checkpoints are go/no-go decision points.

“If you fail one of those three checkpoints, we’re not going to let you command a ship,” Grady said.

“This is the culture of excellence that we’re [inculcating] and, to this point, 5 percent of those folks have been asked to leave the command pipeline [because] they were not ready.”

Aquilino said he was impressed with the effectiveness of the simulators for the littoral combat ships.

“That model is going to be transitioned into the destroyer [force] as well,” he said. “The way we train is getting better. That will allow us to more quickly get those up to speed who haven’t had it.”

The fleets also are focusing on the training of enlisted operations specialists and quartermasters – the two ratings most involved in the navigation of a ship.

Grady also said “the complexity of a modern warship” demands that the Navy maintain its generalist approach that SWOs be both operations and engineering officers, unlike the Royal Navy, which splits SWOs into separate operations and engineering tracks.

Grady cited the example of the Ticonderoga-class cruiser USS Princeton that struck a mine during the Persian Gulf War.

“The two officers that were on watch and responded to that were the weapons officer and the engineering officer, both of whom so well understood the complexity of the integration of the combat systems and the engineering plant [and] how to maneuver the ship that they were able to keep fighting for 72

hours by pointing the deckhouse up-threat into Iraq,” he said. “That’s why you need officers who are both engineers and topside ship drivers.”

Navy Requests Information for Unmanned Maritime Autonomy Architecture

Navy Requests Information for Unmanned Maritime Autonomy Architecture

By RICHARD R BURGESS, Senior Editor

WASHINGTON – The Navy has issued a Request for Information (RFI) from industry concerning unmanned autonomous maritime systems standardization to lead to more commonality in systems architecture.

The RFI, released on Feb. 15 by the Program Executive Office-Unmanned Maritime Systems and Small Combatants, is for Unmanned Maritime Autonomy Architecture (UMAA) for operation of unmanned undersea vehicles (UUVs) and unmanned surface vehicles (USVs).

“The intent of UMAA is to provide overarching standards that various UUVs and USVs can be built to in order to avoid creating multiple conflicting systems in the future,” an official said.

The RFI, posted on the FedBizOps website, invites government organizations and industry “to participate in the development of the Unmanned Maritime Autonomy Architecture (UMAA). The UMAA is being established to enable autonomy commonality and

reduce acquisition costs across both surface and undersea unmanned vehicles.”

The RFI said that in 2018 “the Unmanned Maritime Program Office (PMS 406) chartered a cross-organizational team to develop the Unmanned Maritime Autonomy Architecture with the goal of standardizing autonomy interfaces across its growing portfolio of unmanned vehicles. Earlier this year, the team published the UMAA Architecture Design Description providing the initial framework for both service and interface definition. Additional design guidance will be provided through a series of Interface Control Documents (ICDs) in the areas below.

- Situational Awareness,
- Sensor and Effector Management,
- Processing Management,
- Communications Management,
- Vehicle Maneuver Management,
- Vehicle Engineering Management,
- Vehicle Computing Management,
- Support Operations”

An initial industry day will be held on March 4.

Navy Awards Orca XLUUV

Contract to Boeing

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has selected Boeing to build the Orca extra-large unmanned underwater vehicle (XLUUV).

With a \$43 million contract modification, the Naval Sea Systems Command ordered four Orcas and associated support elements, a Feb. 13 Defense Department contract announcement said.

The Orca – named for the similar-size marine mammal – is the largest unmanned underwater vehicle currently planned for the Navy’s operational use. It will not be submarine-launched but autonomously launched from the shore and independently deployed.

The open-architecture, reconfigurable Orca XLUUV “will be modular in construction with the core vehicle providing guidance and control, navigation, autonomy, situational awareness, core communications, power distribution, energy and power, propulsion and maneuvering, and mission sensors,” the announcement said. “The Orca XLUUV will have well-defined interfaces for the potential of implementing cost-effective upgrades in future increments to leverage advances in technology and respond to threat changes.”

The XLUUV will be equipped with a modular payload bay with interfaces for future payloads.

The Boeing design is based on the 51-foot-long Echo Voyager, a large autonomous UUV developed by the company as a capabilities demonstrator.

The Orca program is managed by the Program Executive Office – Unmanned and Small Combatants.

U.K. Royal Navy to Establish Permanent Squadron in Middle East; QE to Deploy with U.S. F-35s

ARLINGTON, Va. – The United Kingdom plans to establish a permanent naval presence in the Middle East, putting more ships “East of Suez” and broadening the influence of the Royal Navy. The Royal Navy’s new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, will deploy to the region with an air wing that will include U.K and U.S. F-35 strike fighters. The United Kingdom also plans to develop a class of Littoral Strike Ships.

In a Feb. 11 speech, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson, addressing the challenges of great power competition and ideological enemies such as al Qaeda, outlined measures the United Kingdom to build up its overseas presence and work with allies and partners, including the NATO alliance.

“In an era of ‘Great Power’ competition we cannot be satisfied simply protecting our own backyard,” Williamson said. “The U.K. is a global power with truly global interests. A nation with the fifth biggest economy on the planet. A nation with the world’s fifth biggest Defence budget and the second largest Defence exporter. And since the new Global Great Game will be played on a global playing field, we must be prepared to compete for our interests and our values far, far from home.”

Williamson said he does “not underestimate the challenges that this approach brings. But we do start from a position of

strength. Our people are already acting around the world from the North Sea to the South Pacific to protect our interests, and we already benefit from strong international partnerships. But we cannot take such relationships for granted. Our global presence must be persistent...not fitful. Patient...not fickle."

He said that, "From this spring, [Type 23 destroyer] HMS Montrose, along with five other naval vessels, will be permanently based in the [Persian] Gulf using innovative crewing and support methods to keep the ship available for more of the time.

"Today, we also go further," he said. "And I can announce the first operational mission of the HMS Queen Elizabeth will include the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Pacific region, making Global Britain a reality. Significantly, British and American F-35s will be embedded in the carrier's air wing. Enhancing the reach and lethality of our forces and reinforcing the fact that the United States remains our very closest of partners. We share the same vision of the world. A world shaped by individual liberty, the rule of law and, of course, the tolerance of others. We have the unique ability to integrate with US forces across a broad spectrum of areas. And, we are more determined than ever to keep working together.

"We will also be using our string of global support facilities and military bases more strategically...to consistently project power both hard and soft," he said. "The Duqm

port facilities in Oman are large enough to be able to support our aircraft carriers. The Al Minhad and Al Udeid Air Bases, in the Emirates and Qatar respectively, provide strategically important capabilities. In Bahrain, our naval base and our long-standing Maritime Command make a major contribution to our activities in the region but also beyond. Further afield we already benefit from facilities in Belize, in Brunei, in Singapore as well as our bases in Cyprus, Gibraltar and

Ascension Island.

“[The Royal Navy] is exerting British influence through greater forward presence,” he said. “I want to capitalize on that. Investing now to develop a new Littoral Strike Ship concept. And, if successful, we will look to dramatically accelerate their delivery. These globally deployable, multi-role vessels would be able to conduct a wide range of operations, from crisis support to war-fighting. They would support our Future Commando Force: our world-renowned Royal Marines – they’ll be forward deployed, at exceptionally high readiness, and able to respond at a moment’s notice bringing the fight from sea to land.

Williamson said his vision is for the Littoral Strike Ships to form “part of two Littoral Strike Groups complete with escorts, support vessels and helicopters. One would be based East of Suez in the Indo-Pacific and one based West of Suez in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Baltic. And, if we ever need them to, our two Littoral Strike Ships, our two aircraft carriers, our two amphibious assault ships Albion and Bulwark, and our three Bay-class landing ships can come together in one amphibious task force. This will give us sovereign, lethal, amphibious force. This will be one of the largest and best such forces anywhere in the world.

“I expect the Royal Navy to deploy flexibly, to be capable of being in many places at once and to ensure we have an efficient fleet of warfighting ships, looking at how they can grow both their mass and their lethality,” he said.

Williamson’s entire speech can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-in-global-britain>

SECNAV Spencer: Navy Problem Solvers 'Need to Look Outside the Wire'

WASHINGTON – Naval officials need to seek solutions from industry and academia to meet the technological and acquisition challenges of the future, the civilian head of the Navy and Marine Corps said.

“One of the drums that I beat to everybody up and down the ladder is, if you are acquiring things, if you are looking for solutions to your problem, look outside the wire,” said Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer, speaking Feb. 8 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a Washington think tank. “Because I will almost guarantee you: some organization out there, whether large corporate, middle corporate, or small company has probably gone through the same problem you are or have a solution or something that looks like your solution.

“This goes to ‘should cost’ before you find out what it does cost,” he said. “Frame your argument, frame your data which you can glean from the outside. One thing that we have learned in this exercise is that corporate America and academic America will bend over backwards to help the services of this country.”

Spencer said that the Department of the Navy and the defense industry are partners in solution-providing and that the department needs to be a “responsible client” of the defense industry.

“I have to be clear on what I need and what I can provide,” he said, speaking of the need to set clear and firm requirements in an acquisition program.

With the additional resources for readiness provided by Congress in the fiscal 2017 to 2019, “the foundation for readiness has been set,” Spencer said. “Everyone understands

they have the resources. This is all being done now to the mantra of urgency.

"We have money, we have plans, we cannot buy time, and that is the biggest stressing point we have right now," he said.

Spencer said the department is "reviewing every single platform that we have as far as how we're going to go forward with modernization, what we're looking at to acquire, and what I call the Force 2.0, which are those weapons systems and concepts that we're developing."

Spencer was appearing at CSIS with his Army and Air Force counterparts, Secretary Mark Esper and Secretary Heather Wilson, respectively.