Navy Awards Contract to VT Halter for New Oceanographic Survey Ship

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded a contract to shipbuilder VT Halter Marine toward advance work for the eighth Pathfinder-class oceanographic survey ship (T-AGS).

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded to VT Halter Marine a "not-to-exceed $9 million undefinitized contract action for functional design engineering, procurement of long-lead time material, and limited advanced production to support the Oceanographic Survey Ship (T-AGS 67)," the Defense Department announced on Nov. 19.

VT Halter Marine, based in Pascagoula, Mississippi, has built seven Pathfinders, six of which were delivered between 1994 and 2001. One of these, USNS Sumner, was withdrawn from service in 2014. A seventh, USNS Maury, was delivered in 2016. It is 15 feet longer than the earlier Pathfinders and features a moon pool to facilitate operation of unmanned underwater vehicles.

The Pathfinder class is operated by the Military Sealift Command for the Naval Meteorology & Oceanography Command.

Naval Strike Missile System Planned for Installation on

LCS 27

ARLINGTON, Va. – Lockheed Martin is in the process of integrating the Over-the-Horizon (OTH) Weapon System on its Freedom-variant littoral combat ship (LCS) and has identified the ship to be built ready for the missile system.

The first Freedom LCS to be built ready to receive the Naval Strike Missile (NSM), the weapon of the OTH system, will be LCS 27, the future USS Nantucket, Joe DiPietro, vice president of Small Combatants and Ship Systems, said Nov. 15 in a teleconference with reporters from Annapolis, Maryland.

The NSM, developed by Norway's Kongsberg, is a ship- and ground-launched anti-ship cruise missile that will be integrated by Raytheon Missile Co. into the OTH system. It will give the LCS an OTH anti-ship capability as an initiative to improve the lethality of the Navy's warships.

"We're working on the design and integration of that," DiPietro said. "[The Navy] had us do space and weight on our previous hull that was awarded for the Naval Strike Missile and now we're working on the modernization package to be able to put that in to an in-service asset as well."

Rear Adm. Joseph P. Neagley, program executive officer, Unmanned and Small Combatants, told Seapower last month that the NSM will be installed on all LCSs, regardless of which mission package is installed.

DiPietro said Lockheed Martin also is working on a backfit of the NSM, but that the Navy will determine the schedule of ships to be fitted with the NSM.

DiPietro also said the company is working on the integration of the Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Program Block II Lite into the Freedom variant.

“We actually already have put that test asset on LCS 1 Freedom and ran through the range and tested it with our COMBATSS21 configuration, being a derivative of Aegis,” he said.

Navy Orders F-35s Under Contract Modification

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded Lockheed Martin a $22.7 billion contract modification for 255 F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighters, the Defense Department said in a Nov. 14 release. Of the order, 42 aircraft are for the Navy and Marine Corps.

Naval Air Systems Command awarded the low-rate initial production contract modification for Lot 12 aircraft plus more added by Congress for fiscal 2018-2019.

The 255 Lightning IIs in this order include 36 F-35Bs for the U.S. Marine Corps and 16 F-35Cs for the U.S. Navy. The order includes 64 F-35As for the U.S. Air Force; 60 F-35As for Foreign Military Sales; and 71 F-35As and 18 F-35Bs for nations partnered in the F-35 program. Work under the contract is expected to be completed by March 2023.

The F-35’s production remains in low rate because it has not yet completed its operational test and evaluation.

The Marine Corps’ F-35B made its first operational shipboard deployments this year and on Sept. 27 Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211 conducted the Lightning II’s first combat missions, over Afghanistan in support of Operation Freedom Sentinel. The Navy’s first F-35C fleet squadron, Strike Fighter Squadron 147, has been formed and is training in its

new aircraft.

Navy Super Hornet Crashes in Philippine Sea; Crew Rescued

PHILIPPINE SEA – A Carrier Air Wing 5 (CVW-5) F/A-18F experienced a mechanical issue that resulted in the crew ejecting while conducting routine operations in the Philippine Sea Nov. 12, Task Force 70 public affairs said in a release.

“The crew was immediately and safely recovered by USS Ronald Reagan search-and-rescue aircraft and brought back to the ship for evaluation by medical personnel, the release said. “Both aviators are in good condition.”

The F/A-18F was flown by Strike Fighter Squadron 102, one of four Super Hornet squadrons assigned to Carrier Air Wing Five.

Two other CVW-5 aircraft have been lost in mishaps over the past year. On Nov. 22, 2018, a C-2A Greyhound assigned to Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 30 Detachment Five crashed into the Philippine Sea while en route to Ronald Reagan, killing three Sailors. On Oct. 19, an MH-60R Seahawk assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 77 crashed on the flight deck of the carrier, injuring 12 persons.

CVW-5 is embarked onboard Ronald Reagan and is currently underway in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations in support of security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Ronald Reagan has resumed normal operations and the crash is under investigation.

Navy Submarine Force Boss: All Submarines to Get 3D Printers

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy is moving to equip all of its submarines with additive manufacturing capability, also known as 3D printing, as part of an initiative to increase at-sea repair capability for the submarine force.

“[We’re] actively experimenting with additive manufacturing and working expediently to provide this capability to all my ships,” Vice Adm. Chas Richard, commander, Submarine Forces, said Nov. 7 at the Naval Submarine League’s symposium. “All my boats will get 3D printers in the near term.”

Richard said that the crew of the attack submarine USS Virginia “went and got their own 3D printer and, using that, built themselves apart at sea to help keep their boat on deployment. It is that type of problem-solving that happens daily across the force.”

Navy: Torpedo Tube-Launched Version of Razorback UUV

Planned

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy is on track to deliver an operational unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) for routine submarine deployment but also plans to develop the capability to launch it from a submarine's torpedo tubes.

The Razorback is a submarine-launched version of the Hydroid-built Littoral Battlespace Sensing Autonomous Underwater Vehicle, a version of the REMUS 600 UUV that entered full-rate production for the Navy in 2013. Details of the Razorback's payloads and capabilities are classified, but it is planned for launch and recovery from a Dry Deck Shelter, a compartment than can be carried on top of the hull of certain submarines.

"We're currently fielding those vehicles for integration with the Dry Deck Shelter and we have plans to develop a torpedo tube-launched version of that in the near future," said Capt. Peter Small, the Navy's program manager for UUVs and unmanned surface vehicles, Nov. 7 at the Naval Submarine League's symposium.

Navy Submarine Warfare Director: Navy to Keep Columbia SSBN Line 'Hot' After 12th Boat

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy plans to keep the production line of the Columbia-class nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) ready for new submarine production, the Navy's director

for submarine warfare said.

“What we are going to do is we’re going to keep the Columbia line hot,” Rear Adm. John Tammen, said Nov. 8 at the Naval Submarine League’s annual symposium. “That gives us the option, if STRATCOM [U.S. Strategic Command] says we need more than 12, well then we can produce more than 12.”

Keeping the line open also may aid in a smoother transition to the Navy’s next submarines, possibly large mother ships for unmanned underwater vehicles and other types mission systems.

“If STRATCOM doesn’t need more than 12, then we’re looking at what we call the Large-Volume Host Platform, where we’ll take that center section – we haven’t nailed down the concept – but there will be the ability to host vehicles on board inside that center section,” Tammen said.

Also speaking at the symposium, Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director of Strategic Systems Programs, noted that the Defense Department’s Nuclear Posture Review calls for a minimum of 12 Columbia-class SSBNs, not a hard limitation of 12 boats.

The design of the lead boat of the new class, Columbia, is 83 percent complete. Construction is scheduled to begin next year. The boat is scheduled for its first patrol in 2031.

Next Sub-Launched Ballistic Missile ‘Won’t Be Completely New’

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy’s next-generation submarine-launched missile (SLBM) will not be a completely new design but will

incorporate some of the current Trident D5 Life-Extension (D5LE) version systems.

The follow-on missile is currently known as the Trident D5LE2, according to Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director of Strategic Systems Programs (SSP).

“What Ohio [-class SSBN] has today [D5LE] is what Columbia will initially have until we get the Life-Extension 2,” Wolfe said Nov. 8 at the Naval Submarine League’s annual symposium.

To lower technical and schedule risk in the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine program, the Navy decided to arm the boats initially with the existing Trident D5LE missile rather than develop an entirely new missile concurrent with the development of the submarine. At some point in the service life of the Columbia class, the boats will receive the D5LE2.

Wolfe said the SSP will begin trade studies in 2020 to “define an SLBM that can deploy throughout the life of Columbia,” which is slated to serve to 2084. The studies will determine which D5LE components can be continued in the next missile and which will need to be modernized or replaced for D5LE2.

The D5LE2 “won’t look like the D5 that we’ve got today, it won’t be completely new, it will be somewhere in the middle,” he said.

“If you look at the decisions that we made on Columbia, as we went down to 16 [launch] tubes [from 24 on the Ohio class], part of that decision was made because there was an assumption that the reliability of this weapon system way out in the 2070s and 2080s will be just as reliable and supportable as it is today with the current Trident,” he said.

Wolfe pointed out that the Trident missile inventory will decline to a point where new production will be needed. Part of the challenge is to sustain the industrial base to build, for example, rocket motors, so that the expertise is not lost

during procurement troughs and would not have to be reconstituted.

“Our challenge is that whatever we do next has, at a minimum, the reliability, accuracy and supportability that we’ve got today,” he said.

Marine Squadron to Return from EA-6B’s Last Deployment

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps’ last squadron flying the EA-6B Prowler electronic attack aircraft is scheduled to return home in early November, marking the last operational deployment for the aircraft.

Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron Two (VMAQ-2) is returning from its final deployment to its home base, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, from a base in the Central Command area of responsibility, the Marine Corps said in an Oct. 31 release.

VMAQ-2 is scheduled to be deactivated in March, 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 and the Navy's electronic attack squadrons.

The Navy retired its last EA-6B squadron in 2015. 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.

Navy Awards NASSCO Contract for Materials for Expeditionary Base Ship

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded a contract to NASSCO for long-lead materials and other support to build the fourth Lewis B. Puller-class expeditionary mobile base ship (T-ESB 6).

Naval Sea Systems Command awarded to NASSCO – a General Dynamics company – a $136.8 million contract "for the procurement of long lead time material, pre-production and engineering support for the Expeditionary Sea Base 6. This action allows the procurement of ship sets of the purchase specifications supporting integrated propulsion, main diesel generator engines, propeller and shafting, integrated bridge electronics, centrifugal pumps, fuel and lube oil purifiers and steering gear components," the Oct. 16 Defense Department contract announcement said.

The work is expected to be completed by May.

The Lewis B. Puller class T-ESB is a modification of the Montford Point class of expeditionary transfer dock ships, of which two were built. The T-ESBs are configured with a 52,000-square-foot flight deck, fuel and equipment storage, repair spaces, magazines, mission planning spaces and accommodations for up to 250 personnel. The ships are capable of supporting multiple missions including airborne mine countermeasures, counterpiracy operations, maritime security operations, humanitarian-aid and disaster-relief missions and U.S. Marine Corps crisis response. They also support MH-53 and MH-60 helicopters.

Two T-ESBs are in service: USS Lewis B. Puller and USNS Hershel “Woody” Williams. Under construction is T-ESB 5, USNS Miguel Keith.