Marine Special Task Force Deployed with Colombian Deputy Commander

ARLINGTON, Va. — A Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SP-MAGTF) returned from a five-month deployment to Latin America last month as the first to deploy with a deputy commander from a partner nation.

“We were the first SP-MAGTF to incorporate a partner-nation officer into our formation,” said Col. Michael H. Oppenheim, commanding officer of SP-MAGFT-Southern Command for the 2018 deployment, speaking Jan. 11 at the Potomac Institute. “He was a lieutenant in the Colombian Marine Corps, [recently] out of battalion command.”

The unnamed officer in the Personnel Exchange Program joined the SP-MAGTF at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for predeployment training and returned to Colombia last week.

“We were able to effectively incorporate him into the formation,” Oppenheim said, noting that the Colombian officer was very helpful in untangling bureaucratic and diplomatic situations that cropped up and smoothed the way.

“He was able to dovetail right into our efforts,” Oppenheim said.

The SP-MAGTF-Southern Command deployed to several Central American nations from June to December, operating mostly in small teams for Theater Security Cooperation, such as weapons training and humanitarian aid. The U.S. Marines and Sailors in the force consisted of 113 active-duty and 117 Reserve personnel, plus one U.S. Army officer and the Colombian officer. The force included four CH-53E heavy-lift helicopters and one KC-130 tanker/transport aircraft.

The deployment was timed for hurricane season to be available to provide disaster relief, but no hurricanes savaged the region. There was one volcano eruption in Guatemala that caused hundreds of casualties. A group of Marine engineers working with the SP-MAGTF was deployed to aid in the relief efforts.

This deployment also was the first of an SP-MAGTF-Southern Command to venture into South America, operating with the armed forces of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Colombia.

The Colombian officer "helped seal the deal for us in many cases," Oppenheim said.

"He has more combat experience than I have," Oppenheim said, noting the officer's long experience fighting guerrillas in Colombia's long counter-insurgency war in-country.

Oppenheim pointed out that deployments like the one recently concluded helped to build readiness as the Marines were "doing real-world things," and that the interaction with partner nations would yield immeasurable benefits in the future by building trust among the militaries and civil officials and providing material assistance in the form of humanitarian and disaster relief.

MCPON: Sailors Must Be 'Qualified, Astute Technicians'

WASHINGTON – The Navy needs to capture the best talents resident in its Sailors to meet the needs of a future fight,

the service's senior enlisted adviser said.

The Navy needs to "find ways to best capture that talent and set it up for success in the fleet," said Master Chief Petty of the Navy (MCPON) Russell L. Smith, speaking Jan. 10 along with Sgt. Major of the Marine Corps Ronald Green at an event sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Smith pointed out that the Navy needs recruits who are comfortable with high technology.

"The Navy is a STEM service," he said, referring to science, technology, engineering and math as the skills Sailors need to man the ships, aircraft, weapons, networks and other electronic systems used in the modern Navy. "We have to be qualified, astute technicians."

Smith said "bringing that [STEM] talent forward is one of our biggest lines of effort."

He also emphasized that sea-going skills such as damage control and firefighting remain just as important now as ever, noting that Sailors must "first meet the mission, then save their shipmates."

Smith noted that the Navy is in stiff competition with other military services and the other high-tech sectors of the U.S. economy for tech-savvy young adults. However, Smith said that the Navy's retention of Sailors is the highest it has ever been, upward of 70 percent, better even than after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Green said the Marine Corps, which recruits 30,000 people each year, continues to achieve its quotas, attributing that to the ethos of the Marine Corps that attracts people looking to be something special.

Green said that while the Marine Corps is adopting new

technology, the focus is “maximizing lethality and not compromising the standard.”

He said that the Corps’ focus is on the lethality and readiness of the individual Marine.

“The robot is not kicking in the door, the Marine is,” Green said.

Smith said that child care for Sailors’ families is becoming a conundrum for the Navy. Green seconded that, noting that 49 to 50 percent of today’s Marines are married, a situation much different from decades ago.

Navy to Establish Submarine Group in Norfolk

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has directed the establishment of a submarine group command in Norfolk, Virginia, later this year.

According to an internal Navy directive, commander, Submarine Group Two (COMSUBGRU TWO) will be established on Sept. 30 at Naval Station Norfolk.

“Due to designation of Commander, Submarine Forces, as Deputy for Joint Forces Maritime Component Commander, strategic establishment of COMSUBGRU TWO is necessary to better align flag officer responsibilities and to increase warfighter readiness for the Atlantic coast nuclear-powered general-purpose attack submarine (SSN) force,” the directive said.

The mission of the group will be, “To man, train and equip assigned forces to provide combat ready SSNs to Commander, Submarine Force Atlantic, for force generation to combatant

commanders; to serve as Commander Task, Force (CTF) 24, to Commander, Second Fleet, or as CTF-46 to Commander, Fourth Fleet; to be responsible for all SSN and guided-missile submarine operations and employment of anti-submarine warfare ready forces for the conduct of theater anti-submarine warfare; to ensure assigned personnel, staffs, and submarines achieve and maintain a level of training, personnel, and material readiness necessary to carry out their assigned missions," the directive said.

An earlier Submarine Group Two was based in Groton, Connecticut, from 1965 until Aug. 22, 2014.

Navy Orders Five Ospreys from Bell-Boeing

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has ordered five more V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft under a modification to a multiyear contract.

Naval Air Systems Command awarded to Bell Boeing a $367 modification for five Ospreys on Dec. 28, an addition to a $4.2 billion contract for 78 Ospreys awarded on June 28.

Under the new order, Bell Boeing will deliver three CMV-22B carrier-onboard-delivery aircraft for the Navy and two MV-22B assault transport aircraft for the Marine Corps by October 2023.

The Ospreys ordered in June include 39 CMV-22Bs for the Navy, 34 MV-22Bs for the Marine Corps, one CV-22B for the Air Force and four MV-22Bs for the government of Japan.

CNO: U.S. 2nd, 3rd Fleets to Become Expeditionary

ARLINGTON, Va. – Two of the Navy's U.S.-based numbered fleets will become expeditionary, backed up at home by their respective training carrier strike groups (CSGs), the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. John Richardson aid. The move is a reflection on the need to increase the agility of naval forces in a return of an era of peer competitors.

The initiative is one of the CNO's goals in an updated version, 2.0, of his document "A Design for Maritime Security.

"Commander, 2nd Fleet (C2F) and Commander, 3rd Fleet (C3F) will be expeditionary: they will have the capability to command and control their forces while deployed forward," the CNO said in the document.

U.S. 2nd Fleet, established in August to operate in the North Atlantic Ocean, is expected to reach full operational capability in 2019.

As a backstop for sustaining training of the fleet's units in their at-home cycles, the fleets' respective carrier strike group staffs in charge of fleet work-ups will be charged with building up deploying forces while the fleet staffs are deployed.

"In order to retain the capability for force generation while C2F and/or C3F are deployed, Carrier Strike Group (CSG)-4 and CSG-15 will develop the capability and capacity to generate forces, reporting directly to Commander, Fleet Forces Command, and Commander, Pacific Fleet, respectively," the document said.

CNO’s Revised ‘Design for Maintaining Maritime Security’ Pushes Columbia SSBN Schedule

ARLINGTON, Va. — The chief of naval operations (CNO) is pushing to accelerate the development of the Navy’s next-generation ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) so that it is ready to deploy “as quickly as possible.” He also is pushing the more rapid acquisition timeline of new ships, aircraft, weapons, and networks.

In the new “Version 2.0” of his “A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority” strategy document, Adm. John M. Richardson emphasized the Navy’s No. 1 acquisition priority, the Columbia-class SSBN, as necessary to sustain the nation’s nuclear strategic deterrent force.

Richardson stated his goal is to “be ready to deploy USS Columbia (SSBN 826) as quickly as possible — beating the current schedule — in order to preserve our ability to defeat the threat. Refresh and fortify the nuclear command and control system. Develop the nuclear capabilities directed in the Nuclear Posture Review.”

Construction of the first Columbia-class SSGN is scheduled to begin by 2021, with strategic certification expected in 2026, the first patrol in 2031 and complete replacement of the Ohio class by 2039. The tight schedule for the new submarine is dictated by the need for a seamless phase-out of the 14 Ohio-class SSBNs as they reach the end of their 42-year service lives and the nuclear deterrent patrols are assumed by the

Columbia class.

With the new era of peer competition in the maritime arena, Richardson also is calling for rapidly acquiring other key platforms and payloads, as listed in the document.

Ships:

■ Award the Future Frigate contract in 2020 to deliver as soon as possible (ASAP).

■ Award the Large Surface Combatant contract in 2023 to deliver ASAP.

■ Award the Large Unmanned Surface Vehicle contract in 2023 to deliver ASAP.

■ Award the Future Small Auxiliary contract in 2023 to deliver ASAP.

■ Award the Future Large Auxiliary contract in 2023 to deliver ASAP.

Underwater Unmanned Vehicles:

Contract for and field the family of Underwater Unmanned Vehicles (Orca, Snakehead, Razorback, Knifefish) ASAP, and no later than (NLT) 2025.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, Aircraft, Weapons:

■ Reach MQ-25 first flight in 2021 and initial operating capability ASAP.

■ Reach MQ-4C Triton initial operating capability in 2021.

■ By the end of 2019, identify requirements across the family of systems to replace the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G by 2030.

■ Develop and field an offensive hypersonic weapon by 2025.

■ Develop and field the family of laser weapons (low-power

lasers, high-power lasers, Surface Navy Laser Weapons System) beginning in 2019 and NLT 2025.

Networks:

Improve the performance of our current enterprise networks in 2019. Modernize these networks under the NGEN-R contract.

Coast Guard Commandant 'Guardedly Optimistic' for Icebreaker Funding in 2019

ARLINGTON, Va. — Funding for the Coast Guard's requirement for new icebreakers in fiscal 2019 is in peril but the Coast Guard remains confident that a conference between the House and Senate will allow the service to begin procurement.

"We're going to be guardedly optimistic," Adm. Karl Schultz, commandant of the Coast Guard, said Dec. 14 during the Navy League's Special Topic Breakfast at the Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City. "We're hoping to build out a fleet of six icebreakers [three polar security cutters and three medium icebreakers].

"We need one now," he said, pointing out the age — 42 years — of the Coast Guard's only operational heavy icebreaker, Polar Star, which recently began its Operation Deep Freeze journey to Antarctica.

President Donald J. Trump proposed funding of the first polar security cutter (PSC) — a name applied to the future heavy icebreaker by Schultz early in his tenure — in the 2019 Coast Guard budget, part of the budget of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The budget's passage has been delayed over

differences in the marked-up Senate version of the bill – which provides the funding–and the House version, which stripped funding Dec. 13 from its version of the bill.

The icebreaker is competing for funding desired by Trump for a more extensive southern border wall in the DHS budget.

Schultz, who has seven years of experience in legislative liaison with Congress, said "I'm going to stick by my guns that I'm guardedly optimistic" for a conference report from Congress that will fund the first PSC.

He pointed out that the first PSC would replace Polar Star, which is dedicated to annual Antarctic resupply missions. The deployment of a new icebreaker to the Arctic would have to await the commissioning of a second PSC.

Schultz plans for construction of the first PSC to begin in spring 2019. He estimates the cutter would be launched in six years and operational a year later.

Search Continues for Marines Missing After Air Collision

ARLINGTON, Va. – The search continues for five Marines whose KC-130 Hercules transport/refueling aircraft collided Dec. 6 with a Marine Corps F/A-18D Hornet strike fighter over the Pacific Ocean.

The two Marines in the F/A-18D apparently ejected; one was rescued in fair condition, the other was recovered and declared dead, III Marine Expeditionary Force said in a Dec. 6 release.

“The search-and-rescue operations continue for the remaining five U.S. Marines who were aboard the KC-130 Hercules and F/A-18 Hornet involved in a mishap about 200 miles off the coast of Japan around 2:00 a.m. Dec. 6,” the release said. “The aircraft were conducting routine training and aerial refueling was a part of the training; as to what was taking place when the mishap occurred, that is under investigation.”

Forces from the U.S. Navy and Japan are assisting in the search.

“U.S. 7th Fleet is supporting ongoing search-and-rescue efforts with a Navy P-8A maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft flying out of Kadena Air Force Base, along with assistance from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Japanese Coast Guard,” the release said.

The Marine Corps has not yet released the names and units of the seven personnel involved. Marine Aircraft Group 11, headquartered at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, includes one F/A-18D squadron, Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 242, and one KC-130J Super Hercules squadron, Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152.

The loss of the KC-130J would be the first J-model lost by the Marine Corps. The KC-130J entered service in 2004. More than 50 have been delivered to the Marine Corps.

Navy Must Be ‘Agile’ but ‘Sustainable’ in the Arctic

WASHINGTON – Sustainability is the key issue for U.S. naval operations in the Arctic, a Navy official said.

“The Navy has to be agile [in its Arctic operations],” Jeffrey Barker, a deputy branch head for Policy and Posture in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, said Dec. 4 at a forum, The Arctic and National Security, sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson Center, a Washington think tank. “But we’re not going to do anything unless it is sustainable.

“I see this as a balance of space, time, and force,” Barker said.

Barker said the Navy would respond to any combatant commander requirements to operate more often in the Arctic. He stressed that the Navy would work closely with the Coast Guard, Air Force and international partners to accomplish assigned missions in the region.

“We can’t do it all our ourselves,” he said.

Barker cited a recent Government Accountability Office report that said that, in his words, “what we are doing aligns with the National Security Strategy. We think we are positioned very, very well.”

Although the recent focus on increasing Arctic operations has been brought about by the changes in the ice coverage of the Arctic Ocean, the Navy has long been a regular operator in the region.

“Most of the missions we do [in the Arctic] we can accomplish with submarines,” he said. “The submarines are up there to deny bastions to the Russians.

First Heliborne AOEW Pod for Navy Expected in Late 2019

WASHINGTON – Lockheed Martin expects to produce the first engineering development model (EDM) of a heliborne electronic warfare pod by late 2019, a company official said.

Orders for materials for the ALQ-218 Advanced Offboard Electronic Warfare (AOEW) pods began last month, Joe Ottaviano, director of electronic warfare programs at Lockheed Martin Rotary and Mission Systems, told reporters Nov. 28 at the Association of Old Crows convention.

The AOEW pod is designed to be taken aloft by an MH-60R or MH-60S Seahawk helicopter and serve as an offboard electronic attack system to counter anti-ship cruise missiles. The helicopter provides power and mobility for the pod, but the pod's operation is independent of the helicopter crew and linked to the SLQ-32(V)6/7 shipboard electronic warfare system.

"It's bringing capability that hasn't been brought before," Ottaviano said, who noted that testing will be a challenge because of the novelty of the capability. "It is designed to be autonomous or [alternatively] work with the fleet."

He said Lockheed Martin expects to roll out the first AOEW EDM in late 2019. The system completed its critical design review in June. The company has been awarded a contract for six EDMs. Initial operational capability is planned for the 2020. Additional pods are expected to be ordered in a low-rate initial production order in the 2021-2022 time frame.

The pod has successfully completed a fit check on the MH-60 helicopter and can be attached to either side of the helicopter.

“How to get all of this capability in a very small pod was a challenge,” Ottaviano said, noting that the pod “generates a lot of heat” and has no supplementary cooling system.