

# Rear Adm. Wettlaufer: Shortage of Ships, Mariners an Ongoing Problem for Military Sealift Command



Rear Adm. Michael A. Wettlaufer, commander of Military Sealift Command, answers questions from the audience after speaking about the needs of the organization at the Navy League hosted Special Topic Breakfast, Oct. 18, sponsored by General Dynamics. *NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES / James Peterson*  
ARLINGTON, VA – Military Sealift Command (MSC) continues to face a shortage of both ships and sailors, and it will take a “collective effort” from government and industry to turn the tide, Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer, commander of MSC, said here during an event hosted by the Navy League of the United

States.

Rear Adm. Wettlaufer noted that after the number of U.S. mariners reached their peak during World War II at 262,000, their population has plummeted to a fraction of that today – about 33,000 between 2018-2021. With recruitment and retention a problem across all of the services, MSC faces no easy solutions.

Specifically, the top challenges currently facing MSC in this area are an atrophied maritime industry, a reduced U.S. flag commercial fleet and a shortage of ocean-going mariners, he said.

To help the issue of a lack of vessels, Wettlaufer said MSC will seek to incentivize commercial participation.

“We’ve got to incentivize U.S. flagged shipping,” he said, noting that the number of U.S. flagged ships at their disposal had declined from 282 at the start of this century to 178 today. “On the production side, it’s great; we’re building ships. But we certainly need more.”

On the recruitment side, it is a multi-pronged problem. A lack of U.S. flagged ships causes a decrease in the mariner population naturally, but there are other issues that the command needs to address, Wettlaufer said.

“This ecosystem is under stress [and] this needs our nation’s focus,” Wettlaufer said. “Why does [this decline in mariner population] happen? Have people changed, or are we ignoring the problem? I think we’re ignoring the problem. I think we’re ignoring the engagement opportunity.”

To help fix this issue, MSC will seek to get mariners to sea through a vigorous recruiting campaign, incentives and training. He also said MSC will be more aggressive in preventing sexual assault. Regardless, it will take a “collective effort” between government and industry to deal

with this ongoing issue, the rear admiral said.

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## T-45 Fleet on Safety Pause



T-45C Goshawk. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA) placed the Navy and Marine Corps' fleet of T-45Cs on a safety pause Oct. 14 to review an engine blade fault, the Naval Air Systems Command said in an Oct. 18 release.

"Out of an abundance of caution and concern for the safety of our aviators, CNATRA made the decision to halt all T-45C Goshawk operations following the discovery of an engine blade failure," said CNATRA Rear Adm. Richard Brophy. "We are working with our partners toward a swift resolution. Safety is at the core of our operations, and we must not expose our pilots or aircraft to unnecessary risk."

"The Naval Undergraduate Flight Training Systems Program

Office, Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Chief of Naval Air Training and Fleet Support Team have been working around the clock with industry partner Rolls Royce to identify the root cause of the recent T-45 engine blade failure,” said Rear Adm. John Lemmon, program executive officer for Tactical Aircraft Programs. “Engineering analysis has been underway and will continue until we can safely return the T-45 fleet to a flying status to support CNATRA’s training.”

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## **U.S. Navy Awards BAE Systems \$143 million Contract to Continue Surface Combat Systems Center Support**

MCLEAN, Va. – BAE Systems will continue to support the integration of various mission equipment, combat systems, and computer programs for the U.S. Navy’s Surface Combat Systems Center (SCSC) in Wallops Island, Virginia, with a new \$143 million, five-year contract. These mission-essential systems are used by sailors across the fleet for all current and future cruiser, destroyer and amphibious ship modernization initiatives.

“Our work at Wallops Island supports SCSC’s mission to provide increased readiness and improved capability to the fleet,” said Lisa Hand, vice president and general manager of BAE Systems Integrated Defense Solutions. “This effort is vital to our nation’s sailors in an increasingly challenging maritime environment.”

BAE Systems’ technical, engineering and overall programmatic

support for SCSC includes all major activities and engineering on the systems used for Surface Navy testing, training and support of deployed surface combat systems, advanced systems under development, warfare systems integration, interoperability and at-sea testing and exercises.

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## Coast Guard Cutter Willow Completes Aids-to-Navigation Mission in Puerto Rico



Petty Officer 3rd Class Vincent Wassylenko, Coast Guard Cutter Willow buoy deck supervisor (wearing yellow safety hardhat in photo), prepares to set a relief hull in Mayaguez Bay, Puerto Rico Oct. 9, 2022. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard Cutter Willow

completed its scheduled aids to navigation service mission around Puerto Rico port and navigable waterways Oct. 17, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release.

During the eight-day mission, cutter Willow crewmembers serviced 23 aids to navigation and performed eight buoy hull reliefs around island ports and navigable waters in Arecibo, Culebra, Guanica, Guayanilla, Ponce, San Juan, Tallaboa and Vieques.

After the Coast Guard reopened all the ports in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Fiona, the cutter Willow moved up its itinerary to provide scheduled maintenance around the island and further inspect the status of the aids to navigation in the most affected areas from the hurricane.

“The crew and I were happy to be back in Puerto Rico, our second homeport, servicing aids to navigation to facilitate the movement of commerce into Puerto Rico and supporting safe navigation around the island,” said Cmdr. Erin H. Chlum, cutter Willow commanding officer. “We were especially grateful for the opportunity to work in areas affected by Hurricane Fiona to ensure necessary resources, fuel and supplies can reach the island and people in need.”

Cutter Willow is responsible for the maintenance of 246 aids to navigation throughout the Coast Guard’s 7<sup>th</sup> District, ranging from South Carolina to the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as well as Guantanamo Bay and Haiti.

Coast Guard Cutter Willow is a 225-foot sea-going buoy tender homeported in Charleston, South Carolina.

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# Marine Corps Adjusts Interim Guidance for ACV Waterborne Operations following Training Incident



U.S. Marines assigned to the 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion, 1st Marine Division, conduct waterborne training with an Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) from shore to loading amphibious transport dock ship USS Anchorage (LPD 23) at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, Feb. 12, 2022.

*U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Willow Marshall*

HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS – Following a training incident, the Marine Corps has adjusted Amphibious Combat Vehicle (ACV) waterborne operations guidance, ceasing water operations involving surf zone transit to allow for additional testing and evaluation.

On Oct. 13, 2022, at approximately 7:45 p.m. PST, an

Amphibious Combat Vehicle assigned to Assault Amphibian School was conducting normal scheduled training operations when it rolled over in the surf zone after a reported mechanical malfunction near Camp Pendleton, California. Of the three crew members inside the vehicle, none sustained injuries or required medical attention. The incident is currently under investigation.

“We’re taking a deliberate and methodical approach to fielding this platform,” said Lt. Gen. David H. Furness, deputy commandant for Plans, Policies and Operations. “This adjustment to current guidance ensures our Marines have the ability to safely train and maintain proficiency with the platform while we work to conduct additional testing.”

Suspension of ACV surf zone transit will remain in effect until additional testing data can be collected and analyzed. In support of this, surf zone operations for Amphibious Vehicle Testing Branch-sponsored testing is authorized.

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## **Navy Demos Wide Range of VTOL Systems for Future Operations**



A vendor demonstrates the vertical takeoff and landing capability of a small unmanned aircraft system during a PMA-263 sponsored technical assessment Sept. 20 in California, Md. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Navy and Marine Corps Small Tactical Unmanned Aircraft Systems (PMA-263) program team put Vertical Takeoff and Landing (VTOL) systems through their paces during a two-week technical demonstration in mid-September, the Naval Air Systems Command said in an Oct. 17 release.

More than a dozen vendors attended the event to help inform the Navy Expeditionary Warfare community of the functions and capabilities available on the commercial market. The VTOL systems represented a wide range of configurations including outdoor, indoor, hybrid VTOL/fixed wing and tethered flight capability.

In partnership with the University of Maryland UAS Test Site, PMA-263's Family of Small UAS (FoSUAS) team evaluated each system against a standard test card to determine its suitability for expeditionary combat support. In addition to

basic measurements like length, height, weight and pack-up size, performance data was collected for ease of operation, range, endurance, audibility, electro-optical and infrared imagery quality and other unique capabilities of each system.

“The goal was to understand what the state of the market is today,” said Col. Victor Argobright, PMA-263 program manager. “We want to show off what is available right now for future procurements to our Navy Expeditionary community.”

Participants representing the Naval Special Warfare, Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal, and Naval Construction Force communities and their Joint Service counterparts were given the opportunity to engage directly with the participating vendors and to observe the flight demonstrations. Each participant was also asked provide their feedback on the potential of each system to fulfill their unique mission requirements.

“Flight demonstration events like this are a critical market research function for the PMA and help us to validate performance data reported by vendors,” said Lt. Cmdr. Ben Whatley, PMA-263 FoSUAS military lead. “We want to put these systems through their paces while also providing a venue for end-users to learn about existing and emerging SUAS technology. Moreover, events where operators from the supported Navy communities come together to collaborate and exchange information about their unique SUAS program needs provide added value to the PMA by ensuring unity of vision and a corresponding unity of acquisition effort.”

The majority of systems demonstrated last month are currently in production and available for procurement. Vendors also had the opportunity to showcase additional developmental capabilities, though these systems were not evaluated against any of the standardized test cards.

“Unmanned systems technology is advancing at an incredible

pace,” Argobright said. “To ensure that our Navy and Marine Corps teams are able to adapt to and outmatch the capability advancements of our adversaries, it is imperative that we leverage rapid acquisition solutions in order to put relevant technology in the hands of the warfighter faster.”

PMA-263 will use University of Maryland UAS Test Site’s assessment data and observer feedback from the event to inform the program’s priorities for follow-on engineering assessments, potential for operational testing, and inclusion of new platforms within the FoSUAS programs of record.

The PMA-263 FoSUAS integrated product team currently supports Group 1 and 2 SUAS including the PD-100 Black Hornet 3, Skydio X2D, SkyRaider R80D and RQ-20B Puma.

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**U.S. Navy Supports  
Australia’s Indo-Pacific  
Deployment Alongside Canada,  
Japan in the South China Sea**



The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Milius (DDG 69) conducts a trilateral training exercise with the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force Murusame-class destroyer JS Kirisame (DD-104), the Royal Australian Navy Supply-class auxiliary replenishment oiler HMAS Stalwart (A304) and the Hobart-class air warfare destroyer HMAS Hobart (DDG 39) while operating in the South China Sea, Oct. 07. U.S. NAVY / *Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Richard Cho*

SOUTH CHINA SEA – Maritime forces from Canada, Japan and the United States concluded exercises in the South China Sea in support of Royal Australian Navy forces, Oct. 17, Commander, Task Force 71/Destroyer Squadron 15 Public Affairs said in a release.

This is the first time all four nations have trained together in the South China Sea exercising complex, maritime operations in the region.

This exercise builds on the previous bilateral and trilateral exercises from recent months conducted in the South China Sea. Throughout the naval exercises, participants trained together and conducted integrated operations designed to increase the

allies' collective ability to maintain maritime security and readiness to respond to any regional contingency. Integrated events included surface, subsurface and air defense exercises that included Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) from several participating nations.

Representing Commander, Task Force 71 are U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Milius (DDG 69) and USS Higgins (DDG 76).

"Working with our Australian, Canadian and Japanese allies in the South China Sea has been an invaluable experience and opportunity," said Cmdr. Matthew Hays, commanding officer of USS Milius. "Combined maritime exercises help us strengthen interoperability and increase collective war-fighting readiness. It was great to be able to work with these 3 fine navies and to demonstrate our unwavering strong support for their increasing role in the region and our commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Professional engagement and cooperation with allies and partners is the foundation of regional stability, which fosters peace and prosperity for all nations.

Australia was represented by the Royal Australian Navy, HMAS Arunta (FFH 151) and HMAS Hobart (DDG 39).

Japan was represented by the JS Suzutsuki (DD 117) and JS Kirisame (DD 104).

Representing Canada was the Royal Canadian Navy Halifax-class frigate HMCS Winnipeg (FFH 338).

"HMCS Winnipeg's deployment in the Indo-Pacific on Operation PROJECTION is aimed at conducting forward naval presence operations in the region as well as participating in cooperative deployments and naval exercises with allied and partner nations," said Commander Annick Fortin, commanding officer of HMCS Winnipeg. "These exercises are an excellent

example as they demonstrate our interoperability with other navies and provides opportunities to learn as well as prove our abilities to work seamlessly together. It is a prime example of our motto 'one with the strength of many;' working together, we are stronger."

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## **Fairbanks Morse Defense to Provide Engines Featuring Common Rail Technology for LPD 32**

BELOIT, Wis. – [Fairbanks Morse Defense](#) (FMD), a portfolio company of Arcline Investment Management (Arcline), has been awarded a purchase order by Huntington Ingalls Industries to build and deliver four main propulsion diesel engines featuring common rail technology to power the U.S. Navy's newest Landing Platform/Dock (LPD) ship, LPD 32, the company announced in an Oct. 11 release. FMD's common rail system technology maximizes performance through enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced carbon emissions.

"For many decades, the engineers and entrepreneurs who built Fairbanks Morse Defense have been proving the quality of our engines while improving real-world results," said FMD CEO George Whittier. "Today, the U.S. fleet and its allies rely on our onboard solutions for global technical support to maximize mission confidence, which is why we remain as committed as ever to designing, developing and delivering the best naval power and propulsion systems on the planet."

Manufactured in the U.S. and serviced worldwide, FMD's proven

marine technology is engineered for excellence to ensure reliable operation, extended asset lifecycles, and minimal downtime. In addition to delivering its power and propulsion systems, the defense contractor has been selected by the Navy and Military Sealift Command time and again to provide mission-critical marine technology, turnkey services and OEM parts throughout the vessel.

FMD previously provided engines with common rail technology for LPD 30 and LPD 31.

This year FMD is celebrating its 150th anniversary, having served for almost 100 years the U.S. Navy, Military Sealift Command and the U.S. Coast Guard. Today, an FMD product is now on every single American naval platform as a result of their expanded portfolio of product offerings through acquisitions and organic growth.

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## **U.S. Naval Forces in Middle East Interdict \$29 Million in Illegal Drugs**



Personnel from U.S. Coast Guard fast response cutter USCGC Charles Moulthrop (WPC 1141) interdict a fishing vessel smuggling illicit drugs in the Gulf of Oman, Oct. 12. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Information Systems Technician 1st Class Vincent Aguirre*

MANAMA, Bahrain – A U.S. Coast Guard fast response cutter seized an estimated \$29 million worth of illicit narcotics from a fishing vessel while patrolling the Gulf of Oman, Oct. 12, two weeks after another sizable interdiction, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs said in an Oct. 13 release.

USCGC Charles Moulthrop (WPC 1141) confiscated 2,980 kilograms of opium and 400 kilograms of methamphetamines as the fishing vessel transited international waters. The Coast Guard cutter was operating in support of Combined Task Force 150, which oversees maritime security operations for Combined Maritime Forces in the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Gulf of Aden.

“A success like this is a team effort. I am proud of each and

every member of our crew,” said Lt. Cmdr. Stephen Hills, Charles Moulthrope’s commanding officer. “We remain committed to countering the flow of illegal contraband and promoting security and stability across the region.”

Hills’ crew previously interdicted another fishing vessel Sept. 27 while patrolling the Gulf of Oman, which led to the seizure of \$85 million worth of illegal drugs.

Charles Moulthrope arrived in the Middle East in May and operates from the U.S. Navy base in Bahrain where U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces are headquartered.

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## **Vigor Begins Work on USS Tulsa, Wins USS Michael Murphy Challenge**

PORTLAND, Ore. – Vigor, a Titan company, is beginning work on two major docking selected restricted availabilities (DSRA) awarded this year, at both Swan Island in Portland, as well as Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard (PHNSY), the company said in an Oct. 14 release. USS Tulsa recently arrived at Swan Island for its DSRA, while Vigor successfully challenged and was awarded USS Michael Murphy in Hawaii. In total, these two projects will employ more than 350 skilled workers in family wage jobs at both locations, as well as subcontractors and others providing support throughout.

“These two large awards reflect Vigor’s strong reputation for quality and on-time performance for the U.S. Navy,” said Adam Beck, Vigor executive vice president of Ship Repair. “Our

skilled workers repeatedly show why Vigor is an industry leader in ship repair, and we are very proud to support our national defense and our service members.”

USS Michael Murphy will be Vigor’s third DSRA completed at PHNSY in as many years, after completing the first two ahead of schedule. Vigor’s impeccable safety record on these projects, completed at the Naval facility, included zero injuries on USS William P. Lawrence and recognition from the Shipbuilders Council of America with a Significance in Safety Achievement award.

This is the first major dry docking for USS Michael Murphy since its post-shakedown availability. It will have shafts, hubs and propeller blades removed and overhauled; a full underwater hull and freeboard preservation; overhaul and replacement of all sea valves; as well as other work completed directly by Vigor and in partnership with the Navy. Approximately 150 people will work on the project each day, through early May 2023.

In Portland, USS Tulsa will undergo a full blasting and painting of the underwater hull and flight deck, including a new type of coating for the hull, and with blasting completed using Vigor’s new more environmentally friendly and efficient system; new decking systems in the staterooms and crew spaces, among others; cleaning and painting of all fuel tanks; and other preventative maintenance. It is scheduled to be at Swan Island for approximately nine months, with more than 200 Vigor employees working on the project.

“These are large, complex projects which our skilled workers at Vigor have become highly adept at in recent years,” Beck said. “Our great ship repair teams not only complete great work on time, they have made Vigor an industry leader in safety. Our Vigor Values of Truth, Responsibility, Evolution, and Love drive us to those two goals each day, and we will continue to live by them as we work to get these two vessels

back in service for the Navy.”

In addition to these two major U.S. Navy projects, work is ongoing at Vigor’s Harbor Island shipyard on USS Chosin, USS Cape St. George and USS Omaha, as well as support for Washington State Ferries. The Ketchikan Shipyard, also operated by Vigor, is continuing repair and maintenance work for the Alaska Marine Highway System, marking a busy summer across Vigor’s shipyard operations.