U.S. Navy Seizes 1,400 Assault Rifles During Illicit Weapons Interdiction

Illicit weapons seized from a stateless fishing vessel in the North Arabian Sea are arranged for inventory aboard guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane's (DDG 77) flight deck, Dec. 21. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Elisha Smith*

MANAMA, Bahrain – U.S. 5th Fleet ships seized approximately 1,400 AK-47 assault rifles and 226,600 rounds of ammunition from a stateless fishing vessel during a flag verification boarding in accordance with customary international law in the North Arabian Sea, Dec. 20, NAVCENT public affairs said Dec. 22.

U.S. Navy patrol coastal ships USS Tempest (PC 2) and USS Typhoon (PC 5) found the weapons during a search conducted by embarked U.S. Coast Guard personnel. The illicit weapons and

ammunition were later transported to guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane (DDG 77) where they await final disposition.

The stateless vessel was assessed to have originated in Iran and transited international waters along a route historically used to traffic weapons unlawfully to the Houthis in Yemen. The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of weapons to the Houthis violates U.N. Security Council Resolutions and U.S. sanctions.

The vessel's five crew members identified themselves as Yemeni nationals and will be returned to Yemen.

After removing the crew and illicit cargo, U.S. naval forces determined the stateless vessel was a hazard to navigation for commercial shipping and sank it.

U.S. naval forces regularly perform maritime security operations in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of legitimate trade and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and other unlawful activity. U.S. Navy warships operating in the U.S. 5th Fleet region have seized approximately 8,700 illicit weapons in 2021.

Guided-missile cruiser USS Monterey (CG 61) seized dozens of advanced Russian-made anti-tank guided missiles, thousands of Chinese Type 56 assault rifles, and hundreds of PKM machine guns, sniper rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers from a stateless vessel transiting the North Arabian Sea in May.

In February, guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) seized a cache of weapons off the coast of Somalia, including thousands of AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and crew served weapons. The inventory also included barrels, stocks, optical scopes and weapon systems.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses

approximately 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Strait of Bab al Mandeb.

Advanced Weapons Elevators Completed Aboard USS Gerald R. Ford

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) departed Naval Station Norfolk to make the transit to Newport News Shipyard in support of its planned incremental availability, a six-month period of modernization, maintenance, and repairs, Aug. 20. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class*

Ryan Seelbach
WASHINGTON – On Dec. 22, the 11th and final advanced weapons elevator aboard USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) was turned over to the ship's crew, according to Program Executive Office Aircraft Carriers public affairs.

AWEs on this first-of-class aircraft carrier operate using several advanced technologies, including electromagnetic motors instead of more labor intensive, hydraulic systems. The advanced technology enables fewer sailors to safely move ordnance from weapons magazines to the flight deck with unparalleled speed and agility.

"This is a significant milestone for the Navy, ship, and her crew," said Rear Adm. James P. Downey, Program Executive Officer for Aircraft Carriers. "With completion of this final AWE, we now have the entire system to operate and train with."

Downey added the Navy-industry AWE team worked tirelessly in port and at sea to complete the elevators to ensure the availability of needed materials and engineering expertise. Multiple vendors have collaborated along the way to ensure seamless support to multi-shift, shipboard production efforts.

"The Navy-industry teaming provided the opportunities for hundreds of craftsmen, technicians and engineers, working around the clock – through multiple underway and holiday periods – to get these advanced systems on line and operational," said Downey.

The team logged the milestone in the midst of the ship's six-month planned incremental availability at Huntington Ingalls Industries-Newport News Shipbuilding facility in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Gerald R. Ford is scheduled to complete the PIA this spring, followed by training and deployment.

"The end game is always operational readiness," added Downey, "and Ford is on track to complete this PIA on schedule, conduct sea trials, and to move on to follow-on tasking."

Austal Delivers Future USS Canberra to U.S. Navy

The future USS Canberra (LCS 3). *AUSTAL USA*

MOBILE, Ala. – The U.S. Navy took delivery of the future USS Canberra (LCS 30) at Austal USA on Dec. 21, the company announced, the second Independence-variant littoral combat ship Austal delivered to the Navy in 2021.

“With two ship launches, two christenings, and now the successful completion of sea trials and delivery for LCS 30, it has been a busy last couple of months at Austal USA,” said Austal USA President Rusty Murdaugh. “All of these milestones require extensive coordination between Austal, our vendors and our Navy teammates and I’m proud to say that these partnerships grow stronger with each milestone achievement.”

Acceptance Trials for LCS 30 were completed in early November, demonstrating to the Navy the successful operation of the ship’s major systems and equipment. Delivery documents were signed onboard the future USS Canberra and the crew will now begin preparing the ship for her commissioning into the fleet.

Four LCSs are currently under construction by the company, including the future USS Santa Barbara (LCS 32). Final assembly is underway on the future USS Augusta (LCS 34) and modules are under construction on the future USS Kingsville (LCS 36) and the future USS Pierre (LCS 38).

Two Expeditionary Fast Transports are also under construction at the shipyard, with a third under contract. In October, Austal USA was awarded a contract for the detailed design and construction of two U.S. Navy Towing, Salvage, and Rescue Ships (T-ATS), the first contract for Austal’s new steel construction facility.

Austal has recently been awarded several post-delivery service-related contracts for the LCS program including sustainment execution contracts for both variants of LCS on the East and West coasts and an indefinite delivery indefinite quantity contract to support LCS deployed to the western Pacific and Indian Ocean.

Biden Permits Defense Production Act to be Used to Strengthen Submarine

Industrial Base

Tugboats guide the USS Minnesota (SSN 783) to the pier as the Virginia-class nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine returns to Naval Submarine Base New London following a regularly-scheduled deployment in 2021. The Defense Production Act can now be used to scale production of Virginia-class subs. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Tristan B. Lotz*
On Dec. 21, President Biden signed three determinations permitting the use of the Defense Production Act to strengthen the U.S. submarine industrial base, the Department of Defense announced Dec. 22.

The expansion of the authority will allow the U.S. Navy to maintain its maritime superiority, the DoD said.

Scaling the production of Virginia-class attack submarines will ensure the U.S. Navy can meet its missions to maintain open sea lanes for global communication and commerce, enhance diplomatic partnerships and grow a robust underwater warfare capability, the DoD said. Through the DPA, the U.S. Navy can make key investments with the manufacturers and suppliers executing the submarine shipbuilding plan.

These activities will strengthen the shipbuilding industrial base and allow its heavy manufacturing and large scale fabrication suppliers to meet growing demand and expand the maritime workforce training pipeline.

“Ensuring a robust, resilient and competitive domestic defense industrial base that has the capability, capacity and workforce to meet the Virginia-class submarine undersea warfighting mission is essential to our national security,” said a memo attributed to Biden.

The DoD said it continues to work with key stakeholders to use Defense Production Act authorities to address risks and challenges across the submarine enterprise supply chain. These authorities expand options and opportunities to accelerate and scale critical investments across key markets.

More information about the DPA is available here, and the presidential determination can be found here.

Austal USA Awarded Contract for Next Generation Logistics Ship Design Studies

Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) conducts a replenishment-at-sea with Henry J. Kaiser-class fleet replenishment oiler USNS Rappahannock (T-AO 204), The next-generation logistics ship is intended to be a smaller than current combat logistics force ships such as the Rappahannock. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Elizabeth Grubbs*

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA was awarded a contract to perform design studies for the U.S. Navy's next generation logistics ship program Dec. 20, the company announced.

This contract requires Austal to develop a new baseline design and perform specific trade studies for the Navy's newest logistics ship. Austal, as the shipbuilder and design agent, will be the prime contractor.

"Austal is excited to begin work on another U.S. Navy steel shipbuilding program," Austal USA President Rusty Murdaugh said. "This contract, combined with our recent T-ATS ship construction contract award and the concept studies we are performing on the LAW p[light amphibious warships] rogram,

demonstrate our commitment to bring the same industry leading quality to steel ships as we have been delivering for aluminum ships.”

The next generation logistics ship program represents a new class of medium-sized at-sea supply ships intended to support small surface combatants such as littoral combat ships and frigates as well as the Navy’s planned LAW. The mission of the NGLS fleet will include refueling, rearming, and resupply of naval assets.

Austal USA’s reputation of completing major military vessel contracts on schedule and on budget gives the company a strong foundation to provide a highly capable and cost effective NGLS design to the Navy.

MRIC Live Fire Tests Deemed a Success, Marine Corps Says

U.S. Marines with 12th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, adjust a Ground and Air Task Oriented Radar system at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Okinawa, Japan, Aug. 10, 2020. The G/ATOR is part of the Corps' Medium Range Intercept Capability, tested Dec. 16. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Savannah Mesimer*

The U.S. Marine Corps' Medium Range Intercept Capability prototype, developed as part of a mid-tier acquisition rapid prototyping effort, successfully engaged targets Dec. 16, 2021, at White Sands Missile Range, the Corps announced.

This first round of tests is part of a series of live fire events scheduled for fiscal year 2022 all of which will be carried out against relevant and increasingly more challenging cruise missile profiles. This test series will stress the system and define the system's proficiency and potential.

The MRIC prototype is being developed by the Ground Based Air Defense program office at Program Executive Officer Land Systems in support of a Fleet Marine Forces modernization initiative. The effort will inform counter-air defense

requirements and any subsequent acquisition activities.

“The MRIC is a missile system which detects, tracks, identifies and defeats enemy cruise missiles threats and other manned and other unmanned aerial threats,” said program manager Don Kelley. “It is planned to provide ground based air defense for permanently fixed and operationally semi-fixed sites.”

The MRIC currently integrates existing Marine Corps systems – specifically, the Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar and Common Aviation Command and Control System – with the Israeli Iron Dome mini-Battle Management Control and Tamir missile.

The project team built upon the lessons learned from an initial demonstration in Aug. 2019. Since then, MRIC has been formally designated a middle tier acquisition–rapid prototype program.

Additional live fire testing is planned during the remainder of fiscal 2022. Pending results, the Marine Corps will decide whether to potentially certify the prototype for deployment, establish an MRIC program of record or both.

USCGC Mohawk Returns from Eastern Pacific Patrol, Conducts International Collaboration

The USCGC Mohawk (WMEC 913) hosts senior officials from the coast guard, navy, and marines of Ecuador for a professional exchange on Nov. 28, 2021, at sea off Ecuador. The Famous-class medium endurance cutter returned to homeport in Key West Sunday after completing a groundbreaking 45-day deployment to the Eastern Pacific Ocean. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

KEY WEST, Florida — The Famous-class medium endurance cutter USCGC Mohawk (WMEC 913) returned to homeport in Key West Dec. 19 after completing a groundbreaking 45-day deployment to the Eastern Pacific Ocean, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area said Dec. 20.

While on patrol, the Mohawk crew disrupted illegal narcotics smuggling, interdicting more than 3,200 pounds of cocaine. The team conducted joint training missions with crews from Panama and Ecuador to strengthen regional partnerships in the Western Hemisphere.

Patrolling in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South, the Mohawk team interdicted a low-profile drug smuggling vessel with approximately 3,200 pounds of cocaine aboard and

apprehended three suspected narcotics smugglers. These low-profile vessels are purpose-built to evade detection and transport illicit contraband across thousand-mile stretches of ocean. The drugs, worth more than $60 million, were seized in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean off the coast of Ecuador. While in theater, Mohawk aided in stopping 17 suspected drug smugglers, contributing directly to U.S. Southern Command objectives to combat transnational criminal organizations.

During the Mohawk's deployment, the crew took multiple opportunities to strengthen ties with partner nations in the region, including conducting joint rescue and assistance drills, exchanging law enforcement and boarding techniques, and practicing towing with Panamanian Servicio Nacional Aeronaval vessels. Mohawk's crew also completed a passing exercise with the Armada del Ecuador offshore patrol vessel LAE Isla San Cristobal (LG 30) and conducted a two-day joint counter-narcotics patrol through Ecuador's exclusive economic zone in the Galápagos Islands.

"International partnerships are critical to detecting and deterring illicit narcotics smuggling; engagements such as these with foreign partners enhance interoperability and interdiction capabilities," said Cmdr. Andrew Pate, commanding officer of the Mohawk.

Mohawk made history during its deployment as the first U.S. Coast Guard cutter to visit and anchor in the Galápagos Islands. The islands are a province of Ecuador and a UNESCO World Heritage site, made famous for species diversity and unique terrain. While at anchor in San Cristobal, Galápagos, Mohawk conducted a professional exchange with senior ranking officials from Armada del Ecuador, held joint law enforcement training, enjoyed a cultural exchange ashore, and took part in a friendly U.S. versus Ecuador game of soccer.

"The U.S. Coast Guard's ability to forge strong and lasting

international partnerships that further the national interest is what makes us such a unique instrument of national security. I am very proud of the Mohawk crew for their work as envoys of the U.S. Coast Guard. The opportunity to work alongside the maritime professionals of Ecuador and Panama during this deployment, as well as our interdiction success sends a strong signal to transnational criminal organizations that the United States values enduring commitments in the region," Pate said. "Our interactions with the Armada del Ecuador in Galápagos left a profound impression on my crew. Choosing to go to sea and serve on a U.S. Coast Guard cutter opens the door to experiences and camaraderie that you don't get in a normal nine to five job."

While underway, the cutter's crew completed aviation, damage control, engineering, seamanship, navigation, and combat systems training to maintain operational readiness and prepare for future multi-mission deployments.

Commissioned in March of 1991, Mohawk is the 13th and final of the 270-foot Famous-class cutters built. The medium endurance cutters fall under the command of the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area. Based in Portsmouth, Virginia, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area oversees all Coast Guard operations east of the Rocky Mountains to the Arabian Gulf. In addition to surge operations, they also allocate ships to deploy to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific to combat transnational organized crime and illicit maritime activity.

AUSTAL Places Order for

Floating Dry Dock

SAN DIEGO – Immediately after finalizing a deal on a new repair facility in the Port of San Diego, Austal USA placed an order for a floating dry dock. The new floating dry dock, optimized to efficiently dock small surface combatants and similar sized ships, will be the centerpiece of the new repair facility.

“This dry dock will greatly enhance Austal’s ability to provide the Navy and other customers a highly capable full-service repair facility located in the homeport of San Diego,” Austal USA President Rusty Murdaugh said. “It will be invaluable to our customers, and we are eager to satisfy their growing demand for West coast repair facilities that include dry docks.”

The dry dock will have a 9,000 light ton lifting capacity. It will be 531 feet (162 meters) long, 154 feet (47 meters) wide, with a maximum draft of 36 feet (11 meters). Construction on the dry dock began today and the completed vessel is scheduled to be fully operational in Austal’s new San Diego repair facility by August 2023.

This contract is one of several milestones Austal USA has achieved over the last several weeks to grow the capability and capacity of its Services business. The acquisition of the San Diego facility and the dry dock, combined with recent contract awards, further cement Austal USA’s role in maintaining and repairing ships throughout the United States and INDOPACOM region.

U.S. Navy, Boeing Complete First Carrier Tests for MQ-25

An MQ-25 Stingray test asset conducts deck handling maneuvers Dec. 12 while underway aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN -77). This unmanned carrier aviation demonstration marked the first time the Navy conducted testing with the MQ-25 at sea. *U.S. NAVY*

NORFOLK, Va. – The U.S. Navy and Boeing have successfully maneuvered the Boeing-owned T1 test asset on a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier for the first time, an early step forward in ensuring the MQ-25 unmanned aerial refueler will seamlessly integrate into carrier operations.

During an underway demonstration aboard the USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77), Navy flight deck directors – known as "yellow shirts" – used standard hand signals to direct T1 just like any other carrier-based aircraft. Instead of a pilot receiving

the commands, however, it was a Boeing MQ-25 Deck Handling Operator (DHO) right beside the yellow shirt who commanded the aircraft using a new handheld deck control device.

“This is another significant step forward in demonstrating MQ-25’s integration into the Carrier Air Wing on the flight deck of our fleet’s aircraft carriers,” said Capt. Chad Reed, Unmanned Carrier Aviation program manager. “The success of this event is a testament to the hard work of our engineers, testers, operators and the close collaboration and teaming from Naval Air Force Atlantic and the crew aboard CVN 77.”

The demonstration was intended to ensure the design of the MQ-25 will successfully integrate into the carrier environment and to evaluate the functionality, capability and handling qualities of the deck handling system both in day and night conditions. Maneuvers included taxiing on the deck, connecting to the catapult, clearing the landing area and parking on the deck.

“The Navy has a rigorous, well-established process for moving aircraft on the carrier. Our goal was to ensure the MQ-25 fits into the process without changing it,” said Jim Young, MQ-25 chief engineer. “From the design of the aircraft to the design of the system moving it, our team has worked hard to make the MQ-25 carrier suitable in every way.”

DHO’s trained in Boeing’s deck handling simulation lab in St. Louis, where they practiced entering commands from simulated yellow shirts into the real handheld device. A simulated MQ-25, running the aircraft’s real operational flight code and interfaces, would move accordingly. The handheld controller is a simple, easy-to-use device designed specifically for a generation of sailors who natively understand such handheld technology and have experience with controllers used in the gaming industry today.

The deck handling demonstration followed a two-year flight

test campaign for the Boeing-owned T1 test asset, during which the Boeing and Navy team refueled three different carrier-based aircraft – an F/A-18 Super Hornet, an E-2D Hawkeye and an F-35C Lightning II.

“The Navy gave us two key performance parameters for the program – aerial refueling and integration onto the carrier deck,” said Dave Bujold, Boeing MQ-25 program director. “We’ve shown that the MQ-25 can meet both requirements, and we’ve done it years earlier than traditional acquisition programs.”

MQ-4C Triton UAS Arrives in Florida as Australian Triton Takes Shape

The Navy's MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft arrived in Mayport, Florida, Dec. 16, as part of early operational capability efforts. *U.S. NAVY*

MAYPORT, Fla. — The Navy's MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft system arrived in Mayport, Florida, Dec. 16, following its initial deployment in the Pacific theater, the office of Commander, Naval Force Atlantic said Dec. 17.

This air vehicle was one of two MQ-4C Triton UAS that operated from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, after completing their first rotational deployment to Japan Oct. 12, 2021.

"The MQ-4C Triton demonstrates the significance of manned and unmanned integration to support national security interests," said Cmdr. Brian Conlan, commander, Unmanned Patrol Squadron (VUP) 19. "The VUP-19 and MQ-4C Triton deployment to the 7th Fleet area of responsibility provided an opportunity to apply and refine the tactics, techniques, and procedures to expand our concept of operations and inform planning for future deployments around the world."

VUP-19, the first Triton UAS squadron, operates and maintains two aircraft as part of an early operational capability to further refine the concept of operations, including expeditionary basing, and complement manned systems to better locate, identify, and track contacts of interest in the maritime domain.

The MQ-4 Triton's arrival at Naval Station Mayport will support unit-level training and preparation for the next variant of MQ-4C.

The Navy conducted its first test flight of the MQ-4C Triton in its upgraded hardware and software configuration, known as integrated functional capability 4, July 29 at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland. IFC-4 brings an enhanced multi-mission sensor capability as part of the Navy's maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting transition plan.

The MQ-4C Triton conducts intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions that pair with the P-8A Poseidon and it brings increased persistence, capability, and capacity through its multi-sensor mission payload.

Australia’s first MQ-4C Triton fuselage is lowered onto the unique one-piece wing. *NORTHROP GRUMMAN*

Australian MQ-4C Triton Takes Shape

Meanwhile, Northrop Grumman Corp. recently completed a significant milestone in the production of Australia’s first MQ-4C Triton when the aircraft fuselage was mounted onto Triton’s unique one-piece wing, the company said. Once completed and delivered, Triton’s powerful payload and endurance will provide the Royal Australian Air Force the ability to detect and analyze threats that were previously undetectable.

“This production milestone further demonstrates our commitment to both sides of the cooperative program between the Royal Australian Air Force and the U.S. Navy,” said Rho Cauley-

Bruner, Triton program manager at Northrop Grumman. “We are on schedule to deliver Triton’s powerful capability in support of Australia’s national security.”

Australia’s first Triton is on track to be delivered just as the U.S. Navy expects to achieve initial operating capability with its multi-intelligence Tritons, the same configuration Australia is receiving. The identical capabilities will allow the RAAF and U.S. Navy to share data and maintain an unblinking autonomous intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting capability over some of the world’s most critical maritime regions.

“I am looking forward to seeing our first Triton roll off the production line and then commence flying in Australian skies in 2024,” said Group Captain Jason Lind, director of Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare at RAAF headquarters. “This capability will extend Australia’s ability to see and understand our maritime approaches to the north and also as far south as Antarctica.”