Marine Infantry Weapons Undergoing Largest Modernization Effort in Decades

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. – Marine Corps Systems Command's program manager for infantry weapons (PM IW) has begun a modernization project to increase the lethality of the infantry squad, the command said in a release.

PM IW strives to equip and sustain the Marine Corps with fully integrated infantry weapons, optics and nonlethal systems for the ground combat element. The portfolio's modernization efforts adhere to Commandant Gen. David Berger's vision to redesign the force to meet the challenges of the age of "Great Power Competition." Through PM IW, the Corps plans to field numerous new weapon and optic systems over the next decade.

"This is the largest modernization of the infantry squad in the last 25 years," said Lt. Col. Tim Hough, MCSC's program manager for infantry weapons.

PM IW has begun the procurement of the Modular Handgun System, which will replace all Marine Corps pistols. This striker-fired pistol includes a plastic clip-on piece, enabling Marines to change grip sizes to accommodate different hand sizes. The weapon is compatible with the pistol-aiming module used by some units. MCSC will begin fielding the system this fiscal year.

"The MHS improves on the precision and reliability of the legacy platforms, while also bringing with it new, more effective ammunition," said Maj. Mike Brisker, weapons product manager for PM IW.

MCSC is expanding the use of the M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle. Originally fielded to infantry units as a replacement for the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon in 2011, the rifle received overwhelmingly positive feedback from Marines. This feedback led to the Marine Corps' decision to field the M27 to all rifle platoons as their primary individual weapon.

"We expect fielding of [the M27] to conclude by the end of this fiscal year," Brisker said.

PM IW is also enhancing its optic systems. Fielded in spring 2020, the Squad Binocular Night Vision Goggle (SBNVG) is a helmet-mounted system that offers improved depth perception, and the ability to detect and recognize targets in extreme low light, in inclement weather and in the presence of obscurants. The SBNVG provides additional capabilities that the legacy system, the AN/PVS-14, lacked.

Since awarding a contract in February 2020, PM IW plans to begin fielding the Squad Common Optic in fiscal year 2021. The SCO includes a magnified day optic, which improves situational awareness, decreases engagement times and increases probability of hit.

"The Squad Common Optic enables Marines to see farther and identify the enemy more quickly," Hough said.

MCSC is collaborating with other services to field certain systems. For example, the Marine Corps will partner with the Army to procure the Next-Generation Squad Weapon system, intended to replace the M27 and become the primary individual weapon for infantry units.

The NGSW will provide a boost to the lethality of the individual soldier and Marine. The weapon includes an optic/fire control system that will incorporate a disturbed reticle to improve the shooter's accuracy. The Marine Corps could receive first deliveries of the NGSW as early as fiscal year 2025, Brisker said.

Additionally, PM IW and Fleet Marines are participating in the Army's Integrated Visual Augmentation System and the Enhanced Night Vision-Binocular programs to help inform requirements and programmatic decisions in the future.

PM IW's modernization efforts mirror MCSC's mission to increase lethality among Marines. The command is continuously striving to equip Marines with the capabilities needed to successfully fulfill missions. To meet this goal, PM IW will continue to solicit feedback from Marines and industry.

"In line with the Commandant's Planning Guidance, we're looking to lighten the load and increase the overall lethality of Close Combat Forces – specifically infantry Marines," said CW4 David Tomlinson, an infantry weapons officer with PM IW.

Tomlinson believes upgrading Infantry Weapon systems will ultimately enhance performance on the battlefield and increase survivability at a time when enemies are strengthening.

"These efforts show we are focused on staying abreast of advancements that are coming quickly," Tomlinson said. "It also shows our desire to stay persistent, look toward the future, and make sure our Marines receive the best [systems] we can buy."

Coast Guard Repatriates 5 of 9 Migrants Following Interdiction in the Mona

Passage

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Bernard Webber, working alongside their Caribbean Border Interagency Group partners on the night of May 12, interdicted an illegal migrant voyage in the Mona Passage off Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release.

Nine migrants were interdicted, all of whom were reported to be Dominican Republic nationals. Five of the migrants were repatriated to the Dominican while four remain in U.S. custody. Three of the four face criminal immigration charges.

While on a routine patrol in the Mona Passage late on May 12, the Bernard Webber's crew stopped the 25-foot yola-type vessel and embarked all nine migrants. Once aboard a cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention.

The migrants facing potential federal prosecution and investigation were transferred to Border Patrol agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, while the remaining migrants were transported by the Bernard Webber to Dominican waters off Punta Cana, where they were repatriated to a Dominican navy vessel.

"In the midst of this ongoing pandemic and upcoming hurricane season, the security of our nation's southernmost maritime border has never been as important and relevant as today," said Capt. Eric P. King, commander of U.S. Coast Guard Sector San Juan. "Our forces remain vigilant and ready to safeguard our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands from illegal voyages, drug smuggling threats and in case of any potential tropical storms or hurricanes."

Coast Guard Cutter Diligence Will Change Homeport to Pensacola

The Coast Guard Cutter Diligence, moored in downtown Wilmington, North Carolina. U.S. Coast Guard

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Diligence will shift homeport from Wilmington, North Carolina, to Pensacola, Florida, on May 25, the Coast Guard 5th District said in a release.

“Diligence is scheduled to depart the city of Wilmington on [May 25] to conduct a patrol in support of the 7th Coast Guard District, and will return to the cutter’s new homeport, Pensacola, Florida,” the release said. “Diligence has been assigned to Wilmington since its recommissioning in 1994, but the namesake has a long history with the state of North Carolina and the city of Wilmington dating back to 1792.”

“The past and present crew of Diligence have truly appreciated the support of the Wilmington community over the years,” said Cdr. Luke Slivinski, commanding officer of the Diligence. “Our close and welcoming relationship has been special, and we’ll miss calling the Coast Guard City of Wilmington our home, but we’re eager to embark on the adventure of establishing a new home port following this patrol.”

Navy Launches Newest Yard Tug

ANACORTES, Wash. – The U.S. Navy's first Yard Tug (YT) 808-class vessel was successfully launched at Dakota Creek Industries (DCI) shipyard on May 16, the Program Executive Office-Ships (PEO-Ships) said in a release.

The YT 808 vessels are designed after the Navy's existing YT 802 Valiant-class tugs and built to commercial ABS standards. The 90-foot by 38-foot tugs will have a top speed of about 11.7 knots and a bollard pull of approximately 40 metric tons, allowing them to effectively perform towing and ship-handling duties for carriers, surface ships, submarines and barges.

The tugs are outfitted with a hydraulic hawser winch and staple on the forward deck for towing, and an "H" bitt installed on the aft deck with an adjacent hydraulic capstan for tightening lines. Similar to the previous 802 Class, the new YT 808-class tugs will have an articulating hydraulic brow installed aft of the deckhouse to allow personnel transfers to and from alongside ships or submarines.

"This is an exciting milestone for this program as the YT 808 class tugs will replace the tugs built in 1964 through 1975," said Mike Kosar, program manager of Support Ships, Boats and Craft Program Office with PEO-Ships. "With five more in the pipeline, we're excited to get these tugs underway and operational."

The Navy and DCI plan to conduct acceptance trials for YT 808 in July with delivery planned for August. DCI will deliver the remaining five tugs between this fall and early 2022.

Navy Awards General Atomics Sustainment Contract for Ford-Class Launch, Landing Systems

An F/A-18F Super Hornet lands on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford during tests in January of the carrier's Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch Systems and Advanced Arresting Gear. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Jesus O. Aguiar

SAN DIEGO – Naval Air Systems Command has awarded General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems a contract for engineering and logistics sustainment of Gerald R. Ford-class Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch Systems (EMALS) and Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG) systems, the company announced May 18.

General Atomics will provide engineering, technical, configuration management and program support for EMALS and AAG systems installed aboard Ford-class aircraft carriers.

"We are proud to continue our working relationship with the Navy and extend our support for these critical technologies as the program advances into a new phase," said Scott Forney, president of General Atomics.

"This contract signals the program is now moving from the design and development phase and into concurrent production and sustainment phase, providing sustaining engineering, material and maintenance support for all Ford-class aircraft carriers. Our in-depth knowledge, expertise and commitment to providing a full range of lifecycle support services will ensure these systems meet or exceed mission requirements for as long as these first-of-kind launch and recovery systems remain in service to the fleet."

At-sea test periods are ongoing for the first carrier of the class, the USS Gerald R. Ford. In February, EMALS and AAG were cleared for shipboard launch and recovery of all currently deployed naval aircraft types aboard the Ford.

More than 2,300 successful day and night aircraft launches and recoveries using EMALS and AAG onboard have been completed. In addition, the Ford has finished flight-deck certification, aircraft compatibility testing and fleet replacement squadron training exercises for pilots to earn their qualifications on specific aircraft. EMALS and AAG continue to perform and execute according to specifications with the objective of reaching the sortie generation rates required for combat readiness.

General Atomics is delivering EMALS and AAG for the future USS John F. Kennedy and USS Enterprise. Significant cost savings are being realized through multiple ship production contracts, which minimize gaps in production while maximizing planning, scheduling and delivery to support all three Ford-class carriers.

Meggitt Wins Marine Corps Contract for More Wireless Virtual Weapons

SUWANEE, Ga. – Meggitt Training Systems has been awarded a $2.6 million contract for additional BlueFire wireless virtual weapons to be used by the U.S. Marine Corps on its Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainer (ISMT), also delivered by the company as a program of record, the company said in a May 14 release.

BlueFire M9 pistols, M4 rifles and M27 infantry automatic rifles will be used at several Marine Corps bases throughout the U.S. Deliveries to Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany will begin within the next 90 days and should be completed by December.

“This order for additional BlueFire weapons demonstrates the value they and ISMT deliver in terms of virtual firearms training for Marines who must be ready to deploy anywhere at any time,” said Andrea Czop, Meggitt’s vice president of strategy, sales and marketing.

Meggitt was originally awarded the $32 million, five-year contract in 2014, delivering and installing 490 systems at locations worldwide. As a certified program of record, ISMT trains new and experienced Marines in marksmanship, collective scenarios and judgmental video scenarios. Each mode provides critical training based on the skill level of the individual or unit.

BlueFire weapons use commercial wireless technology to communicate with ISMT and other FATS-based virtual training systems, giving the same control as tethered weapons, but with full range of movement.

These patented weapon simulators can be used in conjunction with other tethered weapon simulators without modification. For enhanced, more realistic visuals, Meggitt’s BlueFire weapon simulators feature a 3-D marksmanship training environment. The after-action review allows engagement and shot assessment in a 3-D virtual environment, while providing detailed trainee diagnostics for skill reinforcement or correction.

VAW-120 Completes First Fleet Hawkeye-F/A-18 Aerial Refueling

An E-2D Hawkeye prepares to land and be received by the Greyhawks of Carrier Airborne Early Warning Squadron (VAW) 120 on Sept. 9 at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia. This was the first E-2D Hawkeye with aerial refueling capability to join the fleet. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Nikita Custer

NORFOLK, Va. – The "Greyhawks" of Airborne Command & Control Squadron (VAW) 120 successfully conducted on May 11 the first fleet aerial refueling dry-plug certification between an E-2D Advanced Hawkeye and an F/A-18F Super Hornet, according to a release from commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic public affairs.

"With contact between probe and basket, VAW-120 Greyhawks achieved the latest in a litany of significant milestones as Greyhawk 642 became the first Fleet E-2D Advanced Hawkeye to complete F/A-18 aerial refueling," said Capt. Matthew Duffy, commander of the airborne command and control and logistics wing.

Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 211 aircraft from Carrier Air Wing One (CVW-1) embarked aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75) participated in this refueling evolution, three years in the making.

"This ground-breaking achievement represented the culmination of more than three years of test and evaluation to include over 500 hours of evaluation flight time developing the Advanced Hawkeye airborne refueling capability," Duffy said.

VAW-120, part of Airborne Command & Control and Logistics

Wing, has been tasked with initial qualification of aerial refueling for the E-2D fleet and is currently developing the techniques and procedures to train pilots in the new skill set.

“This milestone was the result of detailed coordination between an embarked Carrier Strike Group and a shore-based training command that truly exemplifies the ethos of teamwork that permeates across Naval Aviation,” said Cmdr. Aaron Rybar, commanding officer of Airborne Command and Control Squadron 120.

In September 2019, VAW-120 took delivery of the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye with an aerial refueling capability that allowed for the achievement of this initial operational capability. VAW-120 marked a second milestone in the E-2D legacy in April 2020, by achieving its 1,000th Aerial Refueling contact for the squadron.

Lt. Michael Harrigan and Lt. David Carroll represent the first two fully qualified E-2D fleet replacement squadron (FRS) instructors qualified in aerial refueling. They completed 39 refueling evolutions with both VFA-211 and VFA-81.

“This latest modification of the Advanced Hawkeye will allow for vastly improved on-station time and significantly increase the mission reach and influence of the world’s premier Command and Control platform,” said Duffy, who added that this month’s tested capability serves to increase the lethality for America’s Navy.

The aerial refueling-modified E-2D Advanced Hawkeye is another key component to the carrier air wing of the future. Currently, the squadron’s E-2D AR instructor pilot cadre are increasing proficiency and experience in preparation for training and transitioning the first fleet squadron later this summer.

Yard Patrol 686 Craft Completes Service Life Extension

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Navy recently completed a service life extension program (SLEP) on Yard Patrol 686 and returned the modernized craft to the U.S. Naval Academy on May 14, according to the Navy's Program Executive Office-Ships (PEO-Ships).

The SLEP for the vessel began in August 2019 and was executed in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard at its Curtis Bay shipyard in Baltimore. YP 686 is the fourth of 12 craft planned to receive an extensive overhaul and modernization package.

Work items executed throughout the availability covered nearly every portion of the craft, including wooden hull and deck repair, habitability upgrades and overhaul and modernization of the propulsion and electric generating equipment. This SLEP effort will enable the craft to remain in service for another 10 years.

The 108-foot wooden-hulled YP craft were originally delivered to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, between 1986 and 1988 and have been continuously utilized to train midshipmen on piloting, seamanship, navigation and engineering. The training is designed to help midshipmen develop the essential skills required of an officer-of-the-deck, such as proficiency in navigation and a working knowledge of afloat operations with modern systems essential to seamanship and navigation.

“Recapitalization of the YP craft is a direct investment in the proficiency and technical capability of our Navy’s future leaders,” said Mike Kosar, program manager of the Support Ships, Boats and Craft Program Office within PEO-Ships. “The SLEP will ensure our midshipmen will continue to have the platforms they need to gain the skills that will be required of them at sea.”

Follow-on craft availabilities are scheduled to continue through March 2022 utilizing both the Coast Guard and commercial shipyards.

Hospital Ship Mercy Bids Farewell to Los Angeles

The hospital ship USNS Mercy departs Los Angeles on May 15. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan M. Breeden

LOS ANGELES – The hospital ship USNS Mercy left Los Angeles on May 15 after supporting COVID-19 response operations in the greater Los Angeles area, the U.S. Northern Command said in a release.

“We came to Los Angeles to be the relief valve for local hospitals in the fight against COVID-19,” said Capt. John Rotruck, commanding officer of medical treatment facility (MTF) aboard the ship.

See: Despite Isolation, Five Returning Roosevelt Sailors Test Positive for Virus

“I am very impressed with how well the team came together on this rapid-response mission, completing a wide-range of high-quality medical procedures from orthopedic surgeries to interventional radiology. Sailors from across the country answered the call, forming a unified team focused on our mission to treat patients from Los Angeles. I couldn’t be more proud.”

Mercy is scheduled to return to Naval Station San Diego, where the ship and members of its embarked MTF will remain ready for future tasking.

Lt. Pamela Resurreccion renders a salute to the national ensign during morning colors aboard the hospital ship USNS Mercy on April 30. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan M. Breeden

At the direction of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Northern Command, about 60 personnel assigned to Mercy’s MTF will continue supporting state and local health care providers at skilled nursing facilities. The U.S. Navy, with NORTHCOM-directed forces, remains engaged throughout the nation in support of the broader COVID-19 response.

Mercy has been at the World Cruise Center Terminal in the Port of Los Angeles since March 27. The medical professionals aboard the Mercy performed various medical procedures, including general, orthopedic and plastic surgeries; interventional radiology; exploratory laparotomy; and skin grafting.

“After arriving on station, the personnel aboard Mercy were able to safely execute our mission in support of FEMA and in coordination with state and local authorities,” said the mission’s commander, Capt. Dan Cobian, commodore of Destroyer Squadron 21.

“In addition to supporting Los Angeles-area hospitals, we were

able to expand our mission by providing support to a local skilled nursing facility and we also sent personnel to aid USNS Comfort for their effort in New York. Our Sailors answered the call and showed our country and the world the capability of our combined Navy Medicine and Military Sea Lift Command team in providing aid during this pandemic.”

Boeing Delivers 100th P-8A Poseidon Built for the U.S. Navy

The 100th P-8A Poseidon built for the U.S. Navy departs. Boeing Co.

SEATTLE – The U.S. Navy received its 100th P-8A aircraft from Boeing on May 14 as the global fleet, which also includes the Indian navy and the Australian and U.K. air forces, approaches 300,000 flight hours of hunting submarines and providing aerial reconnaissance capabilities around the world, the company said in a release.

“We’re honored by the Navy’s faith and confidence in our employees and the P-8 system,” said Stu Voboril, vice president and program manager. “Our focus has been, and will be, on delivering the world’s best maritime patrol aircraft, bar none.”

The P-8 is a long-range multimission maritime patrol aircraft capable of broad-area, maritime and coastal operations. A military derivative of the Boeing 737 next-generation airplane, the P-8 combines performance and reliability with an advanced mission system that ensures maximum interoperability

in the battle space.

This is the 94th mission-capable airplane to enter the Navy fleet, with six additional jets used as engineering manufacturing development test aircraft. The 100th fully operational delivery is scheduled for later this year. Boeing has also delivered 12 jets to the Royal Australian Air Force, two to the U.K.’s Royal Air Force and eight P-8Is to the Indian navy. Multiple U.S. Navy squadrons have deployed with the P-8A Poseidon, and the Indian navy and Royal Australian Air Force are conducting missions with the P-8 as well.