

# F-35B Crashes in New Mexico En Route Test Assignment



ATLANTIC OCEAN (Oct. 18, 2023) U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Alex Horne, assigned to Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 23, conducts flight operations from the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales (R09) in the Atlantic Ocean, Oct. 18, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Kyra Helwick)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – An F-35B Lightning II strike fighter crashed shortly after takeoff from Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, on May 28. The pilot ejected and was hospitalized with serious injuries.

The Marine Corps F-35B was en route to deliver to Edwards Air Force Base, California, for assignment to test duties. The aircraft was flying from the Lockheed Martin factory in Fort Worth, Texas, for delivery to Edwards.

According to press reports, the pilot was an Air Force officer assigned to the Defense Contract Management Agency's Fort Worth office.

Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron One, headquartered at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, has a detachment at Edwards Air Force Base for F-35 test and evaluation.

Rep. Rob Wittman, chairman of the Tactical Air and Land Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee issued a statement on the mishap:

"I am incredibly grateful to the first responders who promptly aided the pilot after this crash and relieved to hear the pilot is in stable condition. I am praying for the pilot and their family as they undergo treatment for serious injuries.

"Any crash of our military aircraft is of utmost concern. While we know that expanding F-35 test capacity is the first step to fundamental F-35 transformation, this incident exacerbates the already urgent need to expand it. That's why I authored an amendment in this year's National Defense Authorization Act to increase F-35 test capacity by 50%, ensuring that the U.S. military can accelerate tests associated with our nation's largest defense acquisition program.

"This incident will undoubtedly cause a technical setback for F-35 modernization and warrants an extensive and thorough investigation to determine the exact cause of this crash."

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# Navy Orders Two More Constellation Frigates



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered the next two Constellation-class guided-missile frigates (FFGs) from Fincantieri's Marinette Marine, the Defense Department said.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded Marinette Marine Corp., of Marinette, Wisconsin, a \$1.04 billion fixed-price incentive (firm-target) modification to previously awarded contract “to exercise options for detail design and construction of two Constellation-class guided-missile frigates, FFG 66 and FFG 67,” the May 23 contract announcement said.

The order brings to six the number of Constellation-class FFGs on order. This order is funded by the fiscal 2024 defense budget. The contract allows options for four more frigates.

The Navy has a stated requirement for 20 frigates.

The Navy has selected a name for FFG 66, the future USS Hamilton, as announced May 23 by Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, in honor of Alexander Hamilton, a hero of the American Revolution and the nation's first secretary of the Treasury.

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## Navy Admiral Selects Three Littoral Combat Ships for 2025 Basing with 5th Fleet



An unmanned surface vehicle is craned aboard the Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Canberra (LCS 30), as a part of the first embarkation of the Mine Countermeasures (MCM)

mission package, April 23. The MCM mission package is an integrated suite of unmanned maritime systems and sensors which locates, identifies, and destroys mines in the littorals while increasing the ship's standoff distance from the threat area. Littoral Combat Ships are fast, optimally-manned, mission-tailored surface combatants that operate in near-shore and open-ocean environments, winning against 21st-century coastal threats. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Vance Hand)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of U. S. Navy surface forces has named the three Independence-class littoral combat ships (LCS) slated to be forward-deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet to replace the Avenger-class mine-countermeasures ships (MCMs).

“MCMs are reaching their end-of-service-lives, and we have to replace them, as great as they are,” said Vice Admiral Brendan McLane, commander, U.S. Naval Surface Forces, speaking May 23 at the International Mine Warfare Technology Symposium in San Diego. “Secretary of the Navy [Carlos] Del Toro has approved the strategic laydown which confirmed the deployment of LCS 2 variants – including [USS] Tulsa [LCS 16], Santa Barbara [LCS 32], and Canberra [LCS 30] – to deploy to Bahrain in 2025, and four more to Sasebo [Japan] in 2027.

“The platforms will have the MCM mission package and will replace our legacy MCMs,” McLane said. “But even with these mission packages, we’ll have to incorporate them into a team to be able to combat enemy mining operations. Joining the LCS will be a theater expeditionary MCM team {than} will deploy a combination of unmanned systems, divers, and sensors teamed together to defeat enemy mining. We’re already doing some of that teamwork.”

Two LCS have been deployed to the 5th Fleet area of responsibility so far: Freedom-class LCS USS Sioux City (LCS 11) in 2022 and USS Indianapolis (LCS 17) in 2023, the latter

still deployed there.

“The Sioux City teamed with CTF-52’s MCM expeditionary capability and embarked Helicopter Sea Combat 22 detachment to augment MCM capabilities in 5th Fleet,” McLane said. “Sioux City paved the way for future LCS operations within 5th Fleet and showed what a valuable contributor and teammate the LCS platform can be. The full LCS with mission packages will bring even more capability to the 5th Fleet team.”

McLane said he is “tremendously excited for the long-term viability of LCS as our enduring mine warfare platform due to their modularity and the ability to quickly design, develop, and deploy new subsystems within the MCM mission package will give the Navy persistent competitive advantage as mine warfare continues to evolve.”

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## **SECNAV Del Toro Names Two Future Guided-Missile Destroyers (DDG 143) and (DDG 144)**

# SEAPOWDER

The Official Publication of the Navy League of the United States

From SECNAV Public Affairs, May 22, 2024

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced the names of the Navy's newest Arleigh Burke-class Guided Missile Destroyers, the future USS Richard J. Danzig (DDG 143) and the future USS Michael G. Mullen (DDG 144) during a U.S. Naval Academy Commencement Week ceremony, May 22.

DDG 143 honors the Honorable Richard J. Danzig, the 71st Secretary of the Navy, and DDG 144 honors retired Admiral Michael J. Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Chief of Naval Operations. These are the first ships to bear their names.

"Secretary Danzig and Admiral Mullen were visionary leaders in the mold of the greatest naval leaders that came before. Together they have nearly 100 years of service," said Secretary Del Toro. "Both Secretary Danzig and Admiral Mullen worked tirelessly to ensure our Sailors and Marines had the resources, technologies, and capabilities to set them up for success. I am proud to honor them with these new DDGs."

Born in New York City in 1944, Secretary Danzig received a B.A. degree from Reed College, a J.D. degree from Yale Law School, and Bachelor of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy

degrees from Oxford University.

Secretary Danzig served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 1977 to 1981, first as a Deputy Assistant Secretary, then as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics. In these roles, he contributed to the Department's mobilization and deployment of manpower and material. Secretary Danzig later served as Under Secretary of the Navy from November 1993 to May 1997, before being sworn in as Secretary of the Navy on Nov. 16, 1998.

Secretary Danzig's tenure emphasized four themes: ridding the Services of "a conscript mentality" by treating Sailors and Marines as skilled workers and supporting them with new capital investments and personnel systems; achieving better synergy between the Navy and Marine Corps; strengthening the ability of the sea services to influence events ashore; and embracing new technologies to better achieve those goals. Since the end of his tenure, he has served in multiple technology and national security-oriented think tanks, councils, and panels.

"This is such a wonderful honor. It's certainly a wonderful and touching thing," said Secretary Danzig. "What is most important to me is that this provides a connection among all of the Sailors who will be on this ship."

Commissioned in 1968, Mullen first deployed aboard the USS Collett (DD 730) for operations off the coast of Vietnam as part of U.S. Seventh Fleet. His command tours include the USS Noxubee (AOG 56), USS Goldsboro (DDG 20), USS Yorktown (CVN 10), Cruiser-Destroyer Group TWO with concurrent duties as commander of the USS George Washington (CVN 73) Aircraft Carrier Battle Group, U.S. Second Fleet with concurrent command of NATO Striking Fleet Atlantic, and U.S. Naval Forces, Europe with concurrent command of Allied Joint Force Command located in Naples, Italy. Staff and shore tours

include service at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Bureau of Naval Personnel, and multiple tours in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.

As Chief of Naval Operations, Mullen led the united maritime strategy, oversaw support for the Global War on Terror, and expanded relations with partners and allies.

As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he focused on Joint/combined combat operations in Afghanistan and Libya as well as a major humanitarian operation in Japan; implemented the repeal of Don't Ask/Don't Tell; and stood up U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Cyber Command.

"This is an honor of a lifetime and one I certainly never expected. It says so much about the Navy that I love, and it represents most of my life at sea," said Mullen. "So, along with my wife, Deborah, and my family, this is just something that is so very, very special."

Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, built around the Aegis Combat System, are the backbone of the U.S. Navy's surface fleet providing protection to America around the globe.

"DDG 143 and DDG 144, once built and commissioned, will be the most technologically advanced warships ever built, just as Jack H. Lucas, Carney, Arleigh Burke, and each of their predecessors in the long and storied life of the class," said Secretary Del Toro.

They incorporate stealth techniques, allowing these highly capable, multi-mission ships to conduct a variety of operations, from peacetime presence to national security, providing a wide range of warfighting capabilities in multi-threat air, surface and subsurface domains. These elements of sea power enable the Navy to defend American prosperity and prevent future conflict abroad.

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# HASC TACAIR Mark-Up Would Assign Newest Super Hornets to Navy Reserve



PACIFIC OCEAN (May 19, 2024) An F/A-18E Super Hornet, assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 151, takes off from the flight deck of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72). (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Kevin J. Steinberg)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The mark-up of the House Armed Services Committee’s TACAIR and Land Forces subcommittee for the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act would assign the newest F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters to the Navy Reserve.

The mark-up would “require the Secretary of the Navy to assign

only to the Navy Reserve all F/A-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft procured using funds appropriated for the Navy for fiscal year 2022 or fiscal year 2023,” the text of the mark-up said.

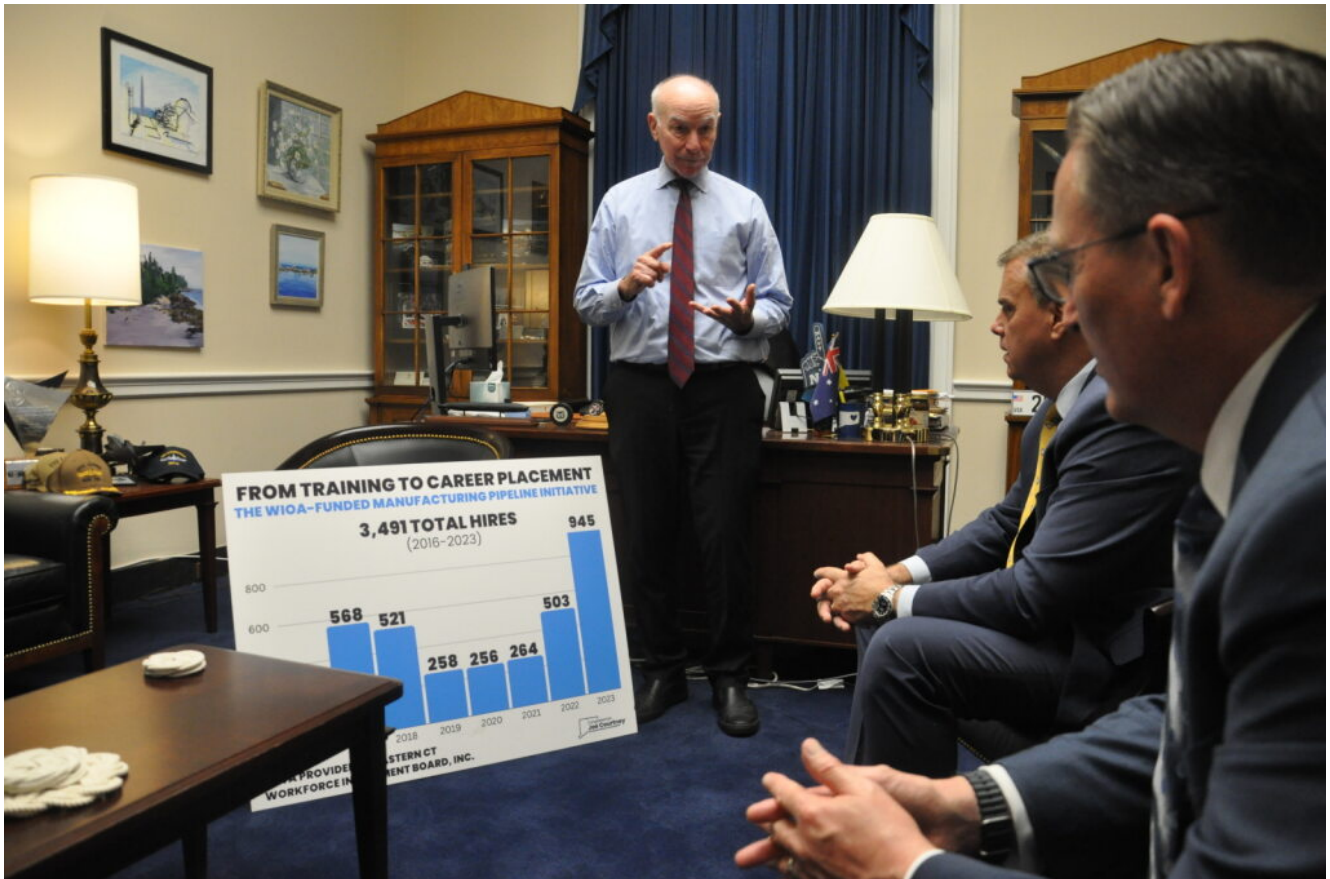
“The Secretary of the Navy shall ensure that all covered [F/A-18] aircraft are (1) provided only to the Navy Reserve; and (2) used only to recapitalize and maintain, within the Navy Reserve (A) a deployable tactical strike-fighter capability; and (B) a threat representative adversary support capability that may be used in support of training activities of the Department of Defense,” the document said.

The Super Hornets would be Block III versions. The only Navy Reserve squadron currently equipped with Super Hornets – Fighter Composite Squadron 12 – operates older versions of the F/A-18E.

The subcommittee’s mark-up also approved multiyear procurement authority beginning in 2025 for Marine Corps’ CH-53K King Stallion heavy lift helicopters and the T408 engines that power them.

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**Navy League Congressional  
Fly-In Makes Successful In-  
Person Return to Capitol Hill**



Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Connecticut) discusses sea service issues with Navy League National President Christopher Townsend and CEO Mike Stevens during the Congressional Fly-In. *James Peterson*

Navy League members from councils around the country visited the offices of dozens of lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Wednesday as part of the first in-person Congressional Fly-In held since 2019.

They came to discuss the needs of the sea services with members of the House of Representatives and Senate, and to touch base with lawmakers and staff that represent their council regions during more than 100 meetings.

The messages included calling for funding two Virginia-class submarines in fiscal year 2025 and writing a "SHIPS Act," modeled on the CHIPS Act that helped restore microchip manufacturing and production capacity in the United States. The Navy League visitors also called for an annual shipbuilding and conversion budget of at least \$35 billion.



Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Virginia) talks with Christopher Townsend.  
*James Peterson*

The council members also discussed the need to fund the sea services' unfunded priorities, including barracks restoration and modernization for the Marine Corps, icebreakers and new cutters for the Coast Guard and defending the Jones Act for the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine.

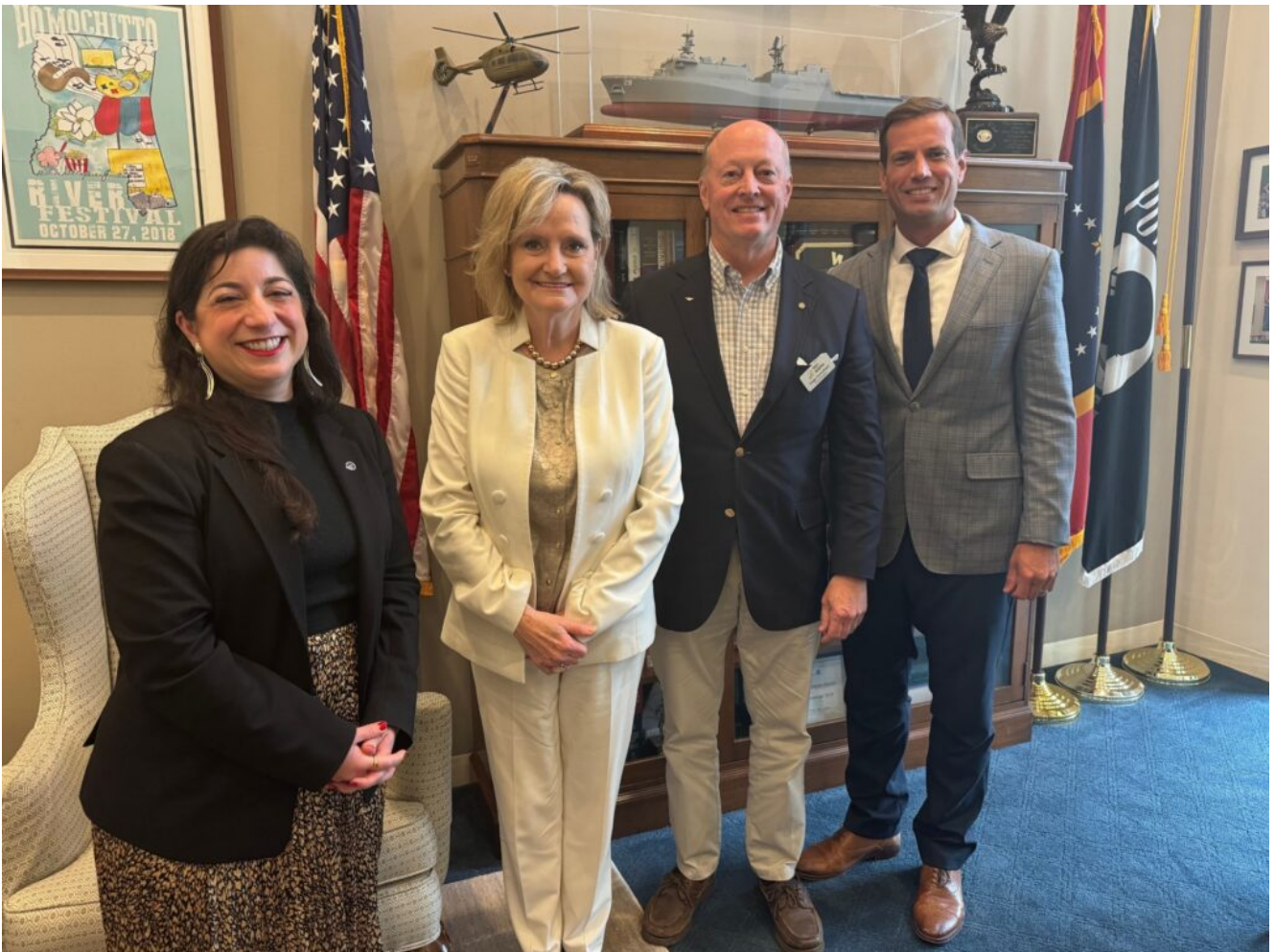
They also educated lawmakers and their staffs on the need to create future Sailors, Marines and Mariners by supporting the Sea Cadets, Young Marines and funding for the state Maritime Academies' student incentive programs.

On the eve of the fly-in, the Navy League notched a major victory for its advocacy work as the House Armed Services Committee voted to include funding for a second Virginia-class submarine in its upcoming National Defense Authorization Act markup.

"We had a great time," Sinclair Harris, retired rear admiral and national vice president of the Navy League, said at the

end of the day. “We had six visits, one with a member of Congress, the rest were staffers, but all of them were very engaged, they all understood the importance of what the Navy League does and supports and educates and advocates for.”

Sara Fuentes, who led a group of council members representing the Southern Region, said, “what makes the Navy League so unique and special is that anyone can get behind our issues because they benefit all Americans. It was a real pleasure to meet with Democrats, to meet with Republicans, all different kinds of offices, inland, coastal, and have them all understand and support our sea services and understand the need to really invest in them.”



Members of the Southern Region meet with Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Mississippi), second from left. *Sara Fuentes*  
Scott Maguire, a board member of the Portland-Blueback Council, said his team made eight visits to House and Senate members, and “they were very receptive to what we had to say

and seemed supportive, so I'm looking forward to their approvals on what we have suggested."

Merilyn Wong and William Stephens of the Marin County Council said they visited their local representative and convinced him to become a co-sponsor of the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act, which ensures Coast Guardsmen are compensated for their work during government shutdowns.

"Every staff person was very receptive, interested in our presentation, wanted to learn a little bit more about it. We kept telling them about the Center for Maritime Strategy, to take advantage of that, something they didn't really know, so that was helpful," said Michele Langford, Pacific Central Region president.

Navy League National President Christopher "Towny" Townsend said "it was a fantastic day. We got to execute one of our primary missions of advocating for our sea services here in person in the halls of Congress.

COVID-19 restrictions put a hold on events like the Congressional Fly-In, but Townsend said it was a good time to come back in person "and spread the Navy League gospel, talk about the needs of the sea services."

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**Navy Expands Suicide  
Intervention and Mental  
Health Services; Survivors**

# Say More Must Be Done



Boatswain's Mate Seaman Kalea Howe, assigned to the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1), poses and screams for a photo to personify feelings of anxiety and depression. This photograph was captured using multiple exposure techniques and was later used to accompany a story about depression for suicide prevention month. *U.S. Navy | Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Alora R. Blosch*

"The reason I'm writing this is because I feel you are the only person that can make the changes necessary for others to not suffer the same fate I did," Petty Officer 3rd Class Brandon Caserta wrote to his commanding officer. "If you can successfully take action and make the changes, you will prevent more suicides within the Navy."

Brandon died by suicide June 25, 2018. That year, he joined a tragic roster of 68 U.S. Navy Sailors on active duty who took their own lives.

Before his death at age 21, the Peoria, Arizona, native wrote letters to his family, friends, supervisor and others that described toxic leadership and a hostile work environment. Stationed at Naval Station Norfolk while attached to Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28, he reported being hazed, bullied and sexually assaulted. Brandon felt the Navy had labeled him a failure. He asked for, but was denied, medical attention.

Brandon's parents, Teri and Patrick Caserta, argue Brandon would be alive today had the military intervened to provide their son with confidential access to mental health services. Their advocacy in the aftermath of Brandon's death led to passage of the Brandon Act, which the Department of Defense officially launched one year ago this month.

The Brandon Act requires the Navy and all military branches to make it easier for service members to ask for mental health treatment confidentially – for any reason, at any time and in any environment. Supervisors or commanders of service members who invoke the Brandon Act must quickly facilitate evaluations, assuring privacy.

“If you're on a ship in the middle of nowhere and you need mental health care, it might take a day or two and happen by telemedicine or some other way,” Dr. Lester Martinez-Lopez, the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, said in a Jan. 22, 2024, DoD News article on the Brandon Act. “But it doesn't matter where you are. All you need to do is raise your hand and tell your supervisor and they will take care of that as soon as possible.”

The Brandon Act passed as part of the fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, signed into law by President Biden Dec. 27, 2021. The DoD implemented the policy May 5, 2023, giving the service branches 90 days to roll it out to all service members, starting with the active-duty components.

Along with the other services, the Navy has since reiterated that suicide prevention is a top priority and communicated about the self-referral process available under the Brandon Act. The Navy is taking other steps to reduce stigma associated with asking for mental health services and promote help-seeking behavior. Efforts include expanding virtual and in-person health, mental health and quality-of-life offerings, particularly those aimed younger enlisted service members, who data show are most at risk of death by suicide.

In 2022, the Navy began moving its Sailor Assistance & Intercept for Life (SAIL) suicide intervention program from an in-person model to a virtual model. The Navy completed the transition to fully virtual SAIL in January 2024. The virtual model is staffed with dedicated remote counselors from the Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC). The Navy says more Sailors are now using the service, citing in the increased accessibility and privacy of virtual care and assistance. The program is operated by the Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC), which oversees 10 Navy regions, 70 bases and more than 43,000 employees.

By the end of 2024, the Navy plans to complete the expansion of FFSC's virtual clinical counseling program, which will provide Sailors and their families in all 10 Navy regions with remote access to short-term assessments, treatment planning, clinical counseling, and referrals from licensed mental health professionals.

### **'More Needs to be Done'**

In a phone interview with *Seapower* magazine, Patrick and Teri Caserta commended Navy and other Pentagon leaders for their willingness to improve access to suicide interventions and other mental health services.

"The (virtual) SAIL program is a step in the right direction," said Patrick, a 22-year retired U.S. Navy senior chief and

naval counselor.

But, he added, “more needs to be done” to end military suicides, including expanding awareness of the Brandon Act and educating commanders that “if you violate the Brandon Act, you’re breaking the law.”

Among the lawmakers overseeing Brandon Act implementation and spearheading related legislation in Congress is Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Virginia), whose state is the home of Naval Station Norfolk, where Petty Officer Caserta died.

“I’ve heard heartbreaking stories from many servicemembers and their families about mental health challenges, the lack of resources, and the stigma associated with asking for help,” Kaine told Seapower in a statement.



Members assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command talk to a Sailor during a mental health awareness event in Bahrain, April 12, 2023. *U.S. Army | Specialist Aaron Troutman*

**OIG Evaluation**

Kaine, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and chair of its Seapower subcommittee, said he's committed to expanding service members' access to mental health care and to preventing military suicides, including assessing the effectiveness of Navy efforts to address this issue.

Pursuant to a directive Kaine and colleagues included in the fiscal 2023 national defense bill, the DoD's Office of Inspector General in February 2024 launched an evaluation of the Navy's suicide prevention and response efforts.

A Feb. 27 OIG memo said subjects of the evaluation include the Department of the Navy, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Defense Health Agency in the National Capital Region. Evaluators plan site visits to Naval Station Norfolk as well as to Naval Base San Diego in California; Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Washington; and Naval Station Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. OIG said it could add other locations to evaluate.

Under Navy policy, commanders must submit a SAIL referral after a Sailor experiences suicide ideation or attempts suicide and is evaluated by a medical treatment facility or emergency department, Cornealius L. Stamps, the SAIL clinical counseling program analyst, said in an email interview with *Seapower*.

A SAIL case manager must contact the referred Sailor within one day to offer assistance and care services. Sailors who accept services can receive virtual counseling from a remote SAIL or clinical counselor or see an FFSC clinical counselor in person.

SAIL's move to a virtual model with dedicated case managers has coincided with an increase in Sailors accepting services, Navy-provided data shows. The percentage of Sailors referred to SAIL who accepted services rose from 46.5% in 2020 to 62.67% in 2023. To meet the demand for services, SAIL's staff

of case managers rose 42%, Stamps said.

It's too early to say if these and other programs are reducing the number of military suicides. In all of calendar year 2022, 492 active-duty, National Guard and reserve service members died by suicide, according to the DoD. This was fewer than the 524 service members who died this way in 2021. Most military deaths by suicide occur among enlisted men under age 30.

More recent quarterly data showed no increase or decrease in Navy active-duty service member deaths by suicide, even as these deaths increased in the active Army, Marine Corps and Air Force. Those three services combined saw 19 more active-duty service member deaths by suicide in the first quarter of calendar year 2023, compared to the first quarter of calendar year 2022.

Stamps said the response to virtual SAIL so far is encouraging.

"Sailors have shared positive feedback about SAIL's virtual services through the program's anonymous surveys, during conversations with their case managers," she said, noting, "we've also heard similar sentiments echoed by referring leaders."

Sailors can also request SAIL services by contacting their local FFSC, a chaplain or another available mental health program. And although CNIC doesn't oversee ship operations, Sailors aboard a ship without counseling services can ask their command to arrange SAIL services by phone.

"It's well-known that military service is challenging and comes with unique stressors that those in the general public will never face," Stamps said. "Recognizing that you need help and asking for it is a sign of strength."

## **Greater Awareness**

In addition to offering virtual SAIL and more remote counseling options, the Navy in July 2023 issued Brandon Act-related guidance and resources in a directive-type memo and fact sheet. The service issued a revised Navy Mental Health Playbook addressing mental health within commands and plans to update and send out additional marketing materials throughout the year. In January 2024, the Navy distributed to all commands the Suicide Related Behavior Response and Postvention Guide, streamlining suicide crisis response guidance and providing step-by-step instructions on the SAIL referral procedures.

Despite these efforts, Patrick and Teri Caserta said too many service members and military families still don't know about the Brandon Act or how to access mental health services.

They're working for change through the Brandon Caserta Foundation, making sure all service members and veterans get the help they need, without retaliation. They want new military recruits educated about the Brandon Act before service even begins. They want Brandon's image on military posters with the message that it's OK for Sailors and service members to seek care, for any reason. They want mental health counselors embedded at the unit level and for the military to establish a uniform response to this crisis.

Ultimately, they want to continue to share what Brandon's experienced – to raise awareness about military suicide, empower service members and families and enact policy changes that will end military and veteran deaths by suicide.

"We know that Brandon's story saves lives," Teri Caserta said.

### **Sidebar: Navy Goes Virtual to Boost Sailors' Access to Quality-of-Life Programming**

To boost the quality of life and health of today's Sailors, the Navy in late January launched a new Virtual Single Sailor Program (VSSP), a platform offering service members and their

families worldwide remote access to electronic sports contests, fitness programs and other entertainment and wellness resources.

“Obviously, the modern-day Sailor has changed in the way that they interact with information and each other,” said Lisa Sexauer, who is director of Fleet Readiness for Navy Installations and oversees the Navy’s Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs. “And so being able to reach them with useful information and also virtual dynamic programming – wherever the Navy operates and wherever their mission allows them to access that information – is kind of the brainchild behind it.”

Sailors can log onto the platform to virtually participate in esports, locate community-based recreational events, access workout builders and find vacation discounts and other resources.

“The real effort here is to create some connectedness and for people to build communities of support (and) friendships,” Sexauer told *Seapower*.

VSSP emerged from an ongoing effort to pilot- and focus-test quality-of life-programs that better meet the “desires and needs” of Sailors, she said, particularly those in the E-1 to E-6 enlisted paygrades.

Along these lines, the Navy said earlier this year it is considering offering free highspeed Wi-Fi to all Sailors. This is pending the results of a February-September pilot test of the service at 12 permanent party unaccompanied housing locations at Naval Station Norfolk, NAVMEDCEN Portsmouth and Norfolk Naval Shipyard.

In early March, installation commanders also got the go ahead to implement 24/7 entry to staffed or unstaffed fitness facilities.

“If we require our Sailors to be physically fit and healthy so

they can fulfill the Navy mission and deploy at a moment's notice, then we must provide the facilities and resources for them to do so," Vice Admiral Scott Gray, commander of Navy Installations Command, announced March 8. "Not only does this make sense, it is the right thing to do for the quality of life of our Sailors and other service members."

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## **Littoral OpTech Workshop Will Examine Operational, Geopolitical Challenges in Baltic Sea**



The Polish Navy, Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided-missile frigate ORP General Tadeusz Kosciuszko (273), departs for sea in support of BALTOPS 23. BALTOPS 23 is the premier maritime-

focused exercise in the Baltic Region. *U.S. Navy | Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Mario Coto*

The 2024 Littoral OpTech workshop, an invitation-only event, will be held May 21-22 at the Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia, Poland. Participants will listen to a number of speakers and panels exploring the current trends in operational, economic and geo-political environment in and around the Baltic Sea.

According to retired Swedish Navy Captain Bo Wallander, the event moderator, Littoral OpTech workshops are typically two-day conferences that bring together key partners and advanced technical and operational expertise to explore and identify the technologies that will enable effective littoral operations.

“The workshops expand the growing global community of interest and garner stakeholder support for addressing the technical challenges in the world’s littorals,” Wallander said.

Wallander described the maritime littorals as “a very complex environment with limited space where it is easy to hide and difficult to detect targets. This means very short reaction times. The proximity to islands and shores means a broad spectrum of threats in all domains. The littorals are also characterized as having a great number of non-military actors like merchant ships, fishing and pleasure boats.”

Wallander referred to the Baltic Sea, in particular, as an “extreme littoral.”

“What makes the Baltic Sea special are the short distances in an east-west direction and the large archipelagos in both Finland and Sweden. There are different currents and counter currents; varying sea bottom topography, water salinity and temperatures,” he said.

Wallander said the workshop will focus on both operations, political issues and technologies with an emphasis on Northern Europe and the evolving security concerns in Northern Europe,

as well as the importance of the fact that both Sweden and Finland have become NATO allies.

The last Littoral OpTech workshop was held in Helsinki, Finland, and also focused on the Baltic Sea. Besides the 2022 event in Finland, previous Littoral OpTech seminars, colloquiums and workshops have been held in Monterey, California; Stockholm, Sweden; Tokyo, Japan; Cartagena, Colombia; Halifax, Canada; and Souda Bay, Crete, Greece.

Wallander said the Polish Naval Academy is working together with the Swedish defense company Saab to host the 2024 workshop.

“The naval academy is located in a very a very significant historical area,” Wallander said. “Gdynia is also an important base for the Polish navy.”

“This area of the world continues to be of great geopolitical, economic and military importance,” Wallander said. “The Baltic Sea is both a very sensitive environment and an important transport link for the Russian Federation. Since the last OpTech event the war in Ukraine has raged on, and both Finland and Sweden have become full-fledged members of NATO.”



The Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia will host the 2024 Littoral OpTech workshop. *Polish Naval Academy*

Poland is situated on the Baltic Sea, with a 328-mile mostly sandy coastline. The country was under Soviet domination after World War II and was a charter member of the Warsaw Pact from 1955 to 1991. In 1999, Poland joined Czechia and Hungary to become the first former members of the Warsaw Pact to join NATO.

The Baltic Sea is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean enclosed by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden and Russia, with a coastline of approximately 5,000 miles. Today, all of those countries are part of the NATO Alliance, except Russia. Russia's Baltic Sea exclave of Kaliningrad is surrounded by Poland to the south and Lithuania to the north and east.

### **Polish Naval Academy**

The Littoral OpTech workshop will be hosted by the Polish Naval Academy, which is named after the "the Heroes of the

Westerplatte.” The academy offers both civil and military undergraduate and graduate study programs. The name refers to the 1939 battle at the Westerplatte peninsula when the Polish forces fought off a vastly superior German army. The battle is revered as a symbol of resistance in modern Poland.

The Polish navy was established in 1918. The academy was established soon after, in 1922. It has been in continuous operation, albeit under different names, ever since. The school is currently under the command of Rector-Commandant Rear Admiral Professor Tomasz Szubrycht.

The undergraduate and graduate courses are taught in Polish and English, and a number of international students attending the school. The military cadets receive commissions in the Polish military upon graduation, mostly in the navy. There are also serving officers working on graduate degrees.

Today, the Polish navy consists of about 12,000 commissioned and enlisted personnel, many of them serving aboard the service’s 46 ships.

The Polish Navy’s two largest surface combatants ORP General Kazimierz Pułaski and ORP General Tadeusz Kościuszko, are the former U.S. Navy Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided missile frigates USS Clark (FFG 11) and USS Wadsworth (FFG 9). The service is ordering new Arrowhead 140 frigates, to be delivered by Polish Armament Group in cooperation with Babcock, U.K.

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## **SAIC Advances Scalable Open-**

# Architecture Systems

# Counter-UAS



From left to right: the vehicles are the Polaris MRZR, Polaris DAGOR, and the EOS Defense HMMWV, all of which are enabled by SAIC's CUAS. (SAIC photo)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – SAIC's counter-unmanned aerial system (CUAS) concepts will be further tested in a June 2024 demonstration, a company official said. The company has two types of CUAS systems deployed and is in competition for two Department of the Navy programs.

"We're really excited about the [June] counter-swarm demo that we've been selected to participate in," said Greg Fortier, SAIC's senior vice president for Army aviation, fires, and C2

in the Army business group, in an interview with Seapower.

SAIC, which has been developing CUAS systems for more than a decade, already has two CUAS systems fielded with U.S. agencies.

The company's Valkyrie CUAS System is "operational in a few parts of our country," Fortier said, with "[0]perational forces in the U.S. Army right now on a pilot type of effort. The predecessor of our system [the Medusa] is also active across the CENTCOM AOR [U.S. Central Command area of responsibility] in certain capacities, and that's mostly with the Department of the Air Force."

Fortier said that SAIC has "continued to evolve our solutions, continued to understand the different requirements from all of the services – frankly all of the agencies in our nation – and then really have driven for the past couple of years into a modular, 100% open system that is a scalable approach to meeting all the different threats within counter-UAS. That's not just in the all-domain warfighting imperative but it's also things like the border of the future as well as the general overall citizen experience for our country.

"SAIC is pivoting on five national imperatives: all-domain warfighting, undersea dominance, citizen experience, border of the future, and next-gen space. CUAS applies to four of the five across multiple agencies," he said. "The company has multiple lines of effort with these imperatives. We go at it in terms of four phases: detect, track, identify, and mitigate. There are multiple technologies that apply across the board—kinetic and non-kinetic solutions. Every customer, every requirement is a little bit different."

"It's all about our open architecture that allows us to integrate very quickly to any of the different modalities that support detect, identify, track, and mitigate," said Jeremy Davidson, SAIC's counter-UAS lead, also speaking during the

interview. "Multi-functional capability within each of those mission domains from detect to mitigate – including all of your different non-kinetic and kinetic modalities as well, including lasers, but also traditional small arms, rockets, ATM [air traffic management], drone interceptors, things like that.

"We bring all of the sensors that feed into that, from radars, to RF [radio frequency], to EW [electronic warfare], and of course the last one is the eye, which is identify where you get into your E0/IR [electro-optical/infrared] sensors," Davidson said.

"We are a tech-agnostic integrator," Fortier said. "We feel like we are a world-wide leader in technology agnostic integration. That makes our systems more powerful in that we can take multiple technologies as we've already done in the past couple of years, integrate and learn, understand, and then pass that along [and] make that connection among the multiple agencies within the United States."

He stresses that the company's integration of technology is not just with hardware but also with software, and that cost reduction and operational effectiveness are achieved through open architecture.

"When you have an open system, and you have an obsolete part, you can pull that part off, and if the technology or the threat changes, you can plug and play new technology at pennies on the dollar because you're not re-integrating or re-configuring an entire system," Fortier said.

SAIC continues to participate in multiple demonstrations for the Joint Capabilities Office and for the Department of Homeland Security on the border, he said.

"There are two offices right now in the Department of the Navy, both of which we are pursuing," Fortier. "We were down-selected in one of those opportunities to continue in the

competition, but that competition is still active.”

The two Department of the Navy competitions are the MADIS-CES (Marine Air Defense Integrated System-CUAS Engagement System) Lethality Upgrade and Marine Corps Installation CUAS.

SAIC has 25 partners and integrates more than 45 technologies. Most of its current integration work is performed in Huntsville, Alabama. The company has had discussions with foreign countries in Europe and elsewhere about its integration technology.

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## **BlueHalo to Test C-UAS System on Marine Corps JLTV**



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – BlueHalo will be testing its LOCUST Laser Weapon System on a U.S. Marine Corps Joint Light Tactical

Vehicle (JLTV), the company's chief executive officer (CEO) said.

BlueHalo's primary focus is on defeating Group 1, 2, and 3 unmanned aerial systems (UAS), as well as counter-rocket and counter-mortar systems, said Jonathan Moneymaker, CEO of Blue Halo, in an interview with *Seapower*.

"As the foundation of P-HEL, BlueHalo's LOCUST Laser Weapon System (LWS) combines precision optical and laser hardware with advanced software, artificial intelligence (AI), and processing to enable and enhance the directed energy "kill chain," the company said in a release. "LOCUST LWS addresses the inherent need for mobility and quick deployment—tracking, identifying, and engaging of a wide variety of targets with its hard-kill high energy laser.

"We look at it from an integrated layered defense strategy," Moneymaker said. "Five years ago, we saw the evolution of drone warfare, today one of the fastest-evolving threat vectors. We wanted to engage that from a variety of modalities. We offer solutions and products that range from passive detection in our Skyview product to RF detect-and-defeat in our Titan product, our LOCUST Laser Weapon System, expanding into more global C2 [command and control], and starting to expand into our next-gen kinetic interceptor.

As of April 2024, BlueHalo had delivered two P-HEL systems to the U.S. Army, which has deployed them to unspecified locations.

"It is most certainly [deployed] in areas of conflict," Moneymaker said. "It's real, it's deployable, it's reliable, and frankly needed to bring service members home."

"We're very proud to be the first operationally deployed [HEL] system," Moneymaker said, noting that its system has surpassed operational 10,000 hours and that the customer having a system that "has finally reached a level of reliability that they've

been looking for as they've been fielding these capabilities."

He said that the next expansion would be a mobile high-energy laser weapon – on an infantry squad vehicle or a JLTV. The first mobile system was delivered in late March.

"The JLTV integration will be on the Marine Corps' JLTV, so we've been working with all of the services as it relates to deployment of LOCUST," he said. "We certainly have been having initial conversations with afloat Navy on how can we deploy these systems in the best configuration to counter some of the activity we're seeing in the Red Sea."

Moneymaker said he sees great potential in the "proven, ready [P-HEL] system" for naval use with its roll-on/roll-off capability.

The work for the Marine JLTV is through the Department of the Navy's Ground-Based Air Defense program, as well as through the Joint Capabilities Office and U.S. Army Rapid Capabilities and Critical Technologies Office (RCCTO).

Moneymaker said the LOCUST is very effective against a [drone] swarm, noting that the capability is part of the test criteria. The LOCUST uses Wizard artificial intelligence and machine learning for target identification and aimpoint recognition.

The P-HEL is powered by a generator or batteries, and the company is looking at how to tie the HEL into shipboard power.

The company's HEL is built primarily at the BlueHalo campus in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with work expanding to Huntsville, Alabama, and Rockville, Maryland. BlueHalo, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, employs 2,400 workers and is approaching revenue of \$1 billion annually. The company has other facilities in Dayton, Ohio, and Fort Lauderdale, Florida.