NAVCENT Commander: Difficult to Find Houthi Center of Gravity to Hold at Risk

An F/A-18E Super Hornet from Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 211 launches from the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) during flight operations in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, July 31, 2024. (U.S. Navy photo)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Houthi forces who have been attacking shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden lack a center of gravity, making for deterrence by U.S and partner forces difficult, the commander of U.S. naval forces in the Middle East said in a webinar.

Since November, a few weeks after the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas terrorists, the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, with cooperation from the navies of several allies and partners, has been engaged in protecting commercial shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden from attacks by ballistic missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, unmanned surface craft, and unmanned underwater vehicles launched by the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

“We have certainly degraded their capability,” said Vice Admiral George Wikoff, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, commander, U.S. 5th Fleet, and commander, Maritime Forces, speaking in an August 7 webinar sponsored by the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the U.S. Naval Institute and funded by HII.

“However, have we stopped them? No,” Wickoff said, noting Houthi recent attacks on shipping, one of which damaged a commercial ship. “But our mission remains to disrupt their ability and try to preserve some semblance of maritime order while we give an opportunity for policy to be developed against the Houthis.

“The challenge of the deterrence is, obviously, you have to have a center of gravity to hold at risk, and one thing we don’t really know that much about—and we find this through history—is it is very difficult to find a centralized center of gravity that we can hold at risk over time and use that as a potential point of deterrence,” he said. “So, to apply a classic deterrence policy in this particular scenario is a bit challenging.”

Wickoff said the continuing naval operations in the BAM (Bab-el-Mandeb) Strait region will act as a “shock absorber.”

He noted an almost 50% drop in commercial shipping through the BAM region in the September through December time frame, with a large drop until the beginning of February.

“The reflected the maritime industry’s ability to re-calibrate and re-initiate their routes,” he said. “It’s a couple-months process to take transit patterns that go through the Red Sea and re-route them around the Cape of Good Hope, etc.”

Since the beginning of February there has been a stabilization, with approximately 1,000 ships going through the BAM per month, compared with approximately 2,000 ships per month prior to the Israel-Hamas war, Wickoff noted.

“Right now, the idea is to continue to maintain that decision space, try to preserve where we are right now … to allow other levers of government, other levers of the international community to pressurize the Houthis to stop what they’re doing in the maritime,” the admiral said.

Career Advancement: MARAD Has a Story to Tell of Good Jobs, Work-Life Balance

Ann Phillips, administrator of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration. *Brett Davis*

The Maritime Administration has a good story to tell, and Ann Phillips, the retired Navy admiral who runs MARAD, is seeking

new ways to tell it.

“Not enough people know enough about the maritime ministry, and they don’t know what opportunities are there for them,” she said in an interview with Seapower at the Department of Transportation headquarters in Washington, D.C. “It’s good paying jobs, good paying union jobs, good paying jobs with a career advancement opportunity.”

MARAD, established in 1950, is the DOT agency responsible for the nation’s waterborne transportation system, including supporting the technical aspects of ships and shipping, port and vessel operations and national security-related maritime transportation. It maintains a fleet of cargo ships in reserve to provide sealift surge capability in wartime and in case of national emergencies. Phillips was sworn in as administrator on May 16, 2022, after serving nearly 31 years in the U.S. Navy as a surface warfare officer.

Like its military brethren, the maritime industry faces challenges, such as an aging ships in the Ready Reserve Force (part of the wartime surge capability) and a shortage of Mariners. A few years ago, MARAD faced a shortage of an estimated 1,800 Mariners to be able to activate the full Ready Reserve Force for six months, such as might be required in wartime.

“And along came COVID, which made it worse for sure,” Phillips said. “People left because they weren’t guaranteed replacements. They left because they were stuck overseas. They left because they didn’t want to get COVID or they didn’t want to get involved in all the challenges of operating under those circumstances.”

Things are looking brighter. Enrollment is trending up at the MARAD-funded and owned Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, as well as the six state academies in California, Michigan, Maine, Massachusetts, New York and Texas.

MARAD has a Student Incentive Program for the state academies, and Congress authorized doubling the incentive to $64,000 over four years, which mostly covers student expenses. Upon graduation, officers become part of the Navy's Strategic Sealift Officer Force, according to a description of the program published by the California State University Maritime Academy.

"This year we completely filled up all the slots for the Student Incentive Program for the first time in forever," Phillips said. There was a question as to whether upping the funding would matter, but "it would appear the answer is yes, it will make a difference," Phillips said with a laugh.

The academy at Kings Point has also been working hard on recruiting, she said, and has 300 students coming into the new freshman class, up from recent years.

"They have to get through the very arduous and rigorous curriculum at Kings Point. But, that's a success," Phillips said.

Improvements

MARAD has made several improvements lately to continue to attract and retain recruits, both in terms of hardware and policy and standards.

It has developed a program to designate some qualified training entities as Centers of Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education, a voluntary program intended to improve and support the workforce. As of earlier this year, 32 centers have been designated, including colleges and other facilities in 17 states and Guam.

"It's not just credentialing Mariners, it's also workforce development for maritime more broadly," Phillips said. The designation gives the centers "bragging rights" but for the industry it helps tap into a broader set of potential industry

members and provides “other opportunities to get the word about out about the maritime industry and what it can do for you.”

On the policy and standards side, MARAD has implemented EMBARC, which stands for Every Mariner Builds A Respectful Culture. The program was introduced by MARAD and the Merchant Marine Academy in December 2021. It lays out policies, programs, procedures and practices to help prevent and respond to sexual assault and harassment. The owners and operators of any vessel that embarks Merchant Marine Academy cadets on board must adopt the EMBARC standards, which include zero tolerance for sexual assault and harassment, eliminating barriers to reporting such incidents, supporting survivors, witnesses and bystanders who report incidents, among several others.

“Any vessel that is required to carry midshipmen, which is anybody receiving a payment under the maritime security program, tanker security, or cable fleet security program, plus our operators of Ready Reserve fleet vessels, all have to be a part of the program, or we may withhold their stipend, their payment,” Phillips said.

MARAD isn’t interested in withholding payments, but in ensuring the safety of Mariners at sea. Other ship operators that aren’t required to comply have been coming forward to do so, Phillips said, meaning a “vast percentage of the U.S.-flag fleet” is now EMBARC compliant.

The program was underway before she became administrator, Phillips noted, “but to be able to take it from a program to a law in a year is almost unheard of. And it has made a difference. It has made a difference. Talking to midshipmen – we have a Midshipman Advisory Council now, we were tasked to put together at Kings Point – and they talk to me about how they feel EMBARC matters and has made a difference to them. Some of them have said, I don’t know a maritime industry

without EMBARC.”

EMBARC and other quality-of-life improvements MARAD is making may help in recruiting women, who are not a large part of the commercial maritime industry to date. Phillips said 8% of the U.S. industry are women but just 2% globally.

Empire State, the first ship in the new National Security Multi-Mission Vessel program to build state-of-the-art training ships for the Merchant Marine academies. *Philly Shipyard*

“There are not many women in the industry, broadly. And so, that’s a shortfall. Fifty percent of our country’s population, roughly, are women, and yet 8% of the industry is women. We know this from the Navy, you’ve got to get to a critical mass. And once you do, everything becomes more straightforward because the novelty is gone, right?” Phillips said. “And so, we’re not yet there in maritime, but if we want to, if we want

to grow our Mariner pool [but] we're missing half the people in the country, then well, that's an obvious place to look. And if you want to make people feel safe at sea, that applies to everybody. That's just not women. That's Mariners broadly. So, all of that comes together in EMBARC."

NSMV

There is also a strong new hardware push, namely getting MARAD's new National Security Multi-Mission Vessels, or NSMVs, out to the training academies to replace the older National Defense Reserve Fleet ships now in use. A model of an NSMV sat in the middle of the table in the MARAD office where we spoke.

"New York has theirs. She just took off on her summer cruise yesterday morning," Phillips said on June 11 of the ship, Empire State. "Massachusetts will be getting theirs later this summer, Patriot State, and there's three more coming for the rest of the Maritime Academies. They are tremendous training vessels. It's much more modern than the ships that we've had. Although I cast no aspersions on steam vessels or the training vessels that the academies have been using, they have all served their purpose and served their country well … but this is a state-of-the-art vessel."

The NSMV represents more than just a shiny new ship, Phillips said, it's also a boon to recruitment and retention. Students at all six of the state academies and the Merchant Marine Academy will have access to the ships, which can also be mobilized by the federal government if they are needed to respond to disasters or for humanitarian assistance.

"It makes a difference with young recruits," she said. "They don't want to see steam." The new ships also are a way to boost quality of life, as they give cadets a flexibility their forebears didn't have.

"I think the, the work-life balance piece matters now more than ever," Phillips said. "And we've seen, when I visit our

Ready Reserve fleet ships – which of course are much older – and quality of life is, of course, challenged on an older vessel. But when I ask Mariners what they want, they want connectivity. They want internet, they want Starlink [satellite communications], they want be able to get on Instagram and talk to their kids. All these things that this can do, right?" she said, pointing to the NSMV model. "All these things that can do. But they want that. They want a gym. They want good quality food.

"They just want to know you care about them."

In addition to benefiting the training schools, the NSMV is helping bolster America's shipbuilding industry, which suffers from a worker shortage and backed-up schedules. The NSMV ships are being built by Philly Shipyard under a firm fixed-price contract from TOTE Services LLC, the program's vessel construction manager.

"Philly had 88 people on their rolls and now they have easily 1,400 people working on this," Phillips said. "And we've been a part of that the whole way. Our small shipyard grant program helped provide them opportunities to get their very modest amounts of money to get their apprenticeship training up and running."

The NSMV contract also enabled the shipyard to win other contracts, and now "they've got an order book and they're off to the races … that's an example of how that can be done. So, let's keep doing it," she said.

The Flexibility of Maritime

Merchant Marine Academy graduates also have unusual flexibility, in that they can commission with any of the military services if they choose.

"If you go to King's Point, you … graduate with your license, either third mate or third engineer, you graduate with a Naval

Reserve Commission or perhaps an active-duty commission. You can do that too. And of course, you have your degree. So, you have an engineering degree, a license, and a military commission. The world is your oyster. You can do all kinds of things with that. You're pretty much set for the rest of your life," Phillips said.

She recounted a story from an academy graduate whose father wanted her to go to the Naval Academy, as he was a Navy man.

"She said, no, daddy, I want to go to Kings Point, because then I can go to any of the services," Phillips said. "And he admitted to me, yeah, she was right. In the end, she did not accept a commission, but she works for the Navy and she's a port engineer for the Navy and handles naval vessels and using her King's Point experience."

Students can wait until their senior year to decide to join any of the other services.

"We've had Space Force commissions last year, I think two Coast Guard – lots of folks do that – but all services," she said, noting their Merchant Marine background is still useful even if they go into another service.

"If they're going to join the Navy with a Navy commission then they aren't sailing U.S. flag, right? But they still come with that background. And I can tell you from personal experience, that's a connection. … One of the ships I was on, the supply officer was a Kings Point graduate. She could stand a bridge watch any day of the week. She had no problem. All of that was learned here. She done it. She had experiential learning. It was easy for her."

Phillips said being a Merchant Mariner is simply a good job that not enough people know about, and most people don't understand how much of their daily goods are shipped over water.

“They don’t realize how much of their goods are moved commercially on rivers or in coastwise trade. They just don’t really think about it,” Phillips said. Also, “people don’t think of it as an industry. They don’t think of it as an industry where they can have a long-term career.”

And a flexible career at that. Phillips said during her Navy years, “when I came back from deployment, if I had duty the next day, it was like, oh, that’s nice. You got back from deployment. You’ve been gone for eight months. Don’t be late for watch. But when you’re off in the industry, you’re off. You can work six months a year. You can work nine months a year. It’s up to you. You can do it in pieces. It depends on who you’re sailing for and what your watch rotation is. But you get an excellent salary and you get excellent benefits … if you’re part of a labor union or with your company.”

That flexibility means “you can manage your life in a different way,” Phillips said. “And you can’t do that in the military.”

The Future

Asked where she would like the maritime industry to be in five years, Phillips said she’d like to see the construction of more sealift and tanker security vessels, expanded capacity at the Kings Point academy and a congressional appropriation for a grant program to help expand the work of the Centers of Excellence.

“The Center of Excellence program has a grant program authorized, but not appropriated,” Phillips said. “So, an appropriation there would help us work collaboratively across the selected centers of excellence institutions and give them the ability to build more capacity, to do more recruiting locally.”

One goal she described as aspirational would be a collaboration across all the maritime stakeholders to create

an advocacy program for Merchant Mariners to “get that word out there” about the good jobs the industry can provide.

The U.S. Marine Corps has had Super Bowl ads: Why not one for the Merchant Marine?

From the July-August issue of Seapower *magazine.*

IFS Enterprise Software Supports Shipbuilding, Aviation Management and Maintenance

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — A global Information technology company has expanded its products in recent years to provide tailored digital enterprise software to shipbuilders, ship repair yards, air arms, and airlines.

IFS is a global enterprise software company “working with some of the biggest, advanced shipbuilders in the world, across portfolio products,” said Matt Medley, IFS global industry director for Aerospace and Defense (A&D), during an interview with *Seapower*.

“We focus on asset-centric and service-centric industries that tend to be highly regulated like aerospace and defense, one of our six core industries,” Medley said. “Shipbuilding here gets a special focus because we actually have two units that work on shipbuilding: the “gray” ships for defense that fall under

Aerospace and Defense codes [and] the commercial – the "white ships" – under Engineering and Construction.

"Shipbuilding is always complex, and of course when you add the defense angle onto it, with working with the federal government with all of the contracting rules, [it] becomes incredibly complex," he said.

IFS, a privately held company based in Sweden, has more than 6,000 employees. Topline revenues topped $1 billion in 2022, and are set to go to $2 billion in 2025, said Medley, a former Air Force C-130 pilot. The company's North American headquarters is based in Chicago. The company's products are used by more than 10,000 customer organizations.

The IFS A&D sector is headquartered in Ottawa, Canada. Medley said the company has been growing by a mixture of internal growth and acquisition of other companies, with the A&D sector formed by the 2017 acquisition of a company called MXI, which had developed an asset-management software product called Maintenix used by airlines such as Southwest Airlines. IFS A&D sells its products directly to government, militaries, and defense contractors.

IFS is teamed with Lockheed Martin beginning in 2021 to provide digital transformation of U.S. Navy's maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) legacy systems into "a single, fully modernized and responsive logistics information system," according to a company release. IFS software enhances planning and execution of maintenance by using artificial intelligence, digital twins, and predictive analytics.

IFS is now in the limited-deployment phase for introducing its solutions for the U.S. Navy's aircraft fleet.

"The Navy decided to start with one of IFS's different applications for its first limited deployment," Medley said. "The final solution will be an IFS product. They wanted to crawl before you walk before you run, because Maintenix is

incredibly complex, and complex for a reason and that's why it's the Number One in the world in this market, because it has come very, very sophisticated guardrails to make sure that you don't do things incorrectly."

The company's core ERP (enterprise resource planning) IFS Cloud software is used by the shipbuilding and ship repair industry.

"The prime OEMs [original equipment manufacturers] and the prime contractors are our biggest customers," Medley said, noting that the list included the three General Dynamics shipbuilders – NASSCO, Bath Iron Works, and Electric Boat – and BAE Ship Repair, Vigor Shipyards, and Austal.

IFS's solutions for the ship industries include not only the core ERP functions such as accounting and management, but also materials management, subcontracting, project management, product development, engineering, procurement, constructed out-fit, operations, repair, and maintenance.

"We code these solution sets across the breadth of the life cycle of the large asset – everything from design all the way out to sea trials and commissioning, integrating your operations out the entire value chain, forward and backward, and then internally as well with all of your processes all the way down to the shop floor," Medley said.

Medley said that the sale of a product is the beginning of a relationship, not the end, noting that it's never "a sale and walk away."

Like most software companies, IFS uses an "evergreen model" to provide subscription-based ongoing updated software to its customers. The company issues major updates twice per year, in the spring and the fall.

Undeterred: Baltimore Coast Guard Yard Work Continues Despite Bridge Collapse

U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Diligence (WMEC 616) is hoisted on blocks while in dry dock, March 21, 2024, at the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore, Maryland. Diligence conducted a two-month living marine resources patrol in the Gulf of Mexico and

received a maintenance availability. *U.S. Coast Guard | Lt. Cmdr. Brian Waller*

On March 26, a container ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge, causing it to collapse. The catastrophe halted marine traffic to and from the Port of Baltimore, one of the busiest ports in the United States, for nearly two months.

However, the U.S. Coast Guard's ongoing efforts to complete midlife maintenance on its fleet of seagoing buoy tenders at the Coast Guard Yard were undeterred.

The U.S. Coast Guard Yard: A Baltimore Harbor Fixture

The U.S. Coast Guard Yard has built, repaired and maintained vessels in Curtis Bay, just south of Baltimore Harbor, since 1899. Because it is the USCG's primary facility for major repairs, vessels from around the globe journey to the yard when it's time for service.

Strategic preventative maintenance helps improve the reliability of Coast Guard vessels, control maintenance costs and reduce downtime. The Coast Guard's In-Service Vessel Sustainment (ISVS) evaluates and schedules the major maintenance and upgrades necessary for its vessels to reach or extend their service lives. According to ISVS, each Juniper-class cutter must head to the yard in Baltimore harbor about halfway through its expected lifetime for major maintenance.

Next Generation of Buoy Tenders

The Juniper-class cutters, which took to the seas in the late 1990s and early 2000s, are the second generation of purpose-built Coast Guard seagoing buoy tenders. The 16 225-foot cutters replaced a fleet of 180-foot class cutters, built from 1942 to 1944, which served for more than 50 years. The last of the 180s, the Acacia, was decommissioned in June 2006.

Juniper-class buoy tenders are multi-mission platforms that help protect American shipping interests worldwide. They have

better speed, communications, navigation and maneuverability than their predecessors. Dynamic Positioning allows them to maintain position within a 33-foot circle in winds of up to 30 knots (35 mph) and waves of up to eight feet.

These nimble, adaptable craft handle law enforcement, oil spill recovery, search and rescue, homeland security, ice-breaking operations and other marine missions. They are also instrumental in the U.S. Coast Guard's participation in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, which oversees the conservation and management of migratory fish stocks.

The cutters also enable missions like Operation Blue Pacific, the latest wave of bilateral Shiprider agreements that partner the Coast Guard with myriad nations in Oceania to combat illegal fishing, human trafficking and other international problems.

Service to the Fleet

The standard midlife maintenance package includes upgrading technology, replacing worn decking, making safety upgrades and updating the sewage system to reduce environmental impact. Maintenance professionals at the yard remove obsolete, unsupportable or maintenance-intensive equipment, making updates to the buoy crane, controllable pitch propellers, boat davits and HVAC systems. They also perform comprehensive system-wide checks and fix any issues they uncover.

The first of the Juniper-class cutters began its midlife maintenance in 2017; the last, the Hollyhock, should finish this year. The yard professionals have streamlined the process, which usually takes about a year. Once a vessel is finished, it is relaunched and tested in the harbor. Upon passing inspections, it's ready to return home, fully prepared for another two decades or more of service.

Around the World in 80 Days

Taking a vessel to the Coast Guard Yard isn't like dropping your car off at the local dealership – most of the Juniper-class cutters are based many thousands of miles from Baltimore. The voyage itself can take weeks. However, because the mission is primarily to transport the vessel, there are usually some unexpected perks along the way.

As the old saying goes, Sailors go to sea to see the world. Voyages to the yard allow Coast Guardsmen to sail outside their base areas and experience the world beyond their shores. A maintenance trip can include crossing the equator, the tropic of Cancer or Capricorn or the international date line; many include a journey through the Panama Canal.

It can also allow the crew to enjoy some well-deserved liberty time ashore at desirable vacation destinations. For example, the voyage from Hawaii to the Coast Guard Yard takes at least six weeks. Port calls along the way can include stops in Puerto Vallarta, Cozumel and Key West.

Sometimes, these stops include Coast Guard business, such as picking up ammunition or dropping off cargo. Other port calls simply involve restocking supplies and refueling. Either way, they offer a respite from Coast Guardsmen's usual day-to-day operations and a chance to see some of the world's most beautiful coastal towns.

Overcoming Obstacles, Responding to Challenges

Trips to the yard are often delayed for a myriad of reasons, like all long sea voyages. Storms, fog and other weather issues can necessitate altering a vessel's course or port call. Lack of pier space is a recurring theme because ports usually prioritize Coast Guard vessels below profitable cruise liners and other commercial ships.

A vessel may divert to a nearby port if it has enough food and fuel to change its course. Otherwise, it can wait at anchor for hours or even days to obtain pier space. Fortunately, the

Coast Guard excels at changing tack and responding to unexpected delays. Sometimes, thinking outside the hull leads to clever solutions.

Finding himself lacking pier space outside of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, one enterprising captain used the local tourist amenities to make the best of the delay. After dropping anchor, she called a water taxi to pick up the crew. They spent a day ashore enjoying the town's historic beauty and culinary delights rather than impatiently waiting for the traffic to clear.

Coast Guard civilian employees remove the shaft of the Coast Guard Cutter Hollyhock, a 225-foot seagoing buoy tender home-ported in Port Huron, Mich., during a dry dock at the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore, Aug. 1, 2013. The Yard is the service's sole shipbuilding and major repair facility, and an essential part of the Coast Guard's core industrial base and fleet support operations. U.S. Coast Guard | Petty Officer 2nd Class David R. Marin

Reached the Yard, Now What?

Once the vessel arrives at the yard, its crew has a new mission: preparing it for dry dock maintenance. Everything onboard must be removed, inventoried and transferred to Conex shipping containers or sent to the dumpster. Some items remain in storage at the yard while the hull is serviced in dry dock, while others are sent back home with the crew.

Lieutenant Commander Jessica McCollum, who has shepherded several cutters to the yard for their midlife service, summarized the goal of this process: “Pretend like it’s a toy ship. Take it in your hands, turn it upside down and shake it. If nothing falls out, it’s ready for the yard.” When she took the USCGC Walnut up for service in 2020, it took about three weeks to finish this offloading process.

Once the commanding officer signs over the hull, the crew generally transfers to the vessel finishing its maintenance. If it’s not ready, or there are other delays, they may have to cool their heels in the harbor. Many things can delay the process of completing midlife maintenance, most of which are far more mundane than the bridge disaster.

The seasoned professionals at the Coast Guard Yard don’t release a vessel until they’re satisfied it is shipshape and Bristol fashion. Often, their scrupulous inspection uncovers other issues; a ship doesn’t sail until these are fixed, tested and cleared. Such was the case with the USCGC Hickory, which was scheduled to leave the harbor at the time of the Key Bridge collapse but wound up delayed due to additional maintenance needs.

Flexibility, Versatility and Readiness

During a delay, the crew may spend weeks or months in Baltimore performing other duties, take personal leave or return to their home post, depending on their job. After the bridge collapsed, some Coast Guardsmen were assigned temporary duty cleaning up the mess, ensuring safety and enforcing

security in the harbor. Coasties are often tasked with search and rescue operations and responding to maritime disasters, as they are often the first responders on the scene.

Surprisingly, the extended closure of Baltimore Harbor didn't hamstring the Coast Guard cutters like it did commercial shippers or larger military vessels. This is partly because these vessels and their crews are incredibly adaptable. The port opened an auxiliary channel quickly and the Coast Guard quickly pivoted, enabling their mission to continue.

As McCollum prepares to collect the Hollyhock, the last cutter to complete midlife service, she will set sail with an entirely new crew. Just like after a new vessel is commissioned, these Coast Guardsmen must quickly learn to work well together as a team and respond to adversity during the weeks-long voyage home. Fortunately, as advertised, the U.S. Coast Guard is Semper Paratus: Always Ready. .

From the July/August issue of Seapower magazine. Jamie L. Pfeiffer practiced in Illinois, Oregon and Washington states before retiring from active law practice. She is currently based in Chicago.

New Contract Award to Help Train Fleet to Counter Electronic Warfare

The U.S. Navy awarded the Phoenix Air Group Inc. a contract for Contracted Air Services to simulate airborne electronic warfare threats to help train shipboard personnel and squadrons. The contract includes use of 10 contractor-owned and operated aircraft, such as the Learjet 36 (pictured). (Photo courtesy of Phoenix Air Group Inc.)
Jul 18, 2024

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The U.S. Navy awarded the Phoenix Air Group Inc. a $165 million contract June 28 for Contracted Air Services (CAS) flight hours to simulate a variety of airborne electronic warfare (EW) threats to train, test and evaluate shipboard personnel and aircraft squadron weapon systems operators and aircrew.

“Fleet training against airborne electronic attack forces is a priority and a critical path to achieving electromagnetic spectrum superiority,” said Capt. Greg Sutton, Adversary and Specialized Aircraft Program Office (PMA-226) Program Manager. “The CAS EW jet services contract provides an ability to simulate both the threat and overall spectrum density of the

current and future high-end fight of which is essential to effective aircrew training.”

The contract includes use of 10 contractor-owned and operated aircraft that can support up to 5,000 flight hours of EW jet capabilities per year for fleet scheduling on the East and West Coasts. They can be used in a variety of venues, from basic “schoolhouse” air intercept control training, large multinational exercises, and small, single unit training exercises, including target/banner tow missions supporting the Navy, Department of Defense (DOD) and non-DOD agencies.

“CAS affordably fills critical and mandatory training requirements, mitigating readiness gaps and capability divestments,” said PMA-226 CAS EW Integrated Product Team Lead Matt Rhodes. “It provides fleet air defense training to include evaluation of evolving threats via uniquely modified aircraft configured as required to simulate Fleet Forces Command identified hostile EW near peer threats for air-to-air and air-to-surface training events.”

The EW jets contract is a firm-fixed-price, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract with work scheduled to begin this August and completed in August 2029.

Chief of Naval Operations Hosts Futures Game at U.S. Naval War College

From CNO Public Affairs, July 18, 2024

Newport, R.I. – Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Lisa Franchetti hosted the CNO Futures Game at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, July 16-17.

Franchetti emphasized the need for leaders across the Joint Force to think, act, and operate differently, and seek ways to integrate conventional capability with hybrid, unmanned, and disruptive technologies, because tomorrow's battlefield will be incredibly challenging and complex.

"It is our duty to plan for the future and ensure our Fleet is always ready to preserve the peace, respond in crisis, and win decisively in war," said Franchetti. "The Navy is never going to fight alone. We will work hand-in-hand with our Joint teammates and Allies and partners. To that end, I challenge you to have an open mind and think about the capabilities, people, and broader warfighting ecosystem across the Joint Force that we're going to need to effectively carry out our

missions.”

Futures Game is organized by the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Warfighting Development Vice Adm. Dan Dwyer.

“The Navy uses events like the CNO Futures Game as part of our ongoing analytic efforts to shape and inform naval strategy, analysis, operational concepts, and warfighting requirements,” said Dwyer. “By examining potential future states, we can characterize the operational problems the Navy will face today and tomorrow as well as what roles the Navy may be asked to perform in support of our national security. Events like the CNO Futures Game support this process and allow us to better characterize future challenges.”

Robust wargaming and analysis underpin Navy efforts by providing analytic rigor and a comprehensive examination of strategic and operational concepts to support CNO decision making on the most consequential issues facing the Navy.

“We know our enduring functions: sea control, power projection, deterrence, maritime security, and sealift, but it is our ability to test alternative concepts, reinvigorate analysis, and explore future force structure options that will enable us to field a force capable of responding to all threats—anywhere and anytime,” said Franchetti.

As a critical component of the Navy’s Analytic Master Plan (AMP), the U.S. Naval War College (NWC) is designated by the CNO as the Navy’s pillar lead for wargaming. NWC spearheads efforts to integrate all research activities within the naval wargaming enterprise and facilitates the promulgation and integration of research findings across the naval analytic community.

Wargaming has been integral to NWC since 1887. While the tools and technology used in simulations have evolved over the past century, the value of wargaming in maritime leadership development remains strong. Today, NWC conducts more than 50

gaming events per year, ranging in variety from complex, multi-sided computer-assisted games to simple, single-sided seminar games.
This was Franchetti's first time hosting the Futures Game as CNO. She hosted the Futures Game in 2023 as Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

Parsons Offers Counter-UAS Technology to Protect Marine Corps Installations

– Drone Dome: Fast-Deployed Configuration. Credit: Parsons
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps is seeking counter-unmanned aerial systems technology to protect its installations. One of the companies bidding to be the provider is Parsons, in partnership with Rafael Systems Global

Sustainment LLC (RSGS).

Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (CUAS) is a sector of defense technology that has been of increasing focus over the last decade and has become even more to with the extensive use of UAS in the Ukraine War, the Israel-Hamas War, and the Houthi drone attacks against naval and commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

The need to provide force protection extends not only to deployed forces but to their installations.

The Marine Corps solicited proposals for "installation counter-small UAS," said Christopher Hamilton, vice president for innovative technology solutions at Parsons, in an interview with Seapower. "They're looking to protect Marine Corps facilities and infrastructure around the world from the small UAS threat, primarily Group 1and Group 2 UAS, but some Group 3 potentially as well. That's the lower half of the UAS spectrum, but those drones, as we've seen, can do quite a bit of damage if configured in the right way and with explosives, or just wreak havoc in terms of security responses to drones, as we've seen with sporting events over the past year or so."

Parsons, in its proposal, is the prime solutions provider, delivering overall program management, sustainment, and systems integration, while RSGS is providing the Rafael Drone Dome System, a Parsons spokesman said.

The Marine Corps requirement is focused on its permanent installations in the United States and overseas, Hamilton said, noting that Parsons has "years and years of experience of developing, integrating, and deploying critical infrastructure protection systems, and over the past few years, CUAS has become really the most critical of those infrastructure protection components.

He said the Marine Corps requirement for infrastructure protection played to the strengths of Parsons, which has been

“deploying CUAS systems for other clients around the world to do very similar functions.”

Parsons’ analysis of the Marine Corps requirement came down to providing two capabilities: the most effective system and the most available system – 100% of the time.

The Drone Dome system would be tailored specifically for the Marine Corps. Hamilton said it was the most battle-proven system and has been deployed in several different theaters with great success in defeating threats.

In addition, Hamilton said that Parsons “has the knowledge and experience to manage a global logistics enterprise, where you’re looking to maintain near 100% availability of systems. We do that today.”

The Drone Dome system includes a command-and-control system, RF sensors, radars, and kinetic and non-kinetic effectors that are options. The Marine Corps requires a modular open systems approach to allow the system to adapt to evolving threats. It will make maximum use of artificial intelligence.

“It’s clear that the Marine Corps wants a system that evolves over time,” Hamilton said.

Parsons, based in Chantilly, Virginia, has a center of excellence for CUAS at Summit Point, West Virginia, where it assesses CUAS threats.

Parsons delivered its proposal to the Marine Corps in April. A single contract award in the competition is expected this summer. The program is to have a duration of at least 10 years.

USS George Washington Arrives in San Diego for Japan Carrier Swap

NAVAL AIR STATION NORTH ISLAND (July 10, 2024) – Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73) arrives at Naval Air Station North Island, California, July 10, 2024. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Class Aron Montano)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73) arrived at Naval Air Station North Island, California, July 10, 2024, after its "round-the horn" voyage from Norfolk, Virginia, around Cape Horn to the Pacific Ocean. The carrier soon will succeed USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) as the forward-deployed U.S. Naval Forces Japan aircraft carrier at Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan.

The George Washington departed Norfolk on April 25, 2024, and

completed a series of U.S. Southern Command exercises with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay, and conducted port visits planned for Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Embarked in the George Washington were the Carrier Strike Group 10 staff and aircraft and personnel of Carrier Air Wing Seven (CVW-7).

At North Island, the George Washington will embark Carrier Air Wing Five (CVW-5) from USS Ronald Reagan and replace that carrier as the one forward-deployed to the U.S. Seventh Fleet.

The George Washington was the forward-deployed carrier based in Japan from 2008 until 2015, when it was replaced in Japan by the Ronald Reagan. In 2017, the George Washington entered a Refueling and Complex Overhaul at the Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News Shipbuilding yard in Virginia, an evolution that took six years, including the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. The George Washington's nuclear propulsion plant is fueled to run another 25 years.

Marine Corps Commandant Sheds Light on Reaper UAV Capabilities

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps' MQ-9A ER [extended-range] Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are capable of carrying an electronic warfare pod that renders the UAVs "mostly undetectable" to enemy radars, a senior Marine Corps official said.

General Eric M. Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps, speaking July 2 at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank, discussing the capabilities of a Marine littoral regiment and the forces supporting them – including the Reaper UAVs – pointed out the sensing mission of the regiments in the first island chain in the Pacific.

"What they bring with them is a sensing and making sense capability;" Smith said. "Some of the programs are classified. Some of the pods that go on our MQ-9s are classified. It's called a T-SOAR pod, and what it does is it can mimic things that are sent to it that it detects, turn it around, and send it back so that it becomes a black hole. It becomes mostly undetectable."

"Without crossing classification levels, it has the ability to somewhat disappear off of an enemy radar," he said later in

the webinar, in response to a reporter's question. "I'll just leave it at that."

Although not clear, the commandant may have been referring to the Scalable Open Architecture Reconnaissance (SOAR) pod, which L3Harris describes as a "groundbreaking, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) solution from L3Harris Technologies and General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI). SOAR integrates L3Harris' industry leading full-band signals intelligence (SIGINT) capability with a medium altitude long-endurance GA-ASI Predator B wing-mounted pod to offer unparalleled options for warfighters in the ISR domain. SOAR provides significant mission expansion for Predator B operations against modern threats in new operating domains and a new dimension for remotely piloted aircraft systems."

The builder of the SOAR pod and the MQ-9, GA-ASI, says on its website that the SOAR pod "provides long-range detection, identification, and location of radar and communication signals of interest. SOAR enables MQ-9 or other aircraft operators to provide standoff surveillance – seeing threats before threats can see the aircraft – and communicate actionable intelligence. The system leverages significant U.S. government technology investments in strategic intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems to provide a low-cost, widely deployable capability for a variety of National Security Council and Combatant Command signals intelligence collection objectives."

GA-ASI lists key benefits of the 634-pound SOAR pod as:

- Enables long-range persistent surveillance of enemy communications and radar emitters
- Enables cooperative collection and target exploitation capabilities

- Features real time collection and onboard storage for post-mission analysis

- Allows for true multi-intelligence target identification and tracking in real time

---

Iron Mountain Anticipates Increase in Work for the Navy Under GPO Contract

ARLINGTON, Va. – An information technology company expects its business with the U.S Department of the Navy to increase as task orders come under a government contract from the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) for document scanning and conversion services.

In late April, the GPO awarded Iron Mountain a contract “to

provide off-site document conversion and scanning services for the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)" the GPO announcement said. "The contract covers a range of services including document preparation, scanning, optical character recognition (OCR), indexing, and output to various media. The estimated value of the contract is not specified, but it indicates 15-25 orders per year, with 5-10 being multi-year efforts, and scanning requirements ranging from 1,000 to 9,000,000 images per order. The contract term is from April 26, 2024, through February 28, 2025, with up to four 12-month option periods."

"Currently, with the Navy, we are kind of in our infancy in joining and partnering with them," said Melissa Carson, general manager of Iron Mountain's Government Solutions Group. "The thing we have with them is the traditional Iron Mountain business, records information management. We have a BPA [blanket purchase agreement] with them, a master agreement with them [the Navy's records office], to help them with all their record storage needs across the whole naval installation.

Iron Mountain provides records management and storage services to federal, state, and local governments as well as public education institutions. The company, with corporate headquarters in Nashua, New Hampshire, maintains 1,400 sites across the world in 110 countries. The company's Government Solutions Group is based in Herndon, Virginia.

Carson said the company also has partnered with some of the system integrators and has acquired some other companies.

"We actually have made a couple of acquisitions here in the last couple of years and really have a robust solution that takes all this e-waste within that ecosystem and not only just takes it off their hands securely," she said. "We've got proprietary software that does the data erasure that meets DoD standards off of hard drives, but also with the recent acquisition of Regency, we actually now have a goal of

recycling components. We take it down to bare metals and are able to actually only put 8% in the landfill."

Iron Mountain digitized all of the Veterans Administration's personnel files, part of which involved digitization of a million boxes of records.

Iron Mountain expects task orders from the Navy similar to its work for the Veterans Administration.

"Iron Mountain can do intelligent document processing with Insight AI [artificial intelligence], with one touch, create the image, classify it for records storage and retention, along with the metadata off of it," Carson said, noting that her company can pass the data and images back to the agency—the usual scenario—or provide off-site storage.

"We now with this Insight tool, have used the power of AI and machine learning models with natural language models behind it," she said. "We're now able to do millions of documents a month with 30% less labor, equipment, and facilities. We've been able to absolutely increase that capability and throughput so that one is lower priced – because it was also [prohibitively] expensive for many of these agencies to even start with that – so it's not only saved that but it's also eight times faster. So that's why we're able to digitize millions [of records] in a month."

Carson pointed to one example: "For a large financial agency in the government we were able to do a billion images in less than a year at 96% accuracy of pulling data off of these records. The old-fashioned way would have taken 30 years by 800 people.

"Many agencies are finally getting policy changes so that once it is digitized, they do not have to hold on to that paper record," she said. "Iron Mountain is full-life cycle: "We take it and shred it and we put all of that paper back into the paper industry. We are one of their biggest suppliers to be

able to trade with recycled paper.”

The tedious task of scanning documents has led to improvements in scanning technology.

“We’ve been very influential with the scanning equipment suppliers,” Carson said. “We’ve forced them to innovate, too, so there is a particular machine that we’re actually using for the IRS [Internal Revenue Service]. We are actually taking their paper tax returns – so about nine million people still file with paper – and they come in crumpled, with coffee stains and all that. With this new scanning technology, we don’t need to do all of that repair anymore. Literally, it is sensitive enough that you scan it through even with a tear, even with coffee stains, even rumpled, and it looks like a perfectly good piece of paper.”

Iron Mountain even has infrared scanners for fragile old onion-skin paper that never touches the paper.

The company is working to make data storage technology more robust, and “future-proof,” to avoid obsolescence overtaking the technology and ensuring that digital records are accessible and readable. The company also maintains an inventory of obsolete technology in order to read older analog and digital records.