CNO Holds Fast on Ship Decommissionings, Fleet Readiness

Sailors assigned to the USS Monterey (CG 61) man the rails during its decommissioning ceremony. Monterey was commissioned on June 16, 1990, and was a U.S. Navy warship for 32 years. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Rodrigo Caldas*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy's top officer held fast when discussing the controversial subject of decommissioning older ships in order to sustain a ready, relevant fleet in a discussion at an event in Washington.

"For our last four budget cycles, readiness has been our number one priority, followed by modernization of the fleet that we have today – 70% of which we'll have a decade from now – and, finally, capacity at an affordable rate," said Chief of

Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Michael Gilday, speaking Oct. 19 at the Atlantic Council. “My approach has been, commensurate with my responsibilities, to field the most lethal force we can now and into the future.”

Gilday said that fielding a lethal force involves maintaining ships; “not taking maintenance holidays – as sometimes we we’ve been prone to do in the past, when we made capacity king; to ensure that our supply storerooms are filled with the proper parts so that our ships are self-sustaining at sea; to ensure that our magazines are actually filled with weapons.”

Referring to the issue of capacity, Gilday said that “when we make decisions on which ships we’re going to decommission, the entering argument is the size of the fleet that we can afford.”

Citing the current high monetary inflation, the CNO noted that 60% of the Navy’s budget rises at a rate above inflation and has to be taken into account.

“Maintaining the fleet we have is extremely expensive,” he said.

Gilday said the Navy looks at stratifying lethality across its platforms, ranking those platforms from 1 to 20, helping to inform decisions about which ships to decommission.

“It gets back to what we can afford,” he said.

The CNO noted that some ships “haven’t seen a dry dock since 2000” and that some ships have 125 departures from specifications.

One example he cited was an engineering directive not to put a tugboat against one side of the ship because it could result in a hole puncture in the ship because the steel hull is too thin.

The CNO said that some Ticonderoga-class guided-missile

cruisers are three years behind in completing maintenance at costs of $80 million or more, and with a weapon system that is not going to be upgraded in time “to face the threat that the Chinese pose.”

Gilday said that “when it comes down to making hard decisions on where to put your next dollar, those are decisions that need to be made and debated within the Pentagon.”

The CNO pointed out that a few ships account for most of the delay days in maintenance.

The Navy has reduced maintenance delay days from 7,700 as of January down to a little over 3,000 today. Between 40% and 50% of the delay days can be attributed to six or seven ships that the Navy would like to decommission.

“They are old and not fit to fight against the current threat,” he said. “They were designed in the 1970s for a fight of a bygone age, but we’re still holding onto them.”

U.S. Marine Corps successfully tests Rafael’s TAMIR IRON DOME Interceptor

U.S. Marines at the White Sands facility in New Mexico test a new prototype system for Medium Range Intercept Capability using TAMIR IRON DOME interceptors. *Spokesperson Department at the Israeli Ministry of Defense*

HAIFA, Israel – The U.S. Marine Corps' latest live fire test of the TAMIR IRON DOME culminates a series of three trials carried out over the past year, and for the third time the system successfully intercepted a wide variety of targets, Rafael said in an Oct. 1 release. In this latest test, the ability to continuously launch TAMIR IRON DOME interceptors from a mobile launcher developed by the Marines was also tested.

The series of tests were conducted by the Marines at the White Sands facility in New Mexico as part of the development program to test a new prototype system for Medium Range Intercept Capability (MRIC – Medium Range Intercept Capability).

"The three tests that took place this year proved that the performance of the MRIC system with IRON DOME interceptors is

good and provides a dedicated launcher solution for the Marines," said Don Kelly, project manager in the Air Defense Department (GBAD) of the Marine Corps' Land Directorate (PEO Land Systems) at the end of the test.

"Once again, RAFAEL's systems have proven that they are able to integrate into existing systems and create synergy between systems, providing optimal performance," said Executive Vice President and Head of the Air and Missile Defense Directorate at RAFAEL Brigadier General (Ret.) Pini Yungman. "RAFAEL's advanced systems are developed with an "open architecture" allowing seamless integration with other systems. In the latest test conducted by the Marines, a successful combination of the TAMIR interceptor launched from a new launcher developed under the leadership of the Marines, combined with the Marines' radar system and the battle management system, which are systems developed by American industries, was demonstrated."

Cutter Alert Returns to Astoria Following 68-DayDrug Interdiction Patrol

The Coast Guard Cutter Alert (WMEC 630) conducts an engagement coincidental to operations with members of the Guatemalan Navy August 23, 2022, five miles south of Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

ASTORIA, Ore. – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Alert (WMEC 630) crew returned to their homeport Saturday Oct. 8, following a 68-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in an Oct. 19 release.

The crew steamed over 13,700 nautical miles ranging from Oregon to Columbia and conducted counter-drug missions, search-and-rescue operations and international law enforcement training engagements.

While in theater, Alert's crew boarded three Costa Rican fishing vessels and successfully removed 1,440 pounds of marijuana valued at $1.4 million. Furthermore, during the boarding of the fishing vessel Mujer Gitana, Alert's crew detected and articulated numerous factors of reasonable suspicion allowing Costa Rica to issue a return to port order.

Costa Rican Law Enforcement officials searched the vessel and located a hidden compartment under a reversible steel hydraulic door system, a smuggling technique that reportedly has never been seen before on a Costa Rican vessel. The search resulted in the seizure of 729 kilograms of cocaine worth $21.1 million, and the apprehension of seven detainees by one of our top-priority partner nations.

Additionally, the Alert crew led a multinational training engagement with the Guatemalan Navy, conducted three joint boardings with the Costa Rican Coast Guard, and responded to one search and rescue case involving an American fisherman off the coast of Baja California.

The embarked helicopter aircrew flew more than 50 hours over 16 days and searched thousands of miles over the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

The ship also freed two sea turtles that were found entangled in fishing nets left drifting upon the ocean.

“I’m extremely proud of the crew’s dedication, hard work, and sustained high levels of performance over the last two months,” said Cmdr. Matthew R. Kolodica, Alert’s commanding officer. “The Alert and crew truly epitomize the Coast Guard’s motto ‘Semper Paratus’ – ‘Always Ready’ and had a direct positive impact on stemming the flow of illicit narcotics to America, and we helped counter its destabilizing effects in Central and South America. As each day passes, the crew continues to inspire me; I’m truly honored to lead such an outstanding crew.”

Commissioned in 1969, Alert is one of three 210-foot medium-endurance cutters stationed on the West Coast. With a crew of 75, they regularly perform counter-drug, migrant interdiction, search and rescue and fisheries law enforcement missions throughout the Northern and Eastern Pacific Ocean.

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

Rear Adm. Michael A. Wettlaufer, commander of Military Sealift Command, answers questions from the audience after speaking about the needs of the organization at the Navy League hosted Special Topic Breakfast, Oct. 18, sponsored by General Dynamics. *NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES / James Peterson*

ARLINGTON, VA – Military Sealift Command (MSC) continues to face a shortage of both ships and sailors, and it will take a

“collective effort” from government and industry to turn the tide, Rear Adm. Michael Wettlaufer, commander of MSC, said here during an event hosted by the Navy League of the United States.

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

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

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

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

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

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

To help fix this issue, MSC will seek to get mariners to sea through a vigorous recruiting campaign, incentives and

training. He also said MSC will be more aggressive in preventing sexual assault. Regardless, it will take a “collective effort” between government and industry to deal with this ongoing issue, the rear admiral said.

T-45 Fleet on Safety Pause

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

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

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

pilots or aircraft to unnecessary risk.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On Oct. 13, 2022, at approximately 7:45 p.m. PST, an Amphibious Combat Vehicle assigned to Assault Amphibian School was conducting normal scheduled training operations when it rolled over in the surf zone after a reported mechanical malfunction near Camp Pendleton, California. Of the three crew members inside the vehicle, none sustained injuries or required medical attention. The incident is currently under investigation.

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

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

Navy Demos Wide Range of VTOL Systems for Future Operations

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

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

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

In partnership with the University of Maryland UAS Test Site, PMA-263's Family of Small UAS (FoSUAS) team evaluated each system against a standard test card to determine its suitability for expeditionary combat support. In addition to basic measurements like length, height, weight and pack-up size, performance data was collected for ease of operation, range, endurance, audibility, electro-optical and infrared imagery quality and other unique capabilities of each system.

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

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

requirements.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOUTH CHINA SEA – Maritime forces from Canada, Japan and the United States concluded exercises in the South China Sea in

support of Royal Australian Navy forces, Oct. 17, Commander, Task Force 71/Destroyer Squadron 15 Public Affairs said in a release.

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

This exercise builds on the previous bilateral and trilateral exercises from recent months conducted in the South China Sea. Throughout the naval exercises, participants trained together and conducted integrated operations designed to increase the allies' collective ability to maintain maritime security and readiness to respond to any regional contingency. Integrated events included surface, subsurface and air defense exercises that included Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) from several participating nations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“HMCS Winnipeg’s deployment in the Indo-Pacific on Operation PROJECTION is aimed at conducting forward naval presence operations in the region as well as participating in cooperative deployments and naval exercises with allied and partner nations,” said Commander Annick Fortin, commanding officer of HMCS Winnipeg. “These exercises are an excellent example as they demonstrate our interoperability with other navies and provides opportunities to learn as well as prove our abilities to work seamlessly together. It is a prime example of our motto ‘one with the strength of many;’ working together, we are stronger.”

Vice Adm. Thomas: Triton UAV’s ‘Tremendous Endurance’ Benefits Fleet

A U.S. Navy MQ-4C Triton assigned to Unmanned Patrol Squadron (VUP) 19 prepares to take off from the flightline at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Iwakuni, Japan, Oct. 5, 2022. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. David Getz*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The commander of the Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet said the MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle currently deployed in the Western Pacific is proving to be a benefitting to his fleet's operations.

"Any sensor is goodness in my fleet," said Vice Adm. Karl Thomas, commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, speaking Oct. 14 at the U.S. Naval Institute in Annapolis, Maryland, in a Maritime Security Dialogue, a series conducted by the U.S. Naval Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies and sponsored by HII. "It's a huge AOR [area of responsibility] and to have something that has that kind of legs [range] and that persistence really helps."

"We've obviously been operating in theater with Triton for quite some time," Thomas said. "We're getting close to the IOC

[Initial Operational Capability] level with Triton.

“We’re going to use Triton as a replacement for some of our surveillance aircraft,” he said. “So, the biggest benefit it brings clearly is its tremendous endurance. We’ve operated it out of Guam routinely. We’ve started to operate it out of various places in Japan, trying to not only make sure we have numerous places to take-off and land.”

The admiral said the fleet is working to build up an orbit “to learn our way through some of the capabilities that an EP-3 [Aries II Orion electronic reconnaissance aircraft] might bring back. It will be a different way of processing the information than we do with our EP-3s, so we’re working as a Navy to see how we seamlessly transition.”