Test Squadrons Prove ATAWS Ready for Legacy Hornet Pilots

This F/A-18D was used for ATAWS testing. (U.S. Navy)

Release From Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division

CHINA LAKE, Calif. – An F/A-18 Hornet raced low across the China Lake desert during a simulated terrain collision. Seconds later, the jet pulled up and climbed to safety. The recovery proved the Automatic Terrain Awareness and Warning System could take over when a pilot no longer has time to respond.

The recovery was part of a joint test program by the "Dust Devils" of Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 31 at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, in partnership with the "Salty Dogs" of VX-23 at Naval Air Station Patuxent River,

Maryland.

Controlled Flight Into Terrain has long been one of tactical aviation's most unforgiving hazards. It occurs when a fully functional aircraft is unintentionally flown into the ground.

Between 2010 and 2016, the Navy and Marine Corps lost several F/A-18 Hornets in training and operational mishaps. Each loss reinforced the need for an automatic safeguard that could save aircrew and aircraft when human limits are reached.

The Marine Corps recognized that need after seeing the Air Force's Automatic Ground Collision Avoidance System save multiple F-16 pilots. Marine aviators and flight test teams pushed for a similar capability in the F/A-18A–D, launching development under the Navy's program office for the aircraft, PMA-265, to protect pilots and extend the life of a platform no longer in production.

"The Marine Corps F/A-18A–D legacy Hornet community was the driving force behind ATAWS," said Lt. Col. Timothy Burchett, commanding officer of VX-31. "Every Hornet saved means one more aircraft and aviator available for combat."

How ATAWS works

ATAWS builds upon the Hornet's existing Terrain Awareness Warning System. It continuously predicts the aircraft's flight path relative to the earth's surface, using terrain data, altitude, speed and attitude to calculate when a collision is certain without pilot action.

When a crash is nearly imminent, the system issues visual and audible warnings. If the pilot fails to respond, ATAWS levels the wings automatically. It then instructs a rapid pull-up to clear the terrain. Control is returned to the pilot once the aircraft is at a safe altitude.

Since legacy Hornets use manual throttles, ATAWS intervenes

through flight control inputs only. The system engages only after a pilot has missed all visual and auditory cues, providing automatic recovery when there’s no longer time for a human response.

“Any time a system is designed to intentionally take control of the aircraft away from the pilot, extreme diligence is required,” Burchett said. “We had to be absolutely certain it would not interfere with a mission or take action when it shouldn’t.”

Testing the system at China Lake

From 2023 to 2025, VX-31 partnered with VX-23. They conducted a joint test campaign to ensure ATAWS operated safely and predictably in various flight conditions.

The team executed three phases.

VX-23 completed 32 flights evaluating system logic responses to different dives and recoveries. VX-31 flew 16 flights focused on nuisance testing over flat desert and mountainous terrain to make sure the system would not trigger false warnings or recoveries. The final phase combined both squadrons at China Lake for 16 full-performance flights over seven consecutive weeks.

“The team executed 177 test points that challenged and stressed the system,” said David Pineda, a VX-31 flight test engineer. “Those test points validated that ATAWS met or exceeded the modeled performance.”

Maj. Brian “Wedge” Walpole, VX-31 Legacy Hornet department head, said the system’s consistency between simulator and actual performance confirmed its readiness.

“Regardless of terrain or flight profiles, the system flew like the simulator, and we verified the model through flight test,” Walpole said.

Throughout those weeks, pilots did high-G maneuvers and low-angle strafing runs. Flight test engineers in the test bay watched telemetry. Meanwhile, chase plane crews provided visual backup to ensure safety and effectiveness. The team observed only minor anomalies, none requiring design changes.

Seamless collaboration

The ATAWS test effort united VX-31's mission systems experts with VX-23's flight sciences team into one integrated test unit. Two separate approaches merged into a shared plan built on trust and communication.

"This was the best test program I have ever been a part of," said Burchett. "The teams from Patuxent River and China Lake were so well integrated that you couldn't tell where each team member came from if you didn't already know the people involved."

Walpole called collaboration the foundation for success.

"We turned the challenge of two different test methods into an advantage by working face to face and keeping communication open," he said.

Direct impact on fleet readiness

Following PMA-265's approval, ATAWS will begin fleet rollout in early calendar year 2026. The benefits to the Marine Corps are immediate: fewer lost pilots and aircraft, higher readiness and greater combat availability.

"ATAWS directly advances warfighter capability by ensuring assets are available for forward-deployed power projection," Burchett said. "Every time an aircraft is lost to a mishap, it directly degrades the ability of the Marine Corps to forward project power."

For test pilots and fleet squadrons alike, ATAWS represents a

readiness gain that enhances safety without altering established tactics or habit patterns.

Maj. Ken “Lloyd” Endicott, VX-9 operational test director, said the system “makes protection from CFIT far more robust, but it doesn’t replace disciplined flight planning and conduct.”

Looking ahead

ATAWS sets the stage for future integration of the Automatic Ground Collision Avoidance System in the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler. VX-31 and VX-23 will apply lessons learned from the legacy Hornet to these newer platforms, incorporating system improvements based on the legacy Hornet test results and taking advantage of additional functionality that the newer platforms have available, such as potentially automating a throttle response in a way that was not possible in the older aircraft.

Burchett said the same teamwork that drove ATAWS testing will carry forward into these next efforts.

“The results of the test were incredibly successful, which is an absolute testament to the whole team of designers, engineers, and test pilots who diligently worked the program for many years,” he said. “ATAWS will save lives. There’s no higher return on investment than that.”

SAIC, HavocAI Partner to Link

Autonomous Fleets to Global Command and Control Infrastructure

Release From SAIC

RESTON, Va., Nov. 19, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) — Science Applications International Corp. (NASDAQ: SAIC), a premier Fortune 500 mission integrator, and HavocAI, the leader in collaborative maritime autonomy, today announced an effort to integrate SAIC's real-time, multi-domain communications and data backbone with HavocAI's fully-autonomous, problem-solving fleets. This collaboration will drastically improve maritime domain awareness within the joint, unified warfighting network for the U.S. Navy.

This integration connects HavocAI's collaborative autonomy stack — which currently powers dozens of autonomous vessels in self-organizing teams with the potential to scale to thousands — to broader command and control infrastructure through SAIC's advanced Joint Range Extension (JRE) system. JRE extends the range and interoperability of Link 16 (TADIL-J), which enables U.S. armed forces and allied air, ground, and maritime platforms to collect and exchange vast amounts of tactical data in real-time for faster decision-making.

Adding maritime systems enabled with HavocAI's autonomy to Link 16 can ultimately connect huge, heterogeneous fleets of globally-networked sensors, lethal platforms, and command and control systems to the infrastructure of all military services and allies seamlessly and instantaneously. This meets multiple objectives of the U.S. military's Combined Joint All Domain Command and Control (CJADC2) effort to close all-domain kill chains near machine speed and provide U.S. and allied warfighters with unparalleled decision dominance.

“This is a significant leap forward in expanding the capability of large-scale collaborative autonomy,” said Paul Lwin, CEO and co-founder of HavocAI. “By integrating with SAIC’s proven JRE infrastructure, we’re not just connecting our autonomous vessels to existing systems—we’re fundamentally enhancing how autonomous maritime systems receive and provide real-time tactical data within joint and coalition C2 systems.”

“SAIC’s JRE has been the backbone of advanced joint interoperability for two decades and this partnership to bring HavocAI’s innovative autonomous platform into the fold will provide immediate operational value and drive the future of maritime operations for the U.S. Navy,” said Barbara Supplee, SAIC Executive Vice President of Navy Business Group. “The ability to seamlessly integrate dozens of autonomous vessels into our C2 architecture will provide warfighters with an unprecedented level of maritime domain awareness, sea denial, and sea control.”

The integrated solution is being prepared for demonstrations and exercises where HavocAI’s autonomous fleet will showcase its ability to provide real-time situational awareness data through JRE to maritime operations centers, supporting the Navy’s vision for hybrid fleet operations.

Scientific Systems’ Autonomy Software Achieves Major Milestone in Test with

Unmanned Boats

Advanced Software Enables Coordinated, Autonomous Execution of Complex Maritime Operations During Real-World Ocean Trial

From Scientific Systems

BURLINGTON, Mass., November 18, 2025 – Scientific Systems, a defense software prime with expertise in maritime and multi-domain operations, announced today that its distributed AI-powered OPTIMUS autonomy software successfully executed a recent on-water test of multiple unmanned surface vessels (USVs) performing end-to-end cooperative mission activities. The weeklong maritime test demonstrates that Scientific Systems' scalable autonomy software is ready now to support "intelligent affordable mass" – the deployment of swarms of autonomous low-cost platforms that use edge-based AI to dynamically coordinate, rapidly adapt, and dramatically increase survivability & lethality, to achieve mission intent in relevant scenarios.

The August demonstration featured a fleet of nine boats equipped with Scientific Systems' AI-powered collaborative autonomy software. The software enabled the vessels to operate as an intelligent swarm, searching, monitoring, and engaging targets while avoiding obstacles with dynamic rerouting. This activity was a result of seamless integration of real-time sensing, sense-making, and AI decision-making in the decentralized system. Scientific Systems' unique, decentralized autonomy software enables the formation of "smart swarms" – collaborative, adaptive teams of platforms that can execute complex missions in degraded communications environments. A single remote operator defines only the mission rules, intent, and key authorities, while the intelligent coordination and execution occur autonomously among the platforms within the contested network. This decentralized approach delivers major advantages over

communications-dependent, centrally controlled systems, enabling mission plans to continue even with intermittent or lost communications and eliminating vulnerability to the loss of any single “leader” vessel—all while providing superior resilience, scalability, and security.

“This test underscores the critical role software plays in enabling affordable mass and autonomy at sea,” said Scientific Systems Chief Executive Officer Kunal Mehra. “We’re proud to support the mission of maritime operators and to advance the readiness of scalable, autonomous USV squadrons.”

Today’s announcement follows July’s unveiling of the VENOM small Unmanned Surface Vehicle (sUSV), developed to meet the Navy’s operational need for high-performance sUSV interceptors.

Scientific Systems’ software, integrated with the VENOM sUSV family—offered in 6-, 9-, and 13-meter models and extendable to other USVs—provides a flexible, mission-ready solution built around a modular, scalable autonomy stack tailored to customer-defined objectives.

Navy Accepts Delivery of Future USS Harvey C. Barnum, Jr.

By Team Ships Public Affairs, Nov. 18, 2025

BATH, Maine – The U.S Navy accepted delivery of future USS Harvey C. Barnum, Jr. (DDG 124), from General Dynamics Bath Iron Works, Nov. 17.

The delivery of DDG 124 marks the official transfer of the ship from the shipbuilder to the Navy.

Delivery follows a rigorous series of at-sea and pier side trials designed to demonstrate the ship's readiness and performance across propulsion, combat systems, communications, and navigation functions.

"The future USS Harvey C. Barnum, Jr. will deliver powerful capability to the Fleet and enhance our maritime advantage," said Capt. Jay Young, Arleigh Burke-class program manager, Program Executive Office, Ships (PEO Ships). "DDG 124 and her crew will be a constant reminder of the service and commitment exhibited by her remarkable namesake."

The ship is named after retired United States Marine Corps

Col. Harvey C. Barnum, Jr., a Medal of Honor recipient recognized for his extraordinary heroism and valor during the Vietnam War. His leadership under fire and lifelong commitment to service embody the values of courage, honor, and dedication that define America's naval force. One of the few living namesakes, Col. Barnum has closely followed the construction of DDG 124 and joined the crew, Navy programmatic team, and industry partners for the initial set of sea trials where he fired the first shot from the ship's five-inch gun.

As an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, DDG 124 is the most advanced multi-mission warships in the world. The ship will serve as a multi-mission surface combatant capable of conducting Anti-Air, Anti-Surface, and Anti-Submarine Warfare capabilities, providing robust defensive and offensive power in any maritime environment.

General Dynamics Bath Iron Works has seven additional future Arleigh Burke-class destroyers under construction: Louis H. Wilson Jr. (DDG 126), Patrick Gallagher (DDG 127), William Charette (DDG 130), Quentin Walsh (DDG 132), John E. Kilmer (DDG 134), Richard G. Lugar (DDG 136), and J. William Middendorf (DDG 138).

As one of the Department of War acquisition organizations, PEO Ships is responsible for executing the development and procurement of all destroyers, amphibious ships and craft, auxiliary ships, special mission ships, sealift ships and support ships.

Iranian Forces Illegally

Seize Commercial Tanker in International Waters

From U.S. Central Command, Nov. 16, 2025

TAMPA, Fla. – U.S. Central Command forces monitored an incident involving Iranian forces illegally boarding and seizing a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker transiting international waters in the Strait of Hormuz, Nov. 14.

M/V Talara was seized after being boarded by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) forces who arrived by helicopter. IRGC operatives then steered the tanker to Iran's territorial waters where the ship remains.

Iran's use of military forces to conduct an armed boarding and seizure of a commercial vessel in international waters constitutes a blatant violation of international law, undermining freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce. We call on Iran to articulate to the international community the legal basis for its actions.

U.S. forces will continue to remain vigilant and work alongside our partners and allies to promote regional peace and stability.

GA-ASI Completes Full Scale Fatigue Test on MQ-9B

MQ-9B's Third Lifetime Test Completes
the FSF Testing Process With a Total of 120,000 Hours

From General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc.

DUBAI AIRSHOW – 17 November 2025 – On October 31, 2025, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI) completed its "third lifetime" of full-scale fatigue (FSF) testing for the MQ-9B Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA). Completion of FSF testing for the third and final lifetime includes a total of 120,000 operating hours (40,000+ flight hours per aircraft life) for the RPA and is a key milestone in validating the design of the airframe. The testing verifies the airframe structural integrity in support of certification to the NATO STANAG 4671 standard.

The aim of the testing is to identify any potential structural deficiencies ahead of fleet usage and assist in developing inspection and maintenance schedules for the airframe. Test results will be used as documentation for certification and

will form the basis for in-service inspections of structural components.

“The completion of our full-scale fatigue test validates years of GA-ASI design and analysis efforts,” said GA-ASI President David R. Alexander. “The first two lifetimes simulated the operation of the aircraft under normal conditions, and the third intentionally inflicted damage to the airframe’s critical components to demonstrate its ability to tolerate operational damage that could occur over the lifetime of the aircraft.”

Testing was conducted from December 13, 2022, through October 31, 2025, at Wichita State University’s National Institute for Aviation Research in Wichita, Kansas. The airframe tested was a production airframe purpose-built to support the test campaign.

MQ-9B is GA-ASI’s most advanced RPA and includes the SkyGuardian® and SeaGuardian® models as well as the new Protector RG Mk1 that is currently being delivered to the United Kingdom’s Royal Air Force (RAF). In addition to the RAF, GA-ASI has MQ-9B procurement contracts with Belgium, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, Poland, India, Denmark, and the U.S. Air Force in support of the Special Operations Command. MQ-9B has also been featured in various U.S. Navy exercises, including Northern Edge, Integrated Battle Problem, RIMPAC, and Group Sail.

Austal USA Leads Effort to

Increase Submarine Industrial Base Capabilities under AUKUS

From Austal USA, Nov. 17, 2025

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA entered a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Australian Submarine Corporation (ASC) during the 2025 Indo Pacific International Maritime Exposition (INDOPAC 2025) in Sydney, Australia. This MoU marks an agreement to advance the introduction of cutting-edge 3D printing in Australian shipbuilding and submarine sustainment, strengthening the supply chain to support the Virginia-class and Australian Collins-class submarine programs.

“Austal USA is proud of the role we are playing in the international effort to fortify the submarine industrial base

through innovations in additive manufacturing capabilities," stated Austal USA President Michelle Kruger. "We recognize the importance of AUKUS and are excited to be at the forefront of this monumental collaboration of Allies partnering to defend our freedom with an impenetrable fleet of surface and subsurface naval assets."

The MoU, signed at the Austal USA stand by Austal USA Vice President Business Development & External Affairs, Lawrence Ryder, ASC Chief Capability Officer, Danielle Bull, and Austal Australia Chief Technology Officer, Dr. Glenn Callow, is another indication of the significant role Austal USA is playing in integrating AM technologies into the maritime industrial base of not only the US but also Australia.

"This is another significant advance in our efforts to fully integrate the use of AM in the submarine and shipbuilding production and repair process," stated Ryder. "Signing the MoU here at INDOPAC in Sydney highlights the growing achievements of AUKUS and the expanding relationship between the US and Australian industrial bases."

Austal USA's advanced technologies team has been at the forefront of AM adoption, operating the U.S. Navy's Additive Manufacturing Center of Excellence (AM CoE) in Danville, Va. Austal USA is responsible for developing a national network of vendors with qualified AM machines and processes to provide critical submarine parts. Austal USA has a unique familiarity with end-to-end production pathways using AM across multiple modalities and alloys. The company is using laser powder bed fusion (LPBF), wire arc additive manufacturing (WAAM), wire laser additive manufacturing (WLAM) and exploring the use of cold spray additive manufacturing (CSAM).

One of the most significant challenges is ensuring additive manufacturing digital data smoothly integrates with existing Navy logistics, inventory, and quality management systems. Austal USA is developing a network that will ensure digital

traceability – a digital thread built to Navy requirements – through the development of Digital -Secure Exchange for Additive (Digital – SEA), a purpose-built platform that will connect the Navy and component OEMs with AM suppliers and digital manufacturing information.

Austal USA also formed a strategic partnership in 2022 with General Dynamics Electric Boat, supported by the U.S. Navy, to expand the submarine industrial base (SIB) by producing modules for the Virginia and Columbia -class programs. As part of the partnership, Austal USA is constructing and outfitting Command and Control Systems Modules (CCSM) and Electronic Deck Modules (EDM) for the Virginia- and Columbia-class programs.

Austal USA has continued to expand its facilities and workforce to support the growing demand of the SIB. A new production facility, a 369,600 square foot manufacturing building, will be dedicated to submarine module manufacturing. The new building, Module Manufacturing Facility 3, will be fully operational in late 2026.

Vice Adm. Renshaw Assumes Command of U.S. 5th Fleet

MANAMA, Bahrain (Oct. 5, 2025) U.S. Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Central Command, left; Vice Adm. George Wikoff, outgoing commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), center; and Vice Adm. Kurt Renshaw, incoming commander of NAVCENT, U.S. 5th Fleet and CMF, right; render honors during a change of command ceremony in Manama, Bahrain. (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Iain Page)
From U.S. Fifth Fleet, Nov. 16, 2025

MANAMA, Bahrain – U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Curt Renshaw assumed command of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet (NAVCENT/C5F) and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) from Vice Adm. George Wikoff during a change of command ceremony on board Naval Support Activity Bahrain, Oct. 5.

U.S. Navy Admiral Brad Cooper, commander, U.S. Central Command, served as guest speaker, and thanked Wikoff for his dedication and lasting impact to NAVCENT, the joint force and the entire C5F area of operations.

“George, on behalf of all of Central Command and a grateful nation, thank you for your leadership, your devotion to your mission and your devotion to your people,” said Cooper. “You leave NAVCENT stronger than you found it and your impact has been immeasurable. So much has been achieved by you and this amazing team that I can’t miss the moment to say, the books will show that this was a tour for the ages.”

Wikoff assumed command of NAVCENT/C5F Feb. 1, 2024, and was charged with leading more than 16,000 service members and civilians. He also oversaw tactical control of 10 U.S. and coalition task forces, including 7,310 Sailors and Marines, during 10 fleet operations. As CMF commander, he managed a 47-nation maritime partnership in one of the world’s most diverse and challenging areas of operations.

“ In my time here, I have seen firsthand the commitment of the United States as a reliable maritime partner in this region,” said Wikoff. “ [I witnessed] the most hazardous operations our surface force has seen in 80 years, and our surface warriors never failed.”

Wikoff conceptualized the NAVCENT Maritime Headquarters/Maritime Operations Center; spearheaded a transnational effort composed of surface and air assets from nine nations to strengthen security to maritime traffic throughout the region; and synchronized CMF, United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations and Oil Companies International Marine Forums to develop a Joint Maritime Information Center, to provide guidance to maritime industry in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

His operational vision directly led to efforts which served to defend non-NATO allies, de-escalate regional tensions, deter threats and reassure regional partners of the U.S. commitment to regional stability and security.

“To the service members and civilians of the NAVCENT family, you are the backbone of these efforts, and you have my deepest admiration,” said Wikoff. “I thank you for your honor, courage and commitment to our important mission. You embody the best of what it means to serve and it has been the greatest honor of my career to lead you in this mission.”

Wikoff is slated to report as commander to U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/Allied Joint Force Command Naples.

Renshaw assumes command of NAVCENT/C5F/CMF following his most recent tour as director of operations for U.S. Central Command. He also previously served at NAVCENT/C5F as the deputy commander.

“I am incredibly proud to join this formidable team,” said Renshaw. “ Together, with our partners, we will continue to promote peace through strength, and maintain maritime security and stability throughout this dynamic region.”

NAVCENT/C5F is the maritime component commander of U.S. Central Command, whose area of responsibility encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean. This expanse, comprised of 21 countries, includes three critical chokepoints at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait at the southern tip of Yemen.

USS Pierre

Commissioned ‘Under the Bright Florida Sky’

PANAMA CITY, Fla. (November 15, 2025) – The crew runs aboard the Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Pierre (LCS 38) as they bring the ship to life during the ships commissioning ceremony in Panama City, Fla., Nov. 15, 2025. Pierre is the second U.S. Navy ship to bear this name and will be the final Independence-variant LCS to be commissioned in the U.S. Navy. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Kassandra Alanis)
By Lt. Brinn Hefron, Public Affairs Officer forCommander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

PANAMA CITY, Fla. (Nov. 15, 2025) – The Navy commissioned its newest ship, the Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Pierre (LCS 38) in a ceremony held in Panama City, Fla., Nov. 15.

During the ceremony, the guest speaker, Honorable John Phelan, 79th Secretary of the Navy, recognized the innovation of the

Independence-variant littoral combat ship and thanked the leadership and crew of USS Pierre as they brought the ship to life and began her commissioned service.

“What an extraordinary day to stand beside to our newest warship under the bright Florida sky, surrounding by those who built her, those who will sail her, and those whose spirit she carries forward,” said Phelan. “It’s an honor to be here in Panama City, and for me to place the USS Pierre, the 19th and final Independence-variant littoral combat ship into commission.”

During the ceremony, Larissa Thune Hargens, Pierre’s sponsor and the daughter of South Dakota Sen. John Thune, gave the crew the order to, “man our ship and bring her to life,” after which the Sailors of Pierre responded, “aye, aye, ma’am” and ran aboard the ship.

“Today marks a moment of pride, purpose and profound connection between the ship, her crew, her namesake city of Pierre and our great nation. As the ship sponsor, I again commit my support and appreciation to each of you and each crew who follows in your wake,” said Hargens. “My connection to the Navy began long before this day with my grandfather. He was a Navy fighter pilot during World War II, flying missions over the Pacific. He was brave, determined, and deeply devoted to his country. Just as my grandfather once took to the skies to defend our freedom, you will take to the seas to protect it with the same bravery, discipline, and devotion to duty that have defined the Navy for generations.”

In the week leading up to the commissioning ceremony, the Pierre crew spent time around Panama City, hosted tours onboard for local organizations and built ties with the city hosting their ship’s commissioning ceremony.

“Many of you have traveled thousands of miles to celebrate this moment with us. To commission a ship that represents our

nation’s free and independent spirit, the strength of our constitutional republic, and our willingness to fight for what’s right around the world,” said Cmdr. Justin Guernsey, commanding officer of USS Pierre. “To my coyotes, these past few months you’ve had the opportunity to become intimately familiar with the performance and capabilities of the Navy’s newest fighting ship. Carry our colors high as we bring this ship to life and forward into what action forward into what action may await.”

Other platform guests at the commissioning ceremony included U.S Sen. John Thune, U.S. Senator Ashley Moody, U.S. Rep. Neal Dunn of Florida, Deputy Director, Joint Interagency Task Force South, Rear Admiral Jeff Jurgemeyer, Mayor of Pierre, South Dakota, Steve Harding, Mayor of Panama City, Florida, Allan Branch and President of Austal USA, Michelle Kruger. The master of ceremonies was Lt. Cmdr. Audrey Munji, executive officer of the USS Pierre.

The ceremony concluded with Guernsey beginning the ship’s motto, “On the move!” with the crew completing the phrase, “On the hunt!”

Independence-variant 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. LCS ships integrate with joint, combined, manned, and unmanned teams to support forward presence, maritime security, sea control, and deterrence missions around the globe.

The mission of Commander Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet is to man, train, and equip the Surface Force to provide fleet commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore.

CH-53K King Stallion: 10 Years since First Flight

From Naval Air Systems Command

NAS PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – October 27, 2015 –The CH-53K King Stallion took to the skies for its first flight. Today, more than 10 years later, there are 20 CH-53Ks executing missions with four different Navy and Marine Corps squadrons.

The CH-53K, which will deploy for the first time in fiscal year 2027, achieved Initial Operational Capability in April 2022 and entered full rate production the following November. The only heavy lift helicopter in the U.S. military, the King Stallion can lift 36,000 pounds; refuel mid-air; provide ship-to-shore mobility and maneuverability along with multiple

other assault support missions.

According to Col. Kate Fleeger, Program Manager, H-53 Heavy Lift Helicopters Program Office (PMA-261), the CH-53K will be used to ensure forces remain agile and supported, sustaining operations and maintaining a forward presence on the battlefield.

“With its unique capability to lift all Marine Corps air-transportable equipment from ship-to-shore, the CH-53K will play a crucial role in rapidly and flexibly deploying forces and supplies, supporting Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and Distributed Air Operations concepts, and ultimately enabling the Marine Corps to project power and sustain its presence with greater speed and agility,” she said.

The Marine Corps plans to procure 200 CH-53Ks and the program office recently entered a five-year, multi-year contract with Sikorsky to purchase up to 99 more helicopters.

“We will be equipping six active-duty squadrons, one reserve squadron, two test squadrons and a training squadron with the CH-53K as the Marine Corps transitions from the CH-53E Super Stallion,” said Fleeger. “The full changeover is expected to be completed in FY32.”

PMA-261 manages the cradle to grave procurement, development, support, fielding and disposal of the entire family of H-53 heavy lift helicopters.