Navy’s Two-Carrier Block Buy Stabilized Supplier Base During COVID Pandemic, Industry Exec Says

USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) transits the James River after leaving Newport News Shipyard during sea and anchor, Feb. 25, 2022. Ford is underway in the Atlantic Ocean after completing the industrial portion of a six-month planned incremental availability. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jacob Mattingly*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy’s procurement and congressional funding of two Ford-class aircraft carriers in a single block buy enabled numerous small suppliers to weather or even survive the COVID pandemic, an industry official said. The stability of the program also enabled the aircraft carrier industrial base to control costs and enact savings.

Stable and predictable funding provided by the block procurement of CVN 80 and CVN 81, in place before the pandemic, gave the aircraft carrier industrial base the ability to absorb the shock of the pandemic, especially for the small lower-tier suppliers, said Rick Giannini, chairman of the Aircraft Carrier Industrial Base Coalition and CEO of Milwaukee Valve, speaking March 22 in a phone conference with *Seapower*.

“The two-carrier buy was really very helpful to the supply base [during the pandemic], because those orders in the hands of the suppliers before COVID gave them the work to get through things,” Giannini said.

Giannini said the ACIBC’s top priority is “stable and predictable funding,” which he defined as “a two-carrier block buy over eight years, with carriers purchased on four-year centers.

“And with that comes advance planning funding early in the cycle,” which he said “really is the catalyst. It’s great to have the bulk buy, but if we don’t have the funds to go and buy those raw materials as a supply base, it makes it very difficult to enact the savings that come out of it. We got good funding for [CVNs] 80 and 81, and one of the lessons is we need more early on so we can get more of the supply base involved.”

Giannini cited the experience of his own company, Milwaukee Valve.

“We were able to buy all of the materials for two full shipsets up front. Now we have that material in our facility so that the lead times not be impacted by material problems. Nor will the cost change. And it saves significant dollars and will improve the lead times overall.”

He said a two-carrier block buy is “very doable. We’re hoping we can get it moved up into 2024 – eight years after the AP

[advance procurement] money came in for 80/81. We're really trying to match the procurement of the Nimitz class. They were built on 3.5-year centers. So, four [-year centers] is good enough."

The carrier industrial base coalition includes 2,000 companies from 46 states that employ approximately 121,000 workers. Its member companies provide $9.6 billion worth of materials and services for one aircraft carrier.

Workforce issues became prominent during the pandemic because many "baby boomer" workers retired earlier than planned. A shortage of skilled workers is focusing companies on recruiting and developing shipyard and manufacturing workers. Many companies are forming partnerships with local community and technical colleges and trade schools.

Giannini's Milwaukee Valve company's workforce is down about 8% in personnel, he said. Also, he noted that when a worker contracted COVID-19, about 10 other workers around that worker had to be quarantined, greatly affecting workflow for a week or two at a time. Absenteeism had risen to about 8 to 10 points on a fairly consistent basis, he said.

Giannini attended the dinner March 21 – sponsored by the Navy League –with Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday in Norfolk, Virginia, to celebrate the centennial of the U.S. Navy's first aircraft carrier, where, he noted, the CNO said the Navy needed a force level of 12 aircraft carriers.

SASC Chair Reed: Defense

Budget Turmoil Fault ‘Not in Our Stars, But in Ourselves’

Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee during a hearing in review of the fiscal 2023 defense authorization request on March 8. *DOD / U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jack Sanders*

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee quoted Shakespeare to lay the blame on Congress itself for the defense budget legislative turmoil over the last two decades of multiple continuing resolutions, and said budget delays are especially dangerous in the world’s current geo-political climate.

“We’ve gotten into a very bad habit over the last several years, but I hope we can get it done,” said Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island), when asked by *Seapower* if he foresaw a return to the regular defense budget legislative process in Congress. Reed spoke March 23 in a webinar with reporters of

the Defense Writers Group.

Reed noted the fiscal 2022 budget was received late from the Defense Department, which pushed back deliberations. The 2023 president's budget proposal is scheduled to be delivered to Congress March 28, almost two months later than the normal plan.

Reed said getting the defense budget out on time is "extremely helpful to the services. Most services don't – regrettably – plan to do anything in the first quarter of the new fiscal year because they assume they won't have a budget and, in some cases, even authorization acts. That's a whole quarter of just standing around tapping your feet, and in this world, with these adversaries, and the speed of technology, that's wasted time."

Reed noted the services had to wait nearly six months before the 2022 defense budget finally was appropriated.

"It's not an efficient way to spend money," he said.

"The problem is, as Shakespeare said, is not in our stars but in ourselves," Reed said. "In Congress we have been, for many reasons, distracted. It's a complicated political environment and I hope we can refocus."

Reed said he, ranking member Sen. James Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) and the Senate Appropriations Committee leaders would like to get their defense bills done on time.

"Sometimes we become hostage to other issues, unfortunately," Reed said. "But our goal is very clearly to get it done and get it done on time."

Reed also took the opportunity to say in the current world climate, the United States has to "reimagine how we fight. We have to develop new warfighting concepts. We have new equipment. We have new areas of space and cyber that have been

around by every day are much more critical for what we have to do.”

Reed said tough choices have to be made about legacy systems, and that the U.S. has to look to its allies as a “major source of strength.”

DoD Inspector General to Audit Navy’s MQ-25 UAV Program

The Boeing unmanned MQ-25 aircraft on the flight deck aboard the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brandon*

Roberson
ARLINGTON, Va. — The inspector general of the Department of Defense is planning to conduct an audit of the U.S. Navy's MQ-25 Stingray aerial refueling unmanned aerial vehicle program.

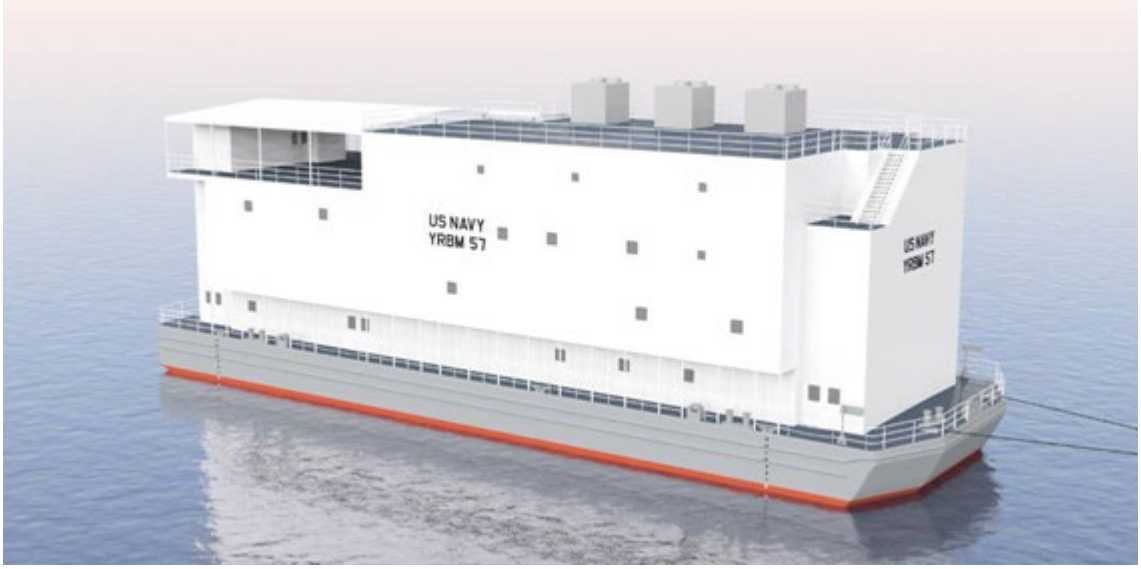
In a March 21 memorandum addressed to the undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, the director for Operational Test and Evaluation, and the auditor general of the Department of the Navy, the inspector general said, "The objective of this audit is to determine whether Navy officials are effectively managing the MQ-25 Stingray program to meet operational capability requirements and user needs. We may revise the objective as the audit proceeds, and we will also consider suggestions from management for additional or revised objectives."

The MQ-25 program is designed to provide a UAV capable of refueling carrier-based aircraft, thus freeing more F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters for their primary missions.

A prototype of the MQ-25A, built by Boeing, has flown and has demonstrated the ability to refuel F/A-18s, F-35 Lightning II strike fighters and E-2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning aircraft. The prototype, known as T1, also was put through flight deck handling trials at sea on board the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) in December 2021.

Boeing is under contract to build seven MQ-25As. The Navy anticipates it will procure a total of 72 Stingrays under current planning. Initial operational capability is planned for fiscal 2025.

Navy Orders YRBM Barges from Conrad Shipyard



A Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing barge. *CONRAD SHIPYARD LLC*

MORGAN CITY, La. – Conrad Shipyard LLC has been awarded a contract by the U.S. Navy for the design and construction of up to eight Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing (YRBM) barges, the company said in a release.

YRBM barges provide a temporary home away from home and workplace for service men and women whose vessels are in port for repairs or maintenance. Conrad's design incorporates functional spaces which allow the Sailors to work, sleep, and eat comfortably.

The fixed-price contract, a small business set-aside, has a potential value of more than $140 million. Conrad expects to deliver the first YRBM barge to the Navy in late 2023. If the Navy exercises options for the additional barges, peak production is expected to occur from 2023 through 2025.

"We are excited to enter into this partnership with the Navy to help modernize its fleet," said Conrad Shipyard CEO Johnny Conrad. "Not only will this contract provide an abundance of jobs for our workforce in the Morgan City area, but it will

also help to support a multitude of small businesses. I know our dedicated and hardworking men and women at Conrad are proud to work on this project which will ultimately benefit the brave service men and women of the U.S. Navy.”

The YRBM barge is an ABS A1 Accommodation Barge with a footprint of roughly 151 feet by 49 feet by 14 feet. The vessel provides pier-side living accommodations capable of berthing 199 mixed gender personnel, messing for 300 personnel, and includes spaces for medical offices, classrooms, workspaces, laundry rooms, storerooms and lounge areas.

Navy Decommissions Two More Patrol Ships

Sailors assigned to the coastal patrol ship USS Whirlwind (PC 11) salute during the ship's decommissioning ceremony on March 21 at Naval Support Activity Bahrain. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Dawson Roth*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy decommissioned two more Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships in March, bring to five the number of PCs retired from the U.S. 5th Fleet this year, all within a one-month period, according to the fleet's public affairs office.

USS Whirlwind (PC 11) was decommissioned in ceremonies held in Bahrain on March 21. A week earlier, USS Squall (PC 7) was decommissioned on March 14. The recent PC force reductions began on Feb. 23 with the decommissioning of USS Firebolt (PC 10), followed by Typhoon (PC 2) on Feb. 28 and Tempest (PC 2) on March 7.

All of the above decommissioned PCs will be made available for foreign military sales.

The reductions leave the Navy's last five PCs on strength

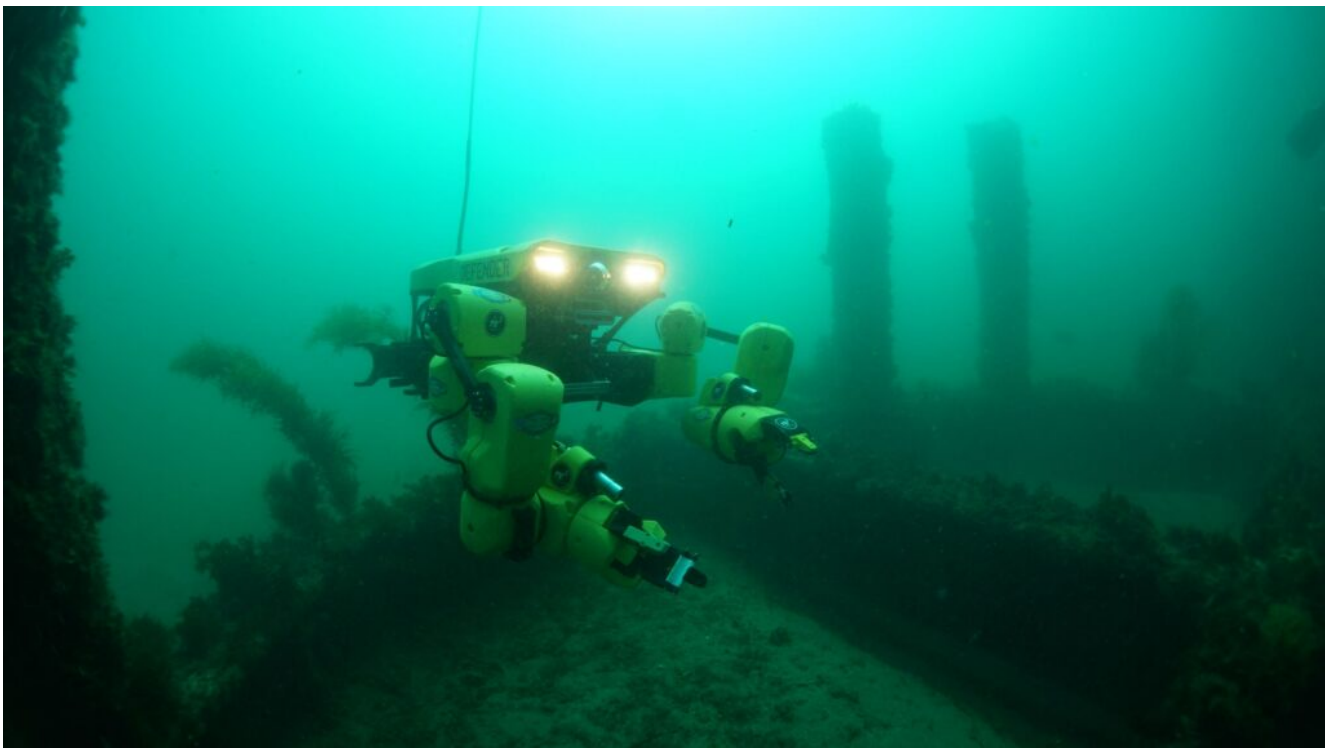
still in service with the 5th Fleet: USS Hurricane (PC 3), USS Monsoon (PC 4), USS Sirocco (PC 6); USS Chinook (PC 9) and USS Thunderbolt (PC 12).

USS Squall – like its sister ships, it was built by Bollinger Shipyards – was commissioned on July 4, 1994. It was based at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, California until late 2005, when it was moved to Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Virginia. In 2013. Squall was assigned to the 5th Fleet.

USS Whirlwind was commissioned on July 1, 1995. It was stationed at Little Creek from which it supported operations in the U.S 4th and 6th Fleet areas of responsibility. The Whirlwind also provided homeland security near New York City's harbor following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the city. The ship was transferred to the 5th Fleet in 2013.

"Our patrol coastal ships have made a lasting impact here in the region supporting naval operations and safeguarding maritime security," said Capt. Robert Francis, commander of Task Force 55 at U.S. 5th Fleet, in the March 21 5th Fleet release. "This was only made possible by the dedicated Sailors who served aboard these ships for nearly three decades."

ONR-Sponsored RE2 Robotics, VideoRay ROV Achieve New Depth Milestone



RE2 Robotics' Sapien Sea Class underwater robotic arms, coupled with VideoRay's Defender remotely operated vehicle, make up the Maritime Mine Neutralization System. *RE2 ROBOTICS*

PITTSBURGH and POTTSTOWN, Pa. – RE2 Robotics, a leading developer of intelligent mobile manipulation systems, announced March 22 that its Maritime Mine Neutralization System reached an unprecedented depth milestone of more than 1 kilometer during a recent open-water demonstration for the U.S. Navy's project sponsor, the Office of Naval Research.

M2NS is an underwater autonomous mine neutralization system composed of RE2 Sapien Sea-class underwater robotic arms mounted onto VideoRay's inspection-class Defender remotely operated vehicle. M2NS also uses RE2's advanced computer vision and autonomy software, RE2 Detect and RE2 Intellect, to enable the precise, autonomous, and clandestine neutralization of a target.

During the test event, which took place in the Pacific Ocean with support from the Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific in Point Loma, California, four successful dives exceeding 1,000 meters of depth were completed. The dives were conducted using supervised autonomy, which allows human operators to monitor the robotic system's autonomous movements and make

corrections if necessary.

“These tests allowed us to demonstrate the continuing success of the M2NS project for the U.S. Navy,” said Jack Reinhart, vice president of project management, RE2 Robotics. “The progress we made during these deep dives shows that we could successfully complete an underwater supervised autonomous mission at depths of more than 1,000 meters without any damage to the system. The M2NS system succeeded where no other system of this class has before.”

All onboard electronics remained operational during the deep dives, including the ROV’s camera feed and data to the support vessel, proving the survivability of the complete system to a depth of more than 1,000 meters.

“We have proven the ability to deploy the Defender with a large payload to depths of 3,500 feet [1,000-plus meters] from a small deck footprint,” said Marcus Kolb, chief technology officer, VideoRay. “We performed complex, autonomous manipulation tasks with the RE2 system while station-keeping a few feet off the bottom. We are excited about the direction of this program and how it will help accelerate commercial solutions.”

Following the success of these dives, RE2 Robotics and VideoRay are planning future demonstrations for ONR to test the system’s autonomy capabilities using a tetherless ROV at extended depths. OceanComm Inc., a provider of high-speed wireless underwater communication technology, will provide wireless acoustic modems for future dives.

Crowley to Operate Ice-Class Tanker for Military Sealift Command

The Stena Polaris, an Ice-class tanker that will be operated by Crowley for Military Sealift Command. *CROWLEY*

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – Crowley has been awarded the Military Sealift Command charter contract to operate the Stena Polaris, an Ice-class tanker serving bulk fuel needs of the U.S. Department of Defense, the company said March 21.

Crowley's government ship management group has completed the conversion of the ship to meet government and military service standards, including registration as a U.S.-flag vessel. The tanker will transport necessary fuel for defense operations in the Arctic and Antarctica regions. When not operating in those regions, the vessel will transport fuel for defense services in the Mediterranean Sea.

Crowley has partnered with the DNV classification society and the U.S. Coast Guard to verify the vessel meets the applicable

standards to support its missions safely and effectively. Enhancements include adding at-sea refueling capabilities for the military. The tanker, now U.S.-flagged with U.S. mariners, is set to enter service this week.

The conversion was completed at Fincantieri Marine Repair near downtown Jacksonville, Florida, supporting investment, jobs and the economy of the home city of Crowley's global headquarters.

"The Stena Polaris plays a critical mission for our warfighters serving our nation in austere environments, and fundamental work to help our military succeed will be done by the strong workforce and maritime industry in Jacksonville," said Mike Golonka, vice president, government maritime services, for the Crowley Solutions business unit. "Crowley's team is fortunate to partner with the U.S. Coast Guard, DNV and Fincantieri Marine Repair to complete the conversion, and we are honored that the U.S. government continues to trust Crowley's ship management team to meet the Defense Department standards for success and efficient service."

"We are excited to partner with Crowley here in Jacksonville to successfully complete this tanker reflagging project," said Ryan Smith, Fincantieri Marine Repair's president. "We are now operating in Northeast Florida providing high-quality services to meet the operational needs of military, government, and commercial clients."

The contract, which carries a one-year term with multiple option years, has a potential cumulative value of more than $98 million.

CNO Visits Norfolk for Carrier Aviation Centennial Celebration

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday during a visit to Naval Submarine School in February. On March 20-21, he visit Hampton Roads, Virginia, to celebrate a century of U.S. aircraft carrier aviation. *U.S. NAVY / Charles E. Spirtos*

NORFOLK, Virginia – U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday traveled to Hampton Roads, Virginia, for the 100 Years of Carrier Aviation Celebration, to visit local commands and to meet with Sailors and industry partners, March 20-21, the CNO's public Affairs office said in a release.

Gilday delivered remarks during the centennial celebration ceremony, hosted by the Navy League, held to honor the legacy of U.S. Navy aircraft carriers and aviation.

“For 100 years aircraft carriers have been the most survivable and versatile airfields in the world,” said Gilday. “Perhaps no single military platform distinguishes what our nation is … and what it stands for … more than the aircraft carrier.”

While in Hampton Roads, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith joined Gilday to meet with Sailors and leadership at Airborne Command and Control Squadron (VAW) 121 and Board of Inspection and Survey, where they spoke to the “get real, get better” call to action.

The get real, get better mindset seeks to reduce the gap between the Navy’s least and most capable performer, cement dynamic learning and innovation into Navy culture, and build better leaders and teams ready to solve problems more effectively.

“Our Sailors need to be self-assessing, finding and fixing problems, and embracing the red,” said Gilday. “We need to expand and empower this across the fleet, we have no room for complacency – each ship, squadron and command must hold themselves accountable. We need to continue to get real and get better.”

Gilday also met with Virginia congressional Democratic Reps. Bobby Scott and Elaine Luria for a working lunch and discussion at Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center. During lunch, they received updates about ship maintenance.

Finally, Gilday visited BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair for a tour and discussion about shipbuilding and maintenance progress and initiatives.

“The work being done here in Norfolk, in partnership with BAE Systems, is helping to ensure our Navy is ready and has

cutting edge capabilities," said Gilday. "Working together with industry partners, we will drive down maintenance delays that reduce our readiness, while we continue to make sure our Sailors have what they need to fight and win."

The Hampton Roads area has the largest concentration of fleet headquarters administrative and communication facilities outside of Washington, D.C. It is home to more than 82,000 personnel and several major tenant commands: U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Joint Staff Hampton Roads, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Command, Naval Submarine Forces, Atlantic, and Naval Reserve Forces Command.

Marine Corps Orders Development of Recovery Variant of ACV

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

QUANTICO, Va. — The Marine Corps has taken the next step in developing its family of Amphibious Combat Vehicles by beginning development of a maintenance/recovery variant of the ACV.

The Marine Corps Systems Command awarded BAE Systems Land & Armaments L.P., Sterling Heights, Michigan, a $34.9 million cost-plus-fixed-fee contract modification to procure labor and material for the design and development of the ACV-R maintenance/recovery variant, according to a March 18 Defense Department contract announcement.

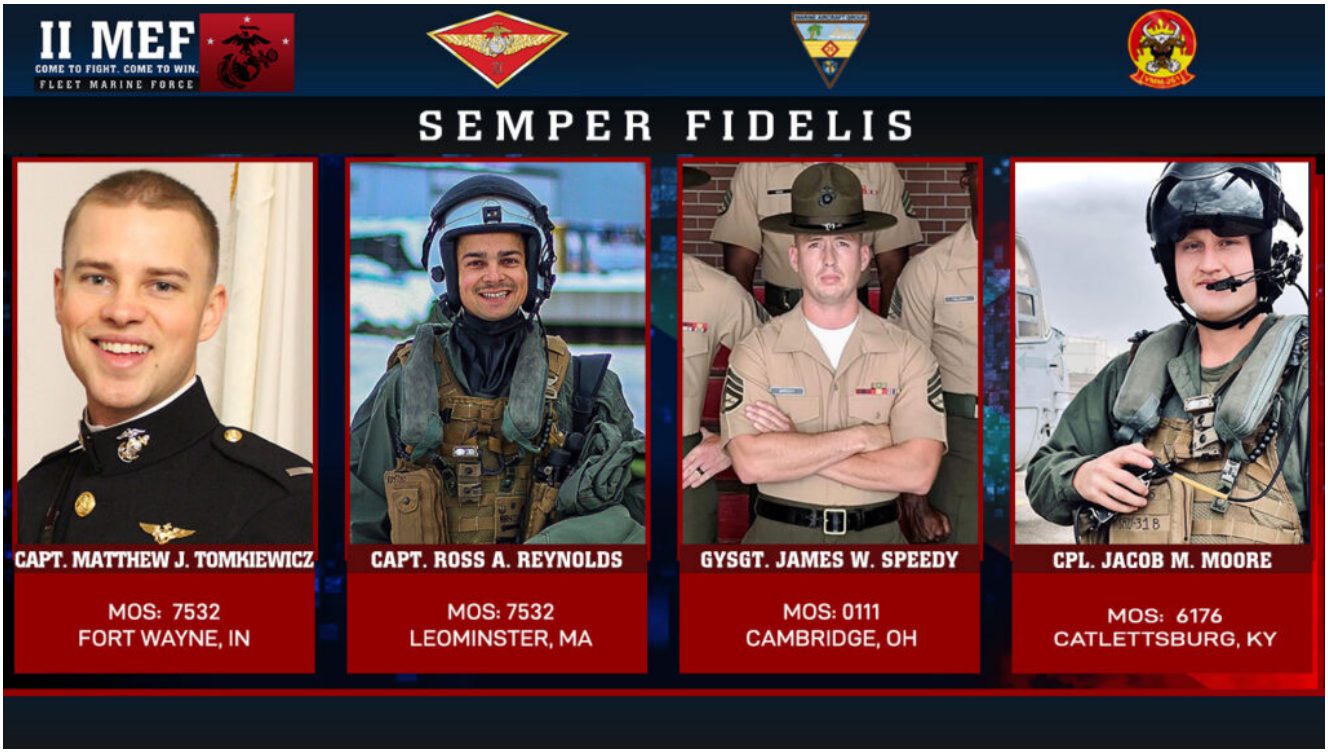
Development of the command-and-control variant, the ACV-C, and the ACV-30 — the latter armed with a 30mm cannon — began in June 2019. The first ACV-C variant was delivered to the Marine

Corps in February 2021.

The basic infantry personnel carrier, the ACV-P, is in full-rate production and is in service with amphibious assault battalions.

Work on the ACV-R under the contract modification has an expected completion date of October 2023.

Four Marines Die in MV-22B Crash in Norway



Four Marines died in a crash during a training flight south of Bodo, Norway, in support of Exercise Cold Response 2022, March 18. All four Marines were assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 261. *U.S. MARINE CORPS*

ARLINGTON, Va. — A Marine Corps MV-22B Osprey tilt-rotor transport aircraft crashed in Norway on March 18, killing all four Marine crewmen on board.

The Osprey, assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 261 (VMM-261), based at Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina, was on a flight south of Bodo, Norway, when it crashed while supporting NATO's Exercise Cold Response 2022.

Killed in the crash were Capt. Matthew J. Tomkiewicz of Fort Wayne, Indiana; Capt. Ross A. Reynolds of Leominster, Massachusetts; Gunnery Sgt. James W. Speedy of Cambridge, Ohio; and Cpl. Jacob M. Moore of Catlettsburg, Kentucky, according to a March 21 release from the II Marine Expeditionary Force.

Norwegian agencies, including the Royal Norwegian Air Force's 330 Squadron and the Hoved Redning Sentralen civil emergency and response organization led in locating the aircraft's wreckage and in recovery of the bodies of the victims.

"The pilots and crew were committed to accomplishing their mission and serving a cause greater than themselves," said Maj. Gen. Michael Cederholm, commanding general, 2d Marine Aircraft Wing, in a release. "We will continue to execute the mission while keeping these Marines and their service in the forefront of our minds. We will never allow these Marines and their service to go unnoticed or unappreciated. Keep these Marines and their loved ones in your thoughts and prayers."

The mishap is under investigation.