

# BAE Systems Awarded \$181M Contract Expanding Amphibious Combat Vehicle program



From BAE Systems

August 12, 2025 – BAE Systems received a \$181 million contract from the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) to produce 31 additional Amphibious Combat Vehicles (ACVs), a part of the recently awarded full-rate production (FRP) Lot 5/6 contract. This latest award, designated as FRP 5C, brings the total number of ACV-30s ordered to 91.

The FRP 5/6 contract includes a series of options to produce up to 150 vehicles, with the USMC exercising the option for FRP 5A and 5B in May for 60 vehicles, valued at \$360 million.

BAE Systems is also currently under contract for the ACV-

Personnel and ACV-Command variants. Work for the ACV-30mm will take place in York, Pennsylvania; Johnstown, Pennsylvania; and Charleston, South Carolina, through the fourth quarter of 2026.

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## **U.S. Central Command Bids Farewell to Gen. Kurilla, Welcomes Adm. Cooper**



U.S. Central Command's (USCENTCOM) Senior Enlisted Leader, Fleet Master Chief Derrick Walters passes the USCENTCOM flag to the outgoing commander of USCENTCOM, U.S. Army Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, during a change of command ceremony, 8 August 2025. Multiple Department of Defense officials attended the event as well as distinguished defense leaders from partner

nations around the world. (U.S. Central Command Public Affairs photo by Tom Gagnier)

From U.S. Central Command, August 8, 2025

TAMPA, Fla. – U.S. Army Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, the outgoing commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), relinquished command today to U.S. Navy Adm. Brad Cooper during a change of command ceremony held at the Tampa Convention Center. Prior to assuming command, Adm. Cooper served as deputy commander of CENTCOM.

Multiple Department of Defense officials attended the event as well as distinguished defense leaders from partner nations around the world.

Gen. Kurilla assumed command of CENTCOM in April 2022. During his time as commander, he led U.S. military efforts in the Middle East maintaining regional stability and security as well as the enduring defeat of ISIS. He led the planning and execution of over 15 major combined combat operations, including Operations Rough Rider and Midnight Hammer.

“I know that under the leadership of Adm. Brad Cooper, with the support of the Defense Department and Joint Staff, the counsel and contributions of our allies and partners, and support of our headquarters and component teams, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and Guardians of Central Command who serve this nation on the front lines of freedom will always succeed,” said Gen. Kurilla. “It has been the honor of my life to have been their commander.”

Adm. Cooper is a 1989 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and holds a master’s degree in strategic intelligence from the National Intelligence University. As the commander of CENTCOM, Adm. Cooper will have oversight of all U.S. military missions throughout the 21-country area of responsibility which includes the Middle East and Central Asia.

“U.S. Central Command and the entire joint force have

performed exceptionally well under the leadership of Gen. Kurilla, helping to bolster partnerships, increase lethality of U.S. forces, and defend Americans and civilians abroad,” said Adm. Cooper. “I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to lead America’s sons and daughters as we support the important mission of enhancing regional security and stability in the Central Command region.”

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## **NAVSEA Leaders Discuss Advanced Technology Needs**



WASHINGTON, DC (August 7, 2025) – Mr. Matt Sermon, Direct Reporting Program Manager, Maritime Industrial Base (MIB), participated in the Strategic Panel at the Maritime Innovation Forum: Advanced Manufacturing: Innovation for Maritime Readiness, that was held at the Capital Turnaround. (U.S. Navy

photo by Laura Lakeway)

By NAVSEA Office of Corporate Communications, Aug. 7, 2025

WASHINGTON – Today, Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) leaders joined more than 360 industry representatives at the Maritime Innovation Forum to discuss the adoption of advanced technologies to improve shipbuilding and repair performance.

The Maritime Innovation Forum 2025 is a national initiative that showcases transformative technologies aligned with the U.S. Navy's Advanced Manufacturing Strategy.

The forum included a keynote address from Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jim Kilby as well as a panel discussion with senior leaders discussing the need to scale innovation. Tom Perotti, executive director and deputy chief engineer of NAVSEA engineering directorate, explained the importance of aligning advanced manufacturing solutions with authorities like Other Transactions (OTs) to quickly address capability gaps and readiness.

“To meet the speed and scale the Fleet demands, we must make advanced manufacturing a foundational capability across the entire shipbuilding enterprise,” said Perotti. “Through innovative tools and systems, scalable solutions and authorities like OTs, we are working to solve problems faster while building a more innovative and agile Navy.”

Matt Sermon, direct report program manager for the Maritime Industrial Base, echoed this forward-looking approach by highlighting recent successes with additive manufacturing.

“We've seen in just a few years that additive manufacturing can supply select parts for our ships now,” Sermon said. “What we want to see in a few more years are entire shipyards, workforce and supply chains integrated by advanced manufacturing processes, technologies and of course, AI.”

Throughout the forum, NAVSEA leaders discussed case studies where OT authorities have been successfully leveraged. Since 2020, NAVSEA has awarded more than 600 OT agreements to expedite needed ship construction, maintenance and modernization solutions. NAVSEA's OT successes shared at the forum included the following:

- **LM2500 Gas Turbine Navy Common Core Controller (GTNC3):** With over 300 LM2500 engines powering the surface Fleet, GTNC3 standardizes the control system across platforms. Developed under the Maritime Sustainment Technology and Innovation Consortium (MSTIC) OT, GTNC3 addresses longstanding variability in control architecture and strengthens long-term sustainment.
- **Strike Up/Down System (SUDS):** This innovation supports rearming the MK41 Vertical Launch System at sea. SUDS was developed under the DoD Ordnance Technology Consortium OT and aims to reduce the need for ships to return to the port for rearming and preserve combat readiness.
- **High-Density Ribbon Fiber Optic Cable and Shipboard Tooling:** This initiative increases fiber density by 12-fold, while maintaining compliance. Developed under the National Shipbuilding Research Program OT with contributions from Ingalls Shipbuilding, Newport News Shipbuilding and others, it enhances shipboard data transfer while simplifying installation.

These projects exemplify how OT agreements fill critical technical gaps across NAVSEA's acquisition portfolio, delivering faster, more affordable and flexible solutions to the Fleet.

During the afternoon of the forum, there were presentations about innovative technologies in the areas of additive manufacturing and 3D printing, robotics and automation, coatings and surfaces, as well as next-generation digital tools, materials and processes. These presentations showcased high-impact technology that aligns with the Navy's modernization goals and industrial expansion priorities.

Through these collaborative efforts, the Maritime Innovation Forum illustrated how technological innovation, alternative agreements and partnerships are directly strengthening the Navy's maritime readiness and industrial base.

In closing remarks, Rear Adm. Pete Small, NAVSEA's chief engineer and Warfare Centers commander, reiterated the importance of collaboration and emphasized NAVSEA's commitment to scaling innovation that delivers results.

"This forum is a testament to what we can achieve when we come together to collaborate on innovative, scalable and real-world solutions to today's most pressing shipbuilding and sustainment challenges," said Small. "The demand is here, and NAVSEA is driving it forward with the help of partnerships, innovative technology and advanced manufacturing."

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## **Coast Guard Commissions Icebreaker Storis in Juneau**



The Coast Guard Cutter Storis in Juneau for its commissioning as the nation's newest Arctic icebreaker. *Photo credit: Craig S. Neus*

JUNEAU, ALASKA— On Saturday, Aug. 10, U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Admiral Kevin Lunday, acting commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, participated in the commissioning ceremony of the United States Coast Guard Cutter Storis (WAGB 21) in Juneau.

Storis, the renamed and reconditioned former commercial icebreaker Aiviq, is the country's first new icebreaker in a quarter century. Sullivan has championed the effort to build new American icebreakers and to procure commercially available icebreakers, and to homeport them in Alaska in order to close the icebreaker gap in the Arctic.



News reporters on the bow-mounted helicopter pad aboard USCGC Storis. *Photo credit: Craig S. Neus*

“Storis adds vital capability to the U.S. polar icebreaker fleet at a critical time, when our adversaries are expanding their activities in and near U.S. waters, and the challenges and threats we face as a nation are growing more complex every day,” Lunday said at the ceremony.

“With the arrival of the Storis to its new homeport in Juneau, we mark not just the commissioning of a vessel, but a strategic milestone in America’s Arctic future,” Sullivan said. “This ship is an investment in real capability, real people, and a real presence in the region that defines the next chapter of global security, commerce, and energy. The homeporting of the Storis right here in Juneau sends a clear and deliberate message: The United States is an Arctic nation, Alaska is an Arctic state, and the United States Coast Guard is a capable and growing Arctic force.”



Members of the public and press visit Storis the weekend of its commissioning. *Photo credit: Craig S. Neus.*

The recent One Big Beautiful Bill, signed into law July 4, included \$300 million to support the shoreside infrastructure needed for Storis' homeporting. Until that is complete, Storis will be temporarily berthed in Seattle, Washington, with the Coast Guard's two other polar icebreakers.

"The United States is an Arctic nation, and it is so because of the great state of Alaska," Lunday said.

The United States' only operational heavy icebreaker, the 1970s-era Polar Star, is undergoing repairs in California and the Coast Guard's medium icebreaker Healey is returning to homeport for repairs after an engine fire. Meanwhile, Sullivan said, Russia has 55 icebreakers and is building more and by 2025, China, which has no sovereignty over any Arctic waters, is set to surpass the United States' icebreaker fleet.



A view of the Storis' bridge. The ship is crewed with a hybrid crew consisting of military cuttermen and civilian mariners. *Photo credit: Craig S. Neus*

"If we're not ready to lead in the Arctic, others will, and they'll be happy to do it for us," Sullivan said. "That's why the Storis is so important."

Lunday said the recent funding bill also funds the beginning of a new generation of icebreakers for the service.

"This is a remarkable moment because it doesn't happen very often, but it's going to be happening a lot more," Lunday said of the commissioning.

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# U.S. Coast Guard Responds to Increased Chinese Research Vessel Activity in U.S. Arctic



The Zhong Shan Da Xue Ji Di, a Liberian Flagged Research Vessel, owned and operated by the Chinese University Sun Yat-Sen, as detected by a Coast Guard C-130 Hercules aircraft from Air Station Kodiak. (U.S. Coast Guard courtesy photo)

[Release From U.S. Coast Guard Arctic District](#)

JUNEAU, Alaska – The U.S. Coast Guard detected and responded to two Chinese research vessels operating in the U.S. Arctic and is currently monitoring a total of five similar vessels in or near the U.S Arctic.

On August 5, a C-130J Hercules fixed wing aircraft from Air Station Kodiak responded to the Chinese research vessels *Ji Di* and the *Zhong Shan Da Xue Ji Di*. Both vessels were transiting northeast in the Bering Sea.

On August 6, the crew of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Waesche (WMSL 751) again responded to the *Zhong Shan Da Xue Ji Di* as it was transiting north in the Chukchi Sea above the Arctic Circle, after passing through the Bering Strait.

The C-130 and USCGC Waesche were patrolling under Operation Frontier Sentinel, an operation that responds to adversaries operating in and around Alaskan and U.S. Arctic waters. The U.S. Coast Guard's responses are intended to counter malign activities, defend sovereign interests, and promote maritime conduct consistent with international law and norms.

In July, [Coast Guard Arctic District deployed a C-130J Hercules](#) fixed wing aircraft from Air Station Kodiak to query the *Xue Long 2*, another Chinese research vessel, approximately 290 NM north of Utqiagvik, Alaska.

The presence of these vessels is consistent with a three-year trend of increased activity from Chinese research vessels operating in the U.S. Arctic. Last year, three Chinese research vessels conducted research operations north of the Bering Strait.

The Coast Guard Arctic District works in conjunction with international partners, U.S. Northern Command, and Alaskan Command to constantly monitor the activity of foreign vessels operating near U.S. sovereign waters and the extended outer continental shelf to ensure homeland security, homeland defense, and compliance with U.S. and international law.

The Coast Guard is America's only surface presence in the Arctic – a growing zone of strategic global competition. A robust national fleet of icebreakers, made possible by historic investment in the Coast Guard, will secure U.S. access, security, and leadership in the Arctic.

On Sunday, the Coast Guard will commission the Coast Guard Cutter Storis, the newest icebreaker in the fleet, at a ceremony in Juneau.

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# USS Savannah Returns to Homeport After 12-Month Deployment



Families welcome the Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Savannah (LCS 28) as it returns to Naval Base San Diego, Aug. 7, 2025. The Savannah returns to its homeport of San Diego following a 12-month rotational deployment to the U.S. 3rd and 7th Fleets. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kassandra Alanis)

[From Lt.Cmdr. Ryan Martinez-Slattery](#)

SAN DIEGO – The Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Savannah (LCS 28) arrived at its San Diego homeport Aug. 7, following a 12-month rotational deployment throughout the U.S. 3rd and 7th Fleet areas of operation. The Savannah operates

with a dual-crew, allowing the hull to stay in theater for longer durations.

“I’m honored to welcome home the crew of the Savannah after a long and challenging deployment,” said Capt. Jose Roman, commodore, Littoral Combat Ship Squadron 1. “This warship showed strength in presence in strategically vital waterways and worked closely with our allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific. I know the families here today are just as proud of their Sailors as I am.”

While on its maiden deployment, the Savannah conducted several multilateral exercises and port visits across the Indo-Pacific, including Cambodia, Singapore, Brunei, Palau, the Republic of the Philippines, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, enhancing regional maritime cooperation and interoperability.

In October 2024, the Savannah sailed in coordination with Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) P-8 maritime patrol aircraft in the South China Sea. The New Zealand-led multilateral patrol exercise fostered tactical proficiency and reinforced air-maritime integration with key regional partners.

Also in October, during a scheduled port visit to Muara, Brunei, the Savannah welcomed officers from the Royal Brunei Navy (RBN), and the Savannah’s Sailors participated in a sports day with their Bruneian counterparts, strengthening ties and fostering goodwill between navies.

“I’m incredibly proud of this crew, not only for their operational expertise over many months in a challenging environment, but for the leadership and commitment they displayed in working with our partner nations,” said Cmdr. Robert Schmidt, commanding officer of the Savannah. “These partnerships are vitally important to regional security, and

this crew represented the best ideals of the U.S. Navy.”

In December 2024, during a port visit in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, the Savannah hosted Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Adm. Samuel Paparo and a delegation from the Royal Cambodian Navy for a tour of the ship and embarked MH-60R Seahawk helicopter. Discussions highlighted the strategic utility of the littoral combat ship and its contributions to maritime security in the region. The Savannah was the first U.S. Navy ship in eight years to conduct a port visit in Cambodia.

The port visit included the Savannah Sailors serving the community at a local food pantry and soup kitchen and participating in a friendly volleyball match with Cambodian naval personnel, reinforcing partnership and professional rapport.

“It was a great experience interacting with their sailors and realizing how much we had in common,” said Electronics Technician 3rd Class Giovanni Pennisi.

In May, the Savannah participated in Exercise Balikatan 2025, the 40th iteration of the premier annual defense exercise held between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States. The Savannah’s crew led five days of live-fire exercises; tactical maneuvering drills; search and rescue; casualty evacuation; and Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) scenarios alongside the Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Air Force, and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

The Savannah’s deployment exemplifies the Navy’s commitment to integrated deterrence, regional maritime security, and enduring alliances and partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Littoral combat ships are fast, optimally manned, mission-tailored surface combatants that operate in near-shore and open-ocean environments, winning against 21st-century threats. LCS integrate with joint, combined, manned and unmanned teams to support forward-presence, maritime security, sea control, and deterrence missions around the globe.

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## USNS Comfort Arrives at Final CP25 Mission Stop in Trinidad



PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad (August 5, 2025) The Mercy-class hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) arrives in Port of Spain, Trinidad during Continuing Promise 2025, August 5, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Rylin Paul)

By USNAVSOUTH/4TH FLEET PUBLIC AFFAIRS

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad – The Mercy-class hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) arrived in Port of Spain, Trinidad, August 5, 2025, for the final mission stop of Continuing Promise 2025 (CP25). The Comfort team will work alongside Trinbagonian medical professionals to provide medical care, including adult care, pediatric care, dental services, optometry, women's health services, and various ancillary support services.

“Our presence in Trinidad and Tobago on this mission is strategically significant, allowing us to address immediate needs and solidify a vital relationship for future collaborations,” said Capt. Ryan Kendall, commodore of Destroyer Squadron 40 and CP25 mission commander. “Building on Continuing Promise's history of fostering strong ties with partner nations, this engagement underscores the United States' deep commitment to the well-being of the Trinbagonian people.”

This visit marks the fifth time the CP mission has provided support in Trinidad and Tobago, and the third time with Comfort. During Comfort's time in Trinidad, patients can receive treatment at the medical site, and surgical operations will occur aboard the ship in the Port of Spain. In addition to Trinbagonian medical professionals, medical personnel from Canada, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Ecuador will work together to provide medical services.

“I will be working in patient administration, doing vitals and surgical screenings,” said Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Joshua Bird, assigned to Comfort. “I'm excited to help patients. We are going to be giving a lot of help to people who need it.”

Comfort's medical care extends beyond human patients during this mission stop, providing critical veterinary services to

animals in need. A U.S. Army veterinary element from the 248th Medical Detachment Veterinary Service Support aboard Comfort will conduct subject matter expert trainings and veterinary services at various locations in Trinidad.

“I’m excited to teach the canine handlers of Trinidad how to perform basic canine tactical combat casualty care,” said U.S. Army Pvt. Angel Bautista, a veterinary technician. “Hopefully what they learn, they will teach other people about performing canine medical care.”

Comfort service members will conduct side-by-side medical exchanges and teach a tactical combat casualty care course to Trinbagonian health professionals. These exchanges will empower Trinbagonian field experts with enhanced skills and knowledge through expert instruction and practical application.

Beyond providing crucial medical care and training, this mission stop offers service members a unique opportunity to forge lasting connections with the community of Trinidad. The mission stop features several impactful community outreach events, including a sports competition and the donation of essential sports equipment. Furthermore, the United States Fleet Forces Band “Uncharted Waters” will collaborate with Trinidad and Tobago’s musical talent in a series of dynamic performances.

“We visited in 2023, and we are looking forward to continue our collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force Steel Orchestra, along with the National Steel Symphony Orchestra of Trinidad and Tobago, whom we have worked with in the past,” said Ensign Christopher McGann, band director assigned to “Uncharted Waters.”

Lastly, the Seabees assigned to Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 11 will work with Trinidad and Tobago Defence

Force engineers to improve and repair projects at the Lochmaben R. C. Primary School in Fullerton, Trinidad.

CP25 marks the 16th mission to the region since 2007 and the eighth aboard Comfort. The mission will foster goodwill, strengthen existing partnerships with partner nations, and encourage the establishment of new partnerships among countries, non-federal entities, and international organizations.

U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet supports U.S. Southern Command's joint and combined military operations by employing maritime forces in cooperative maritime security operations to maintain access, enhance interoperability, and build enduring partnerships to enhance regional security and promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Caribbean, Central, and South American region.

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## **LSE 2025 Concludes: A New Benchmark in Global Naval Integration**



U.S. Navy Adm. James W. Kilby, Chief of Naval Operations (Acting) (center), speaks with Capt. Nathan Diaz, commanding officer of the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Normandy (CG 60) aboard the USS Normandy during Large Scale Exercise (LSE) on August 5, 2025 (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Nathan T. Beard)

[From U.S. Fleet Forces Command](#)

NORFOLK, Va. – Sailors and Marines from across the globe participated in the U.S. Navy- and U.S. Marine Corps-led Large Scale Exercise (LSE) 2025, July 30-Aug. 8.

LSE 2025 marks the most comprehensive demonstration of global maritime coordination to date, testing the services' ability to command and control forces across the full spectrum of conflict in a contested, high-end fight. Using a globally integrated live, virtual and constructive maritime exercise model, the 10-day event addressed complex simulated scenarios while enhancing interoperability, refining tactics, and strengthening collaboration for thousands of Sailors and Marines operating around the world.

For the first time, all 10 Fleet Maritime Operations Centers (MOCs) operated together, synchronizing real-time effects and exercising command and control across 22 time zones and six combatant commands. The exercise replicated the complexity, friction, and operational tempo of global conflict.

“At its core, LSE 2025 is about readiness. It allows us to refine how we command and control forces on a global scale, how we align efforts with interagency teammates, allies and partners, and how we generate and sustain combat power under pressure,” said Vice Adm. John Gumbleton, acting commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command. “One of our top priorities is validating the Global Maritime Response Plan, proving we can shift from steady-state operations to a full warfighting posture at speed, whenever and wherever we’re needed.”

For the first time, LSE 2025 incorporated operational-level participation from key allies and partners, including Canada, Japan, and NATO forces, strengthening coalition integration and interoperability in contested environments. The exercise also included interagency and joint elements, reinforcing the principle of integrated deterrence across domains.

A cornerstone of LSE 2025 was the validation of the Global Maritime Response Plan (GMRP)—demonstrating the Navy’s ability to rapidly shift from day-to-day operations to full-scale warfighting. This required a coordinated effort across the entire enterprise, from OPNAV, Type Commands (TYCOMs), and Systems Commands (SYSCOMs) to the Navy Reserve Force.

“This was more than a Navy and Marine Corps event. It was a unified effort across allies, joint forces, and interagency partners,” said Gumbleton. “Exercises like LSE 2025 showcase the strength of integrated deterrence and the value of building warfighting trust across every level of command.”

LSE 2025 moved beyond coordination to full integration, embedding joint capabilities from the outset and enabling commanders to deliver decisive effects at the operational level.

“Integrating with our naval counterparts, especially at the MOC, enables the Navy and Marine Corps team to exercise command and control of the most lethal fighting force in the world, said Brig. Gen. Thomas M. Armas, deputy commander, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, Marine Forces Command, Marine Forces Northern Command. “The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), known as a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), embarked on a three ship Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), provides numerous options when campaigning or responding to crisis. LSE 25 provides a venue to practice synchronized and innovative command and control in order to ensure guaranteed max effective results when our nation needs it most.”

Large Scale Exercise 2025 provided a pivotal opportunity to test and refine the Navy and Marine Corps’ ability to operate in a globally contested environment. By integrating advanced warfighting concepts, allied capabilities, and real-time operational coordination, the exercise reinforced the maritime services’ commitment to maintaining strategic advantage, deterring aggression, and ensuring security and stability across the world’s oceans.

U.S. Fleet Forces Command is responsible for manning, training, equipping and employing more than 125 ships, 1,000 aircraft, and 103,000 active-duty service members and government employees, and providing combat-ready forces forward to numbered fleets and combatant commanders around the globe in support of U.S. national interests.

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# Coast Guard District is Economic Nerve Center with Complex Northern Border Challenge



The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Bristol Bay, homeported in Detroit, assists the vessel James R. Barker at Rock Cut in the St. Marys River April 2, 2018. Bristol Bay worked the river to keep the waterway open. *Photo credit: U.S. Coast Guard | Chief Petty Officer Nick Gould*

*Editor's Note: Since this article first appeared in the July/August issue of Seapower, the 9th District has been renamed the Great Lakes District.*

The 9th Coast Guard District, or D9 as it is known to the

5,000 people stationed at more than 78 units across five sectors, encompasses eight U.S. states and the five Great Lakes, including three of the world's largest by surface area – Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

With 6,700 miles of shoreline and a 1,600-nautical-mile international border with Canada, the 9th District ensures safe passage each year for 80 million tons of bulk cargo – iron ore, taconite pellets, grain, salt, concrete and fertilizer – along a handful of vital shipping corridors. In D9, these waterways are essentially narrow passages; in the event of a marine casualty situation, bypasses are scarce. What's more, 90% of the nation's iron ore (taconite) comes from open-pit mines in Minnesota and Wisconsin on Lake Superior, where its shipping relies entirely on the Soo Locks, a complex of locks on the St. Marys River without which Lake Superior would be isolated from the rest of the Great Lakes.

Inside the 9th District is the 2,340-mile St. Lawrence Seaway. The primary access route to North America's heartland, the seaway connects the Atlantic Ocean to the head of the Great Lakes. The route is the only navigable link for oceangoing vessels, including cruise ships, to reach the major inland ports of the Great Lakes, among them Ontario's Port of Thunder Bay and the Port of Duluth-Superior.

D9 also has oversight of 5.5 million registered boaters with some of the busiest recreational boating activity in the world. Driving home the economic value of D9's area of responsibility is the fact that America's five great lakes contain 20% of the Earth's fresh surface water, and 40 million Americans rely on the lakes for safe drinking water.

But there's more: a "Hall-of-Fame" stat one might not expect, according to Rear Admiral Jon P. Hickey, the 9th District commander and senior Coast Guard commander for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway.

"If you took the Great Lakes region, the eight states, the two

Canadian provinces, the five lakes, and called that a nation, it would be the third-largest GDP in the world [after] the United States and China,” Hickey told Seapower. “The impact that this sector has, it’s real, it’s tangible. In the 9th District, we’re all about safety and security of these maritime regions, these lakes. It is a lifeblood of the U.S. economy.”

D9 is a thriving ecosystem in which all the moving parts – the multitude of lakes and waterways, the valuable cargo, the skilled workforce and the robust, if overworked, fleet – function seamlessly, usually without disruption and therefore, out of the public eye. None of the work is effortless, much less easy. Hickey described the “challenging” narrow passage along the St. Marys River, considered critical infrastructure by the Department of Homeland Security.

“That’s why we have the vessel traffic system. It is absolutely critical what these folks do to manage vessel traffic safely and securely in those waterways,” Hickey said. “You’ve got these ... thousand footers [ships] going through there ... carrying a product that’s essential to our economy, our security, and if anything were to go wrong, it’s likely [to] block the waterway. These are the things that keep me up at night. The idea of a marine casualty in the St. Marys River, the Detroit River, the St. Clair River because those are the single points of failure in the MTS,” or maritime transportation system.

The regulatory and security landscape surrounding maritime operations on the Great Lakes is nothing if not complex. With 1,600 nautical miles of maritime international border, Hickey said the long-standing cooperation with Canadian maritime authorities is crucial.

“We have an incredible partnership with [our Canadian partners],” Hickey said. “We call it ‘Shiprider,’ where they come on board our vessels, and we go on their vessels. So,

it's a seamless enforcement of Canadian and U.S. laws across that border. We're ensuring the safety and security of our maritime transportation system, which on the Great Lakes is tantamount to our border. If you were to navigate from the Sioux Locks to Duluth, you would cross the Canadian and U.S. border, staying inside the channel, over 20 times."

Unique to the 9th District is the Canadian and U.S. Laker fleet, which operates solely within the bounds of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway up to around Montreal, Hickey said. Made of Canadian and U.S. commercial cargo vessels designed for the transport of bulk commodities within the Great Lakes system, the Laker fleet is "not really considered international" and not subject to the same international regulations, such as SOLAS (International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea), given they only operate within the internal waters of Canada and the U.S.

Meanwhile, the seasonal foreign trade routes through the St. Lawrence Seaway bring foreign flag vessels into the Great Lakes from mid-March to January every year. These vessels are subject to international regulations and must abide by SOLAS requirements because they are in U.S. and Canadian internal waters.

"We have to be very vigilant about ... what's coming in," Hickey said. "Are they threats to our critical infrastructure, our safety, security? If they meet the threshold for a high-interest vessel, we are going to board them as soon as – or before – they get into the lakes. In the U.S. waters and in the seaway, we're going to make sure we keep our American public safe and secure."

Since January, D9 has allocated available operational capacity toward securing and defending the northern border, Hickey said. He said D9 is "leaning into" northern border concerns and intelligence, using resources on hand in anticipation of how border events elsewhere in the country play out.

“We’re also asking the questions of: ‘What would we need if we wanted to do more in the event that ... illicit activity increases on the northern border as we continue to lock down the southern border?,’ that balloon effect,” he said. “We have really doubled down on our interagency coordination. [We are] making sure that illegal cross-border activity like drug trafficking and people trafficking is not happening, and we are as committed to that as we are to our search and rescue mission.”



U.S. Coast Guard units coordinated with local partners in a response to a capsized vessel with five persons and a dog in the water off Mackinac Island, Michigan. (U.S. , in August 2024. Photo credit: U.S. Coast Guard Station St. Ignace

The 9th District does the second-most search and rescue cases after the 7th Coast Guard District in the Southeastern U.S. and Caribbean. In the past year, the people of D9 executed more than 2,000 SAR cases across the Great Lakes, Hickey said.

“We saved 873 lives,” he said. “I tell my people, if you save one life, you’ve impacted and changed the lives of everybody in their circle of trust, circle of love, friends, family and loved ones, for the rest of their lives. Search and rescue goes beyond just a mission. It is our special trust with the American public.”

Whether on behalf of recreational boating safety, icebreaking or the uneventful movement of critical bulk cargo, the D9’s Vessel Traffic Service teams rely on a healthy fleet of multimission cutters, response and patrol boats, and, by extension, U.S. Laker cargo vessels. This is not as easy as it sounds, according to Hickey, who said overdue maintenance and slow to no vessel recapitalization are ongoing challenges for VTS operations and overall readiness.

“Those VTS folks are like air traffic controllers. They maintain situational awareness,” Hickey said. “Our U.S. Laker fleet and the Canadian Laker fleet is old, and what we’re witnessing is an increase in our maritime casualties. I am concerned about the health of the fleet. We are in a downward readiness spiral ... and it’s due to the perennial underinvestment in our Coast Guard. We have backlogs and maintenance across the board, whether it’s our cutter fleet, our boats, our aircraft or our shore infrastructure.”

In April 2025, DHS issued the Force Design 2028 report, which outlines plans for implementing transformational changes within the Coast Guard, including an overhaul of the agency’s acquisition and contracting system to expedite much-needed new ships. Shortly after the report’s release, Admiral Kevin Lunday, the acting commandant of the Coast Guard, told members of the House Armed Services Committee that efforts were underway and that production milestones outlined in Force Design 2028 are being met.

Hickey said the plans in Force Design 2028 can’t come soon enough. Citing last winter’s above-average ice season in the

Great Lakes, he said it was the first time in a while the 9th District had been “stress-tested” with respect to the icebreaking mission. But, thanks to some excellent advanced planning by D9 district staff for maintenance and to complete aids to navigation, or ATONs, in the summer months, they were well prepared.

“We were able to cover down very, very well on the ice season. But, from my perspective, this plan to renew our fleet, our Coast Guard writ large, can’t come soon enough,” Hickey said. “When we talk about Force Design 2028 and recapitalizing the Coast Guard, the VTS system is part of that. We need to recapitalize that system. I am very grateful for the leadership of the administration to get after recapitalization and renewal of the Coast Guard, because it’s not sustainable.”

*Daisy Khalifa is a journalist and publicist. With more than 25 years of professional, public affairs and writing experience in Washington, D.C., she recently relocated to the Minneapolis area. Khalifa has consulted and worked full-time in the federal government, for associations and for Fortune 500 companies, among them the Smithsonian Institution, MCI and Nextel Corp.*

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## **Adm. Caudle Relinquishes Command of U.S. Fleet Forces Command**



U.S. Navy Adm. Daryl Caudle, speaks during the relinquishment of command ceremony for U.S. Fleet Forces Command (USFFC) aboard Naval Station Norfolk on August 6, 2025. USFFC is responsible for manning, training, equipping and providing combat-ready forces forward to numbered fleets and combatant commanders around the globe. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Nathan T. Beard/Released)

[Release From U.S. Fleet Forces Command](#)

NORFOLK, Va. – Admiral Daryl L. Caudle relinquished command of U.S. Fleet Forces Command (USFFC) during a ceremony held aboard Naval Station Norfolk, Aug. 6, 2025.

Presiding over the ceremony was U.S. Air Force Gen. Gregory Guillot, commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command, who praised Caudle’s visionary leadership, operational focus, and relentless dedication to enhancing Fleet readiness during a period of rising strategic competition.

“For the last three and a half years, [Adm. Caudle] has served

simultaneously in four critical positions – Joint Force Maritime Component Commander, Strategic; Commander, United States Naval Forces – Strategic Command; Commander, United States Naval Forces – Northern Command; and Commander, United States Fleet Forces Command,” said Guillot. “In each role, Admiral Caudle served with distinction – persistently advocating for modernization while emphasizing fleet readiness and wartime preparedness.”

During his tenure, Caudle led a force of more than 138,000 Sailors, over 120 ships and submarines, 1,500 aircraft, seven task forces, and five carrier strike groups. His leadership was instrumental in key initiatives that reshaped the Navy’s approach to training, readiness, and force integration.

Among his many accomplishments, he reshaped Atlantic Fleet operations through the One Atlantic initiative, breaking down legacy command-and-control silos and improving homeland defense while enhancing the Navy’s ability to respond to high-velocity threats in the Atlantic, Arctic, and high north.

Caudle championed the development of Live, Virtual Environments, and Constructive Scenarios (LVC), culminating in the establishment of the Hefti Global LVC Operations Center in 2024. The state-of-the-art facility integrates live and simulated training environments, greatly enhancing warfighter preparedness in high-end conflict scenarios.

Also, Caudle led the Navy’s participation in the Chief of Naval Operations-directed Large Scale Exercises 2023 and 2025, which spanned 22 time zones, component commands, U.S. numbered Fleets, and this year, for the first time, including allies and partners – marking the most extensive naval exercise in more than a generation.

Caudle’s focus on homeland defense led to the creation of Maritime Command Elements East and West, streamlining command-

and-control for maritime homeland defense and disaster response operations.

Caudle drove combat-proven readiness across the Fleet, ensuring all deploying units met the highest standards of lethality and performance, demonstrated during major naval engagements in the Red Sea as part of Operations Prosperity Guardian and Poseidon Archer.

In his remarks, Caudle expressed that his proudest accomplishment was the three-year effort that culminated in the Global Maritime Response Plan, a process that leverages combat surge ready units and response conditions to control our escalation of readiness and forces across the spectrum of conflict.

“Leading this extraordinary team has been an honor,” Caudle said. “Your dedication, resilience, and pursuit of excellence have been the driving force behind everything Fleet Forces Command achieved in propelling our Navy forward. You are executing a vital role in force development, force generation and force employment, and that is no doubt a relentless effort.”

As Caudle concludes a tour marked by historic achievements, he leaves behind a legacy of innovation, integration, and strategic foresight that will guide U.S. naval operations for years to come.