U.S. Coast Guard cutter arrives in Papua New Guinea, embarks law enforcement officers to conduct joint maritime patrol

International partners from Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Indonesia, New Zealand, the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, stand on the flight deck of the Coast Guard Cutter Midgett (WMSL 757) in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea Mar. 6, 2025. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Jennifer Nilson)

From U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area, March 12, 2025

PORT MORESBY, Papua New Guinea – At the invitation of the

Papua New Guinea government, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Midgett (WMSL 757) arrived in Port Moresby, Thursday, to embark Papua New Guinean law enforcement officers. This visit directly supports Papua New Guinea's leadership in the Pacific Islands and its commitment to maritime security, specifically in combatting illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

Midgett's presence reinforces the U.S. Coast Guard's commitment to deeper relations with Pacific Island nations and regional stability. This collaborative effort marks the first time a national security cutter, the U.S. Coast Guard's most capable law enforcement cutter, will conduct bilateral maritime law enforcement operations in Papua New Guinea's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), under the existing bilateral agreement that was singed in May 2023.

This joint patrol will represent a tangible demonstration of the bilateral agreement between the United States and Papua New Guinea, strengthening maritime governance within the Pacific and deterring illegal activities within Papua New Guinea's EEZ to promote the sustainable use of marine resources.

Midgett, commissioned in 2019 and homeported in Honolulu, is the eighth Legend-class national security cutter. These 418-foot vessels are equipped with advanced technology and a range of capabilities, making them ideally suited to support a wide range of missions, including maritime security, law enforcement, and search and rescue operations. Midgett's deployment to Oceania highlights the United States' enduring commitment to promoting a peaceful, secure, prosperous, and resilient Pacific Islands region

Sound-Absorbing Chamber Allows Navy to Test Torpedoes Indoors

March 13, 2025 | By Katie Lange, DoD News

The Navy has various methods of testing torpedoes and other underwater weapons, including at tracking ranges. One unique Navy facility in Keyport, Washington allows experts to test these systems indoors.

The Weapons System Test Facility at Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division was built in the 1980s to conduct land-based testing and evaluation of various undersea weapons capabilities including torpedoes and the sensors attached to them.

“Back the Cold War, they running every torpedo on our test ranges. Every single one that’s produced … before deploying it

to the fleet. Obviously, there's a lot of cost and schedule associated with that," said Will Buck, the deputy division head of the Undersea Systems Acquisition and Assessment Division that runs the facility.

To save time and money, the Navy built the facility that contains a pressure chamber that's 45 feet long and 12 feet in diameter. The chamber can hold 40,000 gallons of water that Buck's team of about 20 people can pressurize and heat up or cool down to test torpedoes, sensors and unmanned underwater vehicles in their operational environments.

"It only takes about 30 minutes to fill and drain the tank, turn the wrench and test again," Buck said. "So, it just helps us quickly move through test evolutions to make sure that Navy systems are working the way they're supposed to."

While the facility was first set up in the 1980s, it sat dormant for about 20 years after an accident in 1996 at a similar U.S. facility led to its closure. About a decade ago, Buck and his team knew the space could be useful, so they got approval to revitalize and modernize it.

Typically, undersea weapons find their targets through sounds created underwater. The current facility includes an anechoic chamber – a box within the primary pressure chamber that absorbs sound waves – that can simulate the acoustics of an undersea environment.

Buck's team tests weapons in the chamber to find answers to questions such as, what direction the sounds are traveling, if they're loud enough and if they'll be heard far enough away.

There were other questions the team considered. "What's the directivity of this source? How long is the pulse? How loud is it? What frequency is it?" Buck said. "We're trying to make sure that meets the performance requirements of the system," Buck said.

If those parameters aren’t up to par, the risk for a weapon to miss its target is higher, he said.

The team has tested several Mark 48 and Mark 54 torpedoes in the pressure chamber, as well as torpedo warning systems parts, the Gavia UUV and submarine sonar known as the high-frequency chin array.

“We can put almost any kind of naval system – I mean, outside of a submarine or something really, really big – and we can recreate the physical characteristics it’s going to operate under and provide high-confidence data in how it’s going to react, how it’s going to perform and what changes, if any, are going to be made to the system before it goes out into the hands of the fleet.”

Buck said his versatile team constantly gets to flex its design and engineering muscles with the wide variety of work it’s asked to do, especially with all the new technological capabilities that are coming onto the scene.

“Everything we’re doing with UUVs is relatively modern and novel,” Buck said.

Buck, who’s been at NUWC Division, Keyport, for more than a decade, has a bachelor’s degree in physics and a master’s degree in acoustics. He said for many in his field of work, there aren’t a lot of opportunities outside of academia, so the Navy has been a great place for him to put those skills to work and make a real difference.

“They value competent and well-thought-out ideas and will put investment behind that,” Buck said of his division. “We’ve come a long way as a result. I’ve loved being here.”

The facility has partnered with various institutions on some of its work, including the Applied Research Lab at Pennsylvania State University. Several of the members of the team have published their work and presented at scientific

conferences, helping them to stay engaged with academia.

America ARG Completes Westpac Patrol

12 March 2025

SASEBO, Japan – The America Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) completed their first patrol of 2025, March 6.

This routine patrol, coordinated between the U.S. Pacific Fleet (PACFLT) and U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific (MARFORPAC), served to maintain a consistent presence in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations.

“Throughout our time at sea, we have remained on plan and on target conducting routine operations in the U.S. 7th Fleet area to enhance interoperability with our allies and

partners," said Commander, Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 11, Capt. Patrick German. "Together, we continued to serve cohesively as a ready-response force to defend peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

During the winter patrol, the America ARG consisted of PHIBRON 11, the America-class amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6), the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS San Diego (LPD 22), and the Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship USS Rushmore (LSD 47). Additionall y, the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS New Orleans (LPD 18) briefly joined the team of ships at sea, while conducting routine operations.

"It has been great to have all our assets underway," said German, who previously served as New Orleans commanding officer. "I am extremely proud to have all four amphibious ships underway simultaneously. Having all ships underway simultaneously goes a long way in ensuring our allies and partners that we are a ready force here to assist when and where it's necessary."

From an amphibious assault ship, to an amphibious transport dock ship, to a dock landing ship, each vessel brought its own capabilities to form one, united ARG, operating at sea.

"Each ship has a specific role and while there's some overlap, some of those roles are specific to that particular ship," said German. "For instance, LSDs have the largest well decks in the Navy's amphibious fleet. Then you have the LHA, which is a floating airport. Even though we have aviation capabilities on the LPDs and the LSDs, they can't assume the same role as the LHA or LHD. So, the aggregate of a three to four ship ARG increases strength and enhances the multi-role capability of an amphibious outfit."

Additionally, the 31st MEU integrated into the ARG to form a

powerful and cohesive blue-green team. Its aviation combat element comprised of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 262 (Reinforced) and a detachment from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242; the ground combat element comprised of Battalion Landing Team 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines (2/4); and the logistics combat element comprised of Combat Logistics Battalion 31.

“Working alongside the Marines was critical for us,” said San Diego Commanding Officer Capt. Timothy Carter. “As we continued to learn from each other, we also built on the foundations of our partnerships within our own organization, so that when the time comes to provide support to our allies and partners, we are ready, welding, and prepared to execute our mission.”

Carter added having Marines and Sailors working together is the name of the game in an ARG; having a Blue-Green team is vital to the strength of amphibious operations and capabilities.

During 25.1, America and Rushmore also participated in Iron Fist 2025, while San Diego became the third U.S. ship to visit Ishigaki, Japan in three years, underscoring the strength and commitment of the U.S.-Japan alliance as a cornerstone to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.
Throughout 25.1, the ARG worked as one team in response to operational tasking, from start to end.

“It has been phenomenal watching our teams come together,” said Carter. “We all bring different types of capabilities to the fight. Everyone has a unique art and everyone plays a valuable role in what we have accomplished here. Throughout our interoperability and certifying exercises, we truly came together as a unit, both sea force and landing force while operating as one.”

Based in Sasebo, Japan, and consisting of the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6), transport dock ships USS San Diego (LPD 22) and USS New Orleans (LPD 18), and the dock landing ship USS Rushmore (LSD 47); PHIBRON 11 provides centralized planning embarkation, movement control, coordination and integration of all aspects of amphibious warfare.

Navy Intends to Ramp Up Shipbuilding Through Collaborative Efforts

March 11, 2025 | By David Vergun, DoD News

U.S. shipbuilders continue to produce the highest quality,

safest and most advanced warships on the planet, said Brett A. Seidle, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development, and acquisition, who testified today at a House Armed Services Committee's seapower and projection forces subcommittee hearing on the state of U.S. shipbuilding.

"We have the finest Navy ever assembled in the history of the world," Seidle said. "They're coming to a theater near you, bringing their A game."

However, at a time when adversaries around the globe challenge the maritime commons, the U.S. shipbuilding industry is challenged to produce the quantity of ships at the rate required, he said.

Cost and schedule performance remain challenging with deliveries approximately one to three years late and cost rising faster than overall inflation. These issues are prevalent across the nuclear and conventional shipbuilding communities with both the Navy and industry sharing responsibility, Seidle said.

Some things brought this about, he said, including reduced competition and capacity at tier-one shipyards. Additionally, suppliers have experienced atrophy of the manufacturing sector, shifting Navy requirements, burdensome acquisition processes, depressed investment, workforce shortages, diminished proficiency, supply chain disruptions, historic underinvestment and industry consolidation following the end of the Cold War.

"I was not raised in the shipbuilding environment and therefore am not saddled with preconceived notions of 'this is how we've always done it.' I certainly welcome informed perspectives from those who are passionate about strengthening our fleet," Seidle said.

He believes these collective challenges can be overcome, he said.

“This committee has my passionate commitment to collaborate with Congress, industry, academia, training organizations, trade associations, as well as all levels of government in pursuit of improved cost and schedule performance,” Seidle testified.

“Our nation and the world need the strength of our Navy, and my intent is do everything in my power to deliver on that promise,” he said.

Mass Timber, 3D Printing May be Future of Military Construction for Army, Navy

March 11, 2025 | By C. Todd Lopez, DoD News

Army and Navy barracks may one day be 3D printed or built using mass timber construction that involves large wooden structural beams manufactured from smaller lumber.

Today on Capitol Hill, Dave Morrow, director of military programs for Army Corps of Engineers, and Keith Hamilton, chief engineer for Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, met with lawmakers from the House appropriations committee, subcommittee on defense, to discuss the current and potential future uses of innovative construction techniques and technologies by the armed forces.

Additive construction – 3D printing buildings – high performance cement and concrete mixes, geosynthetics, mass timber, composite materials, industrialized construction, tension fabric structures, and carbon fiber reinforced

polymers were all part of the discussion with lawmakers about how the Army and Navy can develop the most cost efficient and resilient military construction projects.

“In an increasingly complex global security environment, our commitment to innovation in military construction is not just about building structures, it’s about building the resilience and readiness our forces need to prevail,” Morrow said. “By working with industry to leverage these advancements, we can deliver more durable, sustainable and cost-effective infrastructure for our military, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used efficiently, while equipping our troops with the best facilities in the world.”

The Army Corps of Engineers, Morrow said, has already piloted 3D printed construction at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, and Fort Bliss, Texas. At Fort Bliss, three new projects, involving barracks, were constructed using 3D printing technology.

Morrow said this technology can be used in garrison or in expeditionary environments.

“Additive construction has [the] potential to reduce costs, manpower, logistics and time, while opening the door for improved and new applications, such as unconventional countermeasures,” he told lawmakers.

The USACE’s Engineer Research and Development Center, has played a part in the development of unified facilities criteria, to allow additive construction in 80% of the United States, Morrow said. The criteria, developed jointly, sets basic technical requirements that must be followed to deliver code-compliant, complete and usable military facilities.

In Hampton Roads, Virginia, the Navy is now piloting the use of mass timber, also called cross-laminated timber for construction of a child development center, Hamilton said.

In testimony submitted to the committee, Hamilton said the new facility will use a hybrid mass timber exterior envelope consisting of cross-laminated walls and diaphragms.

“DOD has expressly acknowledged the applicability of CLT with the creation of a guide specification,” Hamilton said. “As the CLT construction industry matures, CLT may prove more competitive and could be utilized more broadly in DOD construction.”

The USACE is also working with mass timber projects, Morrow said.

“We recently designed the Army’s first barracks made primarily with mass timber structural elements and are soliciting interest in construction of a project at Mountain Home Air Force Base, calling for the incorporations of mass timber design,” he said, adding that mass timber construction in those projects may reduce construction timelines.

Hamilton told lawmakers, at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, NAVFAC was involved in piloting the use of high-performance concrete to build a new F-35 Lighting II hanger.

Advancements within HPC include durability, strength, and resistance to extreme environmental conditions, as well as improved thermal and acoustic properties.

“HPC has been used extensively for our piers, runways and other critical infrastructure; and we are broadening its application,” Hamilton wrote in submitted testimony.

Like USACE, Hamilton said, NAVFAC is looking to newer technologies to provide better facilities and better capabilities to warfighters.

“NAVFAC is actively testing and employing innovative technologies, materials and methods for design and

construction today, and we are leaning forward to increase collaboration with industry, academia and other government partners to identify and leverage future opportunities," Hamilton said.

Within the Navy, he told lawmakers, new guidance requires NAVFAC planners and engineers to evaluate if new military construction projects can use alternative construction methods to meet warfighting requirements, lower costs and accelerate project delivery.

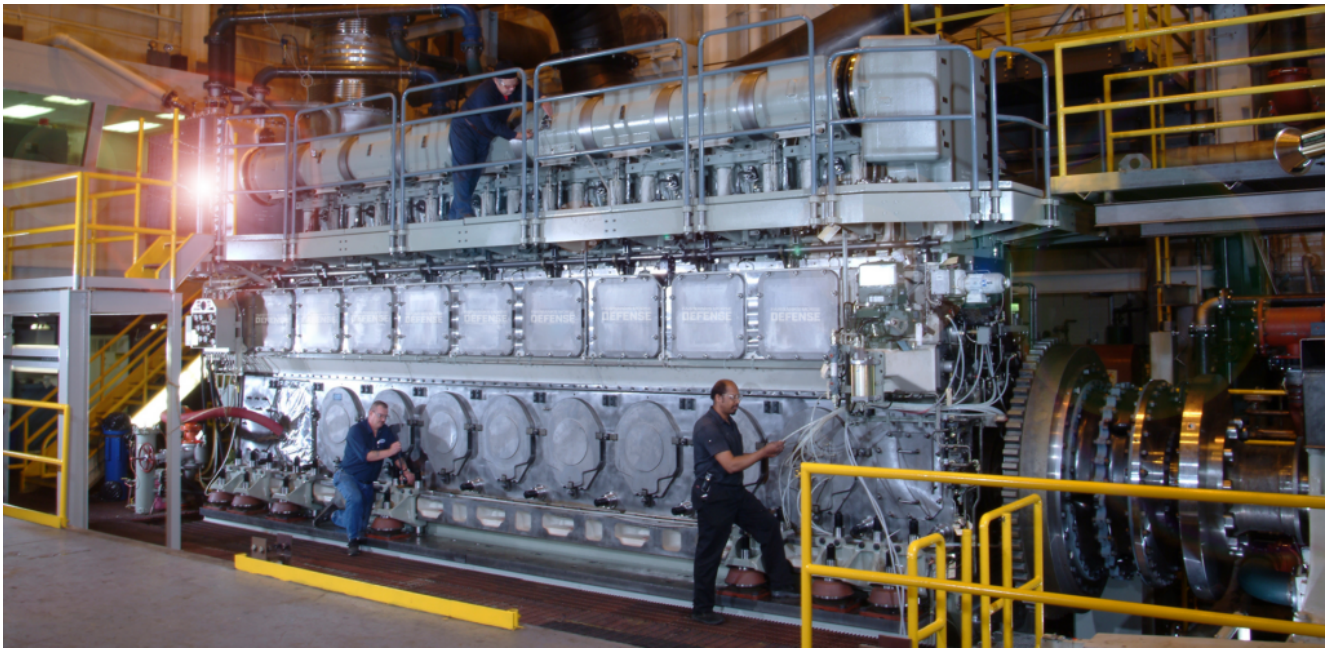
Curtiss-Wright Awarded $50 Million IDIQ Contract by Naval Air Systems Command for High-Speed Data Acquisition Systems

ASHBURN, Va. – March 11, 2025 – Curtiss-Wright's Defense Solutions Division today announced it has been awarded an approximately $50 million firm-fixed-price Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract by Naval Air Systems Command to provide its high-speed data acquisition systems hardware and associated repair services in support of the Naval Air Systems Command Special Flight Test Instrumentation Pool. The contract, which is scheduled to run through January 2030, covers Curtiss-Wright's full line of flight test instrumentation products, including data acquisition units, network switches, data recorders, network gateways, Ethernet radios, RF transmitters, C-Band

transponders, and high-speed cameras supporting fixed-wing and rotary military aircraft. This contract will support numerous platforms including the F-35, F-18, CH-53K, E-2D, EA-18, C-130, and future U.S. Navy development programs.

“We are honored that our high-speed data acquisition technology and services have been selected by Naval Air Systems Command,” said Brian Perry, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Curtiss-Wright Defense Solutions Division. “This IDIQ contract, which is the renewal of an existing contract that has been in use for over 15 years, represents Naval Air Systems Command’s continued endorsement of the reliability and performance of our flight test instrumentation technology to support critical naval air deployments and future U.S. Navy development programs.”

Fairbanks Morse Defense to Supply Engines for Future USNS Dolores Huerta



Fairbanks Morse Defense is supplying main propulsion engines for several fleet replenishment oilers to Military Sealift Command, including the future USNS Dolores Huerta. Photo credit: Fairbanks Morse Defense.

BELOIT, Wis. – Fairbanks Morse Defense has been awarded a contract by General Dynamics NASSCO to build and deliver the main propulsion diesel engines for the Military Sealift Command's future USNS Dolores Huerta (T-AO 214).

"Fairbanks Morse Defense understands that victory at sea begins in the engine room. Over the years, we've been honored to work with the military in delivering reliable engines built on proven technology, and we hold that responsibility with the utmost seriousness," said George Whittier, CEO of Fairbanks Morse Defense. "Our commitment remains steadfast: to equip every ship in the U.S. fleet with the most advanced equipment and technologies, ensuring our sailors can successfully fulfill their mission to protect the freedom of the seas."

The USNS Dolores Huerta is the 10th vessel in the John Lewis-class of fleet replenishment oilers. It will be powered by two 12V 48/60 CR main propulsion engines and two 71 32/44 CR service diesel engines, all manufactured at FMD's Beloit, Wisconsin facility. Each engine will feature FMD's common rail fuel injection system, which improves fuel atomization and

combustion efficiency.

Engine delivery for the USNS Dolores Huerta is scheduled for late 2026. Fairbanks Morse Defense has previously supplied engines for T-AO 205 through T-AO 211 and is currently working on engines for T-AO 212 and T-AO 213.

John Lewis-class oilers, also known as T-AO 205-class, have the capacity to carry 162,000 barrels of oil and a significant amount of dry cargo, providing vital fuel supplies to the U.S. Navy’s carrier strike groups. The ships in this class are named after civil rights leaders such as John Lewis, Harvey Milk, Robert F. Kennedy, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Sojourner Truth. T-AO 214 is named in honor of Dolores Huerta, a prominent labor leader and civil rights activist who, alongside Cesar Chavez, played a pivotal role in the farmworkers’ labor movement in the 20th century.

HII to Strengthen Nuclear-Powered Submarine Supply Chain

Largest U.S. Shipbuilder Teams with Australian Submarine Agency to Qualify Suppliers

From HII

CANBERRA, Australia, March 11, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) — HII (NYSE: HII), the largest military shipbuilder in the United States and a global leader in nuclear-powered submarine construction, was awarded a contract to deliver the new Australian Submarine Supplier Qualification (AUSSQ) pilot program over the next two years to accelerate the identification and qualification of Australian suppliers and products into the United States submarine industrial base.

The contract's initial value is $9.6 million (AUD) with the option to extend based on achievement.

The pilot program will support the development of a sovereign robust, internationally integrated supply chain, accelerating Australian industry's critical contribution to the success of the AUKUS trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

“This contract represents a significant milestone in building a resilient and globally integrated supply chain for nuclear-powered submarines,” said Chris Kastner, president and CEO of HII. “HII has a long history of working with suppliers to ensure they meet the highest standards in safety, security, and performance. We welcome Australian partners to help build out this critical nuclear shipbuilding capability and ensure the long-term success of AUKUS.”

A photo accompanying this release is available at: http://hii.com/news/hii-to-strengthen-nuclear-powered-submarine-supply-chain/.

The HII led AUSSQ pilot program is part of the Australian Government’s comprehensive “AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy,” released by the Australian Submarine Agency on March 5, 2025. The Industry Strategy “identifies the conditions to develop the sovereign industrial capability needed to deliver, operate and sustain our future conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines, while also ensuring our existing *Collins*-class submarines are sustained and upgraded until their eventual withdrawal from service.”

The AUKUS Submarine Industry Strategy states, “The [AUSSQ Pilot program] will use a B2B model, enabling HII Australia to work directly with Australian businesses to qualify both the businesses and their products, and subsequently assist them to tender for supply into the US programs.”

“An Australian submarine industrial base capable of building and sustaining a persistent, potent and sovereign multi-class submarine capability is vital to the defense of Australia, and this Pilot initiative with HII Australia is another important step to this being achieved,” stated Richard Marles, deputy prime minister of Australia and Australia minister for Defence.

The AUSSQ pilot program will engage with Australian companies

nationwide, building on the success of the recent partnership of HII Australia with both the South Australian Government and the Western Australian government, and complements the Australian government's existing Defence Industry Vendor Qualification (DIVQ) Program.

With over 60 years of experience managing complex supplier networks for U.S. Navy nuclear-powered submarine programs and maintaining a strong nuclear stewardship culture for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) on critical national security projects, HII's expertise in quality assurance, safety, and technical training will support Australian industry in meeting the stringent requirements for nuclear-powered submarine construction. The company also brings a record of advancing science, technology, and environmental protection, as well as proven performance in developing and sustaining a highly skilled nuclear workforce, including by investing in education and training programs that attract, develop, and retain top talent in local communities. By leveraging this extensive experience, HII is prepared to support Australia's efforts to build and sustain a robust industrial base capable of supporting these highly sophisticated vessels.

Every year HII spends approximately $1 billion with more than 2,000 suppliers in the United States, with nearly half of this amount going to small businesses.

HII's engagement will focus on assessing and developing Australian suppliers, providing technical guidance, and implementing best practices to ensure compliance with the precise specifications required for nuclear submarine components. By leveraging HII's deep experience in supply chain management and industrial base expansion, the program aims to establish a sustainable pipeline of qualified suppliers, reinforcing the broader AUKUS effort. This contract works in conjunction with our Global Supply Chain Program's broader Australian supplier initiatives.

The contract will be managed by HII's Australian operations leveraging the company's local and international strengths and skills delivered, and in partnership with H&B Defence – a HII and Babcock joint venture.

For more information about HII's role in nuclear-powered shipbuilding and supplier development, visit https://hii.com/what-we-do/sectors/hii-australia.

Update on the Stena Immaculate Incident in the North Sea

From Crowley, March 10, 2025

HULL, UNITED KINGDOM – March 10, 2025 – At approximately 10 a.m. UTC/5 a.m. EDT on March 10, 2025, while stationary and anchored off the North Sea coast near Hull, United Kingdom, the Crowley-managed tanker Stena Immaculate was struck on its port side by the container ship Solong. As a result, at least one cargo tank containing Jet-A1 fuel was ruptured.

Crowley is working closely with response agencies including the HM Coastguard to secure the vessel in a restricted safety area and initiate spill containment response. All 23 Crowley

mariners that were on board are safe and accounted for with no reported injuries at this time.

“As with all our operations, Crowley’s priority is to protect the safety of mariners, and the environment. We greatly appreciate the quick actions and support of the U.K. authorities, rescue workers and others to today’s incident and remain committed to working with them on the continued response efforts,” said Cal Hayden, vice president, Crowley global ship management.

The Stena Immaculate is managed by Crowley through a joint venture with owner Stena Bulk USA. In 2023, the tanker was selected by the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) to serve in its Tanker Security Program. While under charter on this voyage for the Military Sealift Command, the tanker was anchored while it awaited berth availability at the Port of Killingholme, where it was due to make a standard delivery of fuel as part of a routine service under this program when it was struck.

At this stage, it is unclear what volume of fuel may have been released as a result of the incident. At the time it was struck, the 183-meter (596-foot) Stena Immaculate was carrying 220,000 barrels of jet fuel in 16 segregated cargo tanks. Crowley is supporting the relevant authorities in the UK who are investigating the incident and will defer to them for any further questions on potential cause.

Crowley will also provide further updates on official company social media channels.

Marine Corps MQ-9 Reapers Enhanced With Advanced Payload Upgrade

An MQ-9 Reaper is upgraded with SkyTower II Pod that will be deployed to Marine Corps' squadron next year to enhance operational capability. (U.S. Navy photo)

From Naval Air Systems Command, March 10, 2025

NAS PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Navy's MQ-9 Reaper test squadron at Pax River received the first SkyTower II (STII) pod in preparation for the system's initial operational capability (IOC) next year.

Air Test and Evaluation (UX) 24 loaded the new pod onto the aircraft Feb. 25, conducting initial power on checks, the first step into integrating the new capability into the aircraft platform.

“The program is excited to deliver SkyTower II for testing, marking a major milestone in our development journey,” said Capt. Dennis Monagle, Multi-Mission Tactical UAS program manager. “Over the past two years, we’ve partnered with GALT, a small business prime vendor, to rapidly develop this unique capability using middle-tier acquisition, accelerating innovation for the warfighter. With robust system and integration testing now underway, we remain on track to achieve initial operating capability this year, delivering critical capability to the U.S. Marine Corps and the joint forces.”

STII is an airborne network extension pod that enhances cross-domain communication capabilities and links communications between disparate forces. It is required to execute the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) concept of operations by providing tactically relevant operational communications and data sharing capabilities with many forces in support of the MQ-9 Reapers’ operational mission.

UX-24 also completed a fit check of the MQ-9 in the large anechoic chamber at Pax River in late February. The team conducted a number of tests and hoisted the aircraft for the first time as a risk reduction for upcoming program efforts. The tests proved the ability to safely hang the aircraft while providing power, cooling and satellite link with the aircraft for communications, command and control.

Over the next several months, UX-24 will conduct final test events before delivering the upgraded MQ-9s to the fleet.

“The team has been able to accomplish a lot of work in a very compressed timeline by developing and executing these test plans for the chamber event and STII testing,” said Cmdr. Lauren Lawson, MQ-9 government flight test director. ”The dedication shown and technical challenges they’ve overcome to conduct this critical testing to help develop the best product possible to support the Marines is truly commendable.”

VMU-3 is currently flying MQ-9’s in theater today and will be the first to deploy with this new system in 2026.

The MQ-9 Reaper provides Marines with a long-range ISR capability in support of maritime domain awareness and expeditionary advanced based operations in contested environments.