Navy Tweaks Guidance for COVID Shipboard Measures to Comply with Updated CDC Advice

A group of first class petty officers take the Navy-Wide Advancement Exam at Commander, Fleet Activities Sasebo, Jan. 25. In alignment with Navy guidance, CFAS Sailors are taking the NWAE over a three-day testing period allowing for smaller groups of test takers to maintain adequate social distancing as part of continued COVID-19 mitigations. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jeremy Graham*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy has updated guidance to commanders for keeping COVID-19 infections off ships, and what to do if prevention measures fail.

The latest Standardized Operation Guidance (5.0), issued by Vice Adm. William Merz, deputy chief of Naval Operations for Operations, Plans and Strategy, makes changes to how long Sailors testing positive for the coronavirus must be isolated

based on the latest recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The guidance, issued Jan. 15, includes information for commanders on restriction of movement, when to test and quarantine Sailors. It also streamlines health protection measures for ships.

After the massive COVID outbreak on the USS Theodore Roosevelt in 2020 that sidelined the carrier in Guam for months, Navy leadership determined "that our guidance to our commanding officers was insufficient, that we really needed to be much more detailed, that we had to consult with scientists and environmental experts" on how to operate effectively in a contained environment during a pandemic, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday told the Surface Navy Association symposium Jan. 11,

"It is my responsibility to deliver the most capable force and this guidance helps us maximize mission readiness," Merz said in an Aug. 26 statement about the new guidance. "Vaccinations, vaccine boosters, command engagement, and personal accountability are the foundation of our success in fighting COVID."

The announcement came the same day the Navy revealed it had dismissed another 23 Sailors for refusing vaccination, bringing the total to 45 kicked out since the vaccination deadline expired in late 2021.

The Navy's new guidance, which applies to all uniformed Navy personnel "at home and deployed," cuts isolation time for Sailors testing positive for COVID but showing no, or greatly improving, symptoms – such as no fever for 24 hours – to five days, although they must wear masks for another five days to minimize the risk of infecting others.

The CDC said the change "is motivated by science demonstrating that the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in

the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after.” While vaccine booster shots are not yet required, the Navy guidance recommended them “because all studies are converging on the need for a vaccine booster to ensure enduring protection.” The booster “has essentially become the next-shot in a series and will likely become mandatory in the near future,” according to the guidance.

However, the guidance asserted that Navy Surgeon General Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham is the authority for Navy COVID-19 measures. Changes in CDC guidance on virus behavior should first be evaluated by Gillingham “prior to fleet implementation.”

Coast Guard Intercepts 191 Haitians near Bahamas

Coast Guard Kathleen Moore’s crew located a green and blue sail freighter with 191 people aboard during a routine patrol about 40 miles southwest of Great Inagua, Bahamas, Jan 25. The crew provided life jackets and brought the Haitians aboard the Coast Guard Cutters Reliance and Kathleen Moore due to safety of life at sea concerns. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

MIAMI – The Coast Guard intercepted 191 Haitians aboard an overloaded sail freighter Jan. 25, about 40 miles southwest of Great Inagua, Bahamas.

Coast Guard Kathleen Moore’s crew located a green and blue sail freighter with 191 people aboard during a routine patrol at approximately 1 a.m. The crew provided life jackets and brought the people aboard Coast Guard Cutters Reliance and Kathleen Moore due to safety of life at sea concerns.

“The Coast Guard maintains a persistent presence patrolling the waters around Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas, to help prevent loss of life on the high seas,” said Lt. David Steele, Coast Guard liaison officer,

U.S. Embassy Haiti. “These grossly overloaded vessels operate without proper safety equipment and are not built for these hazardous voyages.”

Since Oct. 1, 2021, Coast Guard crews have rescued 802 Haitians compared with:

- 1,527 Haitian Migrants in Fiscal Year 2021
- 418 Haitian Migrants in Fiscal Year 2020
- 932 Haitian Migrants in Fiscal Year 2019
- 609 Haitian Migrants in Fiscal Year 2018
- 419 Haitian Migrants in Fiscal Year 2017

Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all persons receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention. Throughout the interdiction, Coast Guard crew members were equipped with personal protective equipment to minimize potential exposure to any possible case of COVID-19.

Austal USA Celebrates Keel Laying for Navy’s Future Flight II EPF Cody

Averil Spencer, sponsor of the future USNS Cody, speaks at the keel laying ceremony. *AUSTAL USA*

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA celebrated the Jan. 26 keel laying of the future USNS Cody (EPF 14) at its ship manufacturing facility in in Mobile, Alabama, the company said in a release.

Cody is a Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transport (EPF), one of 15 the Navy has contracted Austal to build. The ship is the first U.S. Navy ship named for the city of Cody in Wyoming.

A keel laying ceremony is the formal recognition of the start of a ship's construction. At Austal USA, the keel laying symbolically recognizes module erection in final assembly and the ceremonial beginning of a ship.

The ship's sponsor is Averil Spencer, founder and executive director of Launch gURLs, a nonprofit that aims to close the gender gap in economic opportunities through entrepreneurship programming for adolescent girls globally. In honor of the

U.S. Navy ship keel laying tradition, Spencer welded her initials onto a metal plate that will be installed in the ship. She was assisted by Austal USA A-class welder Amy Cunningham.

T-EPFs 14 and 15 will be built as Flight II variants. The Flight II Variant is an adaptive, modular package that can better host an embarked unit or be set up as a Role 2E medical facility, capable of performing primary surgery, resuscitative trauma surgery, critical care, oxygen generation, blood operations, laboratory functions, and associated ancillary services. The Flight II variant also incorporates an 11-meter workboat for mission use.

USCGC Thetis Returns Home from 68-day Counter-Narcotic Deployment

USCGC Thetis (WMEC 910) crew members conduct rescue hoist training with the crew of an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter from U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Miami on Jan. 12. The flight crew consisted of members from U.S. Coast Guard Air Stations Miami and Houston and Aviation Training Center Mobile, Alabama. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class John Hightower*

KEY WEST, Fla. — The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Thetis's crew (WMEC 910) returned to homeport in Key West on Jan. 26 after a 68-day transit escorting the Coast Guard Cutters Emlen Tunnell (WPC 1145) and Glen Harris (WPC 1144) across the North Atlantic en route to their new homeport in Manama, Bahrain.

Thetis' crew worked alongside NATO Allies and interagency partners in the region while transiting in the U.S. Navy's 6th Fleet area of responsibility.

During the patrol, Thetis's crew received a report from Spain's Las Palmas Rescue Coordination Center of two overloaded migrant rafts taking on water. Thetis, Glen Harris and Emlen Tunnell crews worked together to rescue 103 migrants from overloaded and unseaworthy vessels and recovered two

deceased migrants. The rescued individuals were provided food and medical care prior to being transferred to a Royal Moroccan Navy frigate.

“While escorting two new cutters across the Atlantic, we responded to a distress call and quickly transitioned to our service’s core mission of search and rescue,” said Cmdr. Justin Nadolny, the commanding officer of Thetis. “Working alongside a Moroccan ship, we were able to rapidly respond to those in distress. The case reinforced the importance of joint operations and reaffirmed the U.S. Coast Guard’s presence in the region to ensure the safety of life at sea. I am exceedingly proud of our professional and highly capable team. The crew of all three ships showed remarkable vigilance and adaptability. This case highlighted the Coast Guard’s ability to operate worldwide to protect and save those in distress on the ocean, along with our ability to work seamlessly with international partners to accomplish a shared mission.”

Thetis’ crew strengthened international partnerships in various ports, hosting military and Coast Guard leaders in Fortaleza, Brazil and Mindelo, Cape Verde. Thetis’s crew also embarked a Cape Verdean Coast Guard officer aboard for two weeks. The professional exchange was mutually beneficial, providing U.S. Coast Guard members with a deeper understanding of maritime activity in the region while passing on valuable lessons to our foreign allies.

Prior to departing Cape Verde, U.S. Ambassador Jeff Daigle visited Thetis. The ambassador’s visit showcased the importance of the maritime partnership between the U.S. and Cape Verde while demonstrating the commitment to the shared goal of global maritime security and stability on the African continent.

Thetis deployed with a MH-65 helicopter and aircrews from Air Station Miami and Houston to increase their capabilities. The aviation detachment and cutter crew worked together to conduct

day and night flight operations and practice rescue hoists.

Thetis is the first 270-foot medium-endurance cutter to escort fast response cutters across the Atlantic in support of the Coast Guard's Patrol Forces Southwest Asia mission. These cutters are the third and fourth to be deployed to the region, with the final two scheduled to be delivered to Bahrain in the spring of 2022.

Radar Integration Determined Deployment Timing of Navy's MQ-8C Fire Scout

Lt. Cmdr. Joe Johnson assigned to the "Sea Knights" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5, mans

the flight deck control tower during flight quarters aboard the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), Dec. 15, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Danielle Baker*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy's MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned helicopter reached initial operational capability more than 2.5 years ago but made its first operational deployment only last month. The reason, the Navy's program manager explained, centered on the integration of a radar into the new Fire Scout version.

Navy Capt. Eric Soderberg, the Navy's Fire Scout program manager, speaking to reporters Jan. 25, explained the MQ-8C as a platform reached initial operational capability in June 2019, but the service decided to wait until it could complete integration of the Leonardo ZPY-8 surface search radar on the MQ-8C, which has now been accomplished. The radar already was integrated on the older MQ-8B version, which the MQ-8C is scheduled to replace.

Soderberg said that "the fleet made a decision that a radar-equipped Bravo [MQ-8B] was more suitable to deploy than a non-radar-equipped Charlie [MQ-8C]. Now that we have that radar on the Charlie, it becomes a pretty clear answer that the Charlie is the superior platform, and that's why we're accelerating the transition from the 8B to the 8C."

An MQ-8C, built by Northrop Grumman, was deployed operationally on Dec. 14 on board the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), which is deployed in the U.S. 4th Fleet's area of operations in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South's mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, according to the caption.

Soderberg said the MQ-8C was "performing up to expectations" on the deployment.

The Leonardo ZPY-8 on the Fire Scout gives the host ship a far

greater ability to detect and track surface contacts and maintain over-the-horizon situational awareness.

The MQ-8C's larger airframe and greater fuel load gives it an endurance is 10 to 12 hours, far greater than the four to five hours of the MQ-8B.

The improved software on the MQ-8C system eases the workload on the controllers. The software integrates the radar, electro-optical sensor, and Automatic Information System in the MQ-8C.

The MQ-8C on the Milwaukee is teamed with an MH-60S Seahawk helicopter, which is not equipped with a radar. Both aircraft are operated by the "Sea Knights" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5.

Soderberg said although the detachment's officers all can control the Fire Scout, one officer is assigned as the main specialist for the system. The Navy also is qualifying MQ-8B and MQ-8C operators separately now, as opposed to personnel operating both types.

The program manager also said a data link designed to allow the MQ-8C to share sensor data with multiple platforms is being introduced, but some budget uncertainty is slowing that process.

He said there is a well-defined need for a mine-countermeasures sensor with both littoral surf zone and deeper water capabilities. The COBRA II sensor, equipped with lidar, is considered suitable.

A passive electronic warfare sensor for the platform is under discussion. Soderberg also said there is a "technical way forward" to arm the MQ-8C with weapons such as rockets, but there are "no funded efforts to implement" a weapons

He also said the MQ-8C is ready if needed for on the Lewis B.

Puller-class expeditionary sea base ship. The mobile mission-control station is ready and certified for the ship.

Northrop Grumman Delivers MYP-1's Final E-2D to U.S. Navy; Begins MYP-2

Northrop Grumman successfully delivered the 51st U.S. Navy E-2D Advanced Hawkeye production aircraft, AA-52. The aircraft represents the last to be delivered under the Multi-Year Procurement 1 contract. *NORTHROP GRUMMAN*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Northrop Grumman has successfully delivered the 51st E-2D Advanced Hawkeye for the U.S. Navy. The aircraft is the final one of a Multi-Year Procurement-1, the company said Jan. 21.

The E-2D, numbered AA-52 in company production, is equipped with the Delta System/Software Configuration Build 3, which provides an additional leap in operational effectiveness and technology for the E-2D with the incorporation of aerial refueling and a dwell-based tracker, the release said.

MYP-1, awarded in June 2014, called for the production of 25 E-2Ds, later increased to 26.

The E-2D now equips six of the Navy's nine fleet airborne command and control squadrons and eventually will replace the E-2C in the remaining three squadrons.

Northrop will begin deliveries this year of E-2Ds through MYP-2, which was awarded in April 2019 for 24 E-2Ds.

The Navy's program of record is for 86 E-2Ds. Japan has ordered 13 E-2Ds, and France has ordered four.

Marine Squadron First to Complete Transition to CH-53K

A CH-53K King Stallion (right) and a CH-53E Super Stallion are staged during a redesignation ceremony at Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina, Jan. 24, 2022. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Elias E. Pimentel III*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION NEW RIVER, N.C. – The CH-53K King Stallion heavy-lift helicopter now equips an operational Marine heavy helicopter squadron, the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing said Jan. 25.

A Jan. 24 ceremony at New River marked the transition of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 461 (HMH-461) from the CH-53E Super Stallion to the CH-53K.

“Today our Marine Corps got a little stronger,” said Maj. Gen. Michael Cederholm, commanding general of 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, described the significance of HMH-461’s transition to the CH-53K. “It is only appropriate that 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, and in particular Marine Corps Air Station New River, would be the first to receive the newest land and sea-based heavy helicopter because this is the home of the Marine Corps’ assault support. Placing the CH-53K King Stallion into the

hands of our warfighters will ensure we capitalize on the unique qualities and characteristics of the 53K and will allow 2nd MAW to continue to provide the best aviation support to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force right now, and well into our future."

The CH-53K is designed to lift nearly 14 tons (27,000 pounds) at a mission radius of 110 nautical miles, in high and hot environments. It can lift almost triple the baseline CH-53E lift capability. It is also designed to have a smaller shipboard footprint, lower operating costs per aircraft and less direct maintenance man hours per flight hour. The CH-53K is expected to externally lift two up-armored high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, light armored vehicles and dual joint light tactical vehicles. It features a cabin section 12 inches wider than the CH-53E that can internally load two AMC 463L pallets or five AMC 463L half-pallets or internally load a Humvee.

The CH-53K leverages a next-generation glass cockpit Common Avionics Architecture System open-architecture design; utilizes triple redundant fly-by-wire flight controls adding additional survivability, safety and maintenance improvements; includes fourth-generation high-efficiency composite rotor blades with swept anhedral tips; and leverages a low-maintenance elastomeric rotor head.

"Quite simply, 2nd MAW will be able to move more troops and equipment, at higher altitudes, faster speeds, and in more austere environments than ever before," Cederholm said. "We continue to become a more modernized and lethal force so, when the time comes, we will deliver on II Marine Expeditionary Force's motto: 'Come to Fight – Come to Win.' I am so proud of the Marines and Sailors of 2nd MAW and find it appropriate that they are a part of this moment in Marine Corps aviation history."

The Marine Corps plans to stand up eight active-duty

squadrons, one training squadron and two reserve squadrons to support operational requirements. The CH-53K is currently on track to deploy to the fleet as needed by the Marine Corps in fiscal 2024.

Turkish frigate serving as flagship for NATO Operation Sea Guardian in Mediterranean

The Turkish frigate TCG Barbaros is serving as flagship for NATO's Operation Sea Guardian focused patrol. *NATO ALLIED MARITIME COMMAND*

MEDITERRANEAN SEA – NATO is continuing its Operation Sea Guardian with its first focused patrol for 2022.

Turkish frigate TCG Barbaros is currently deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and is serving as flagship for NATO's current OSG focused patrol.

According to a statement from NATO Allied Maritime Command, Barbaros's three-week deployment is the first of six Operation Sea Guardina-focused operations scheduled this year and will run until Feb. 12, 2022.

"This focused patrol incorporates maritime patrol aircraft from Greece, Poland and Turkey in addition to submarines from Greece and Turkey in support of the flagship," the statement said. "Simultaneously, Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 comprised of the flagship ITS Margottini, ESPS Blas de Lezo and TCG Goksu will be deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, contributing NATO's maritime situational awareness efforts."

According to MARCOM, Operation Sea Guardian is a non-Article 5, "collaborative, year-round maritime security operation designed to maintain maritime situational awareness, deter and counter terrorism activity and build capacity and interoperability among NATO Allies and partners."

Aimed at working with Mediterranean stakeholders and partners, the operation has been conducting focused patrols at specific areas of interest in the Mediterranean Sea. Operation patrols commenced in 2016 to "maintain an accurate picture of the maritime environment and contribute to the safety and security in the region."

NATO's website states that "Operation Sea Guardian is a flexible operation that can potentially cover the full range of NATO's maritime security operation tasks. At present, it is operating in the Mediterranean and is conducting three MSO tasks: maritime security capacity building and support to maritime situational awareness and to maritime counter-terrorism."

As needed, Operation Sea Guardian can also be directed to uphold freedom of navigation, conduct maritime interdiction, fight the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and protect critical infrastructure.

“I cannot think of a better example that speaks to the relevance of inter-agency cooperation than Operation Sea Guardian,” said Allied MARCOM’s commander, Royal Navy Vice Adm. Keith Blount, speaking at the NATO Maritime Security Conference last year at Souda Bay, Crete. “Our obligation to ensure maritime security in the Mediterranean requires a multitude of actions, in collaboration with our allies and partners, and represents the full spectrum of capabilities that we possess.”

Canadian Coast Guard Conducts Sea Trials of V-BAT UAS

A V-BAT vertical takeoff and landing unmanned vehicle. *MARTIN UAV*

OTTAWA, Ontario — Kongsberg Geospatial has successfully conducted sea trials of the Shield AI V-BAT unmanned aerial system on behalf of the Canadian Coast Guard, operating from a small cargo vessel far offshore in international waters, Kongsberg announced Jan. 25.

The Canadian Coast Guard is conducting trials of the long-endurance, vertical takeoff and landing UAS surveillance system for possible deployment on Canadian Coast Guard Vessels under a project funded by Defence Research and Development Canada. The Shield AI V-BAT aircraft was selected due to its unique ability to combine VTOL from the small confines aboard ship with the long endurance of a fixed-wing aircraft while carrying multiple sensors.

Kongsberg Geospatial teamed with Shield AI to deploy the V-BAT VTOL UAS for a three-day sea trial in international waters in the Gulf of Mexico. The trials tested the capability of the

aircraft to provide rapid launch and recovery, long endurance, and confined space takeoff and landing from a moving vessel in a variety of weather conditions, during the day and night. In addition to tracking and identifying other ships at long ranges, the flights conducted a variety of simulated missions designed to emulate real-world situations where the Canadian Coast Guard would use the drones. These included locating and tracking dye patches that simulated wreckage or oil spills and locating life preservers in choppy seas and in a variety of weather conditions.

The V-BAT operators used Kongsberg Geospatial's IRIS UxS software to safely pilot the aircraft at long ranges from the launch vessel. The IRIS software provides a comprehensive situational awareness picture of the operational airspace, data from a variety of sensors and data feeds and shows the location of other aircraft and surface ships, as well as the launch vessel and the "ownship," or drone being operated.

Sensor data feeds from the cameras and sensors carried by the UAS were ingested, at real-time, into the Kongsberg Geospatial Modular ISR Data Analysis and Storage system. The MIDAS system records video and other data from the UAS, and serves as a "mission intelligence coordinator" to view current and historical sensor feeds of the UAS within a temporal and geospatial context to increase sensor utilization effectiveness.

"While the sea conditions were perhaps a little rougher than expected, they were ideal for testing the launch and recovery capabilities of the V-BAT from a small ship under the kind of conditions you might expect during real operations," said Rex Hayes, a retired U.S. Navy and Coast Guard officer and the director of Unmanned Systems at Kongsberg Geospatial. "We were also very pleased with the performance of IRIS and the MIDAS system when handling integrated sensor data feeds from extended missions."

Trials like these are important to the continued health of the industry, according to Brandon Tseng, Shield AI's cofounder and former U.S. Navy SEAL. "We love supporting our allies. It will take strong partnerships – technological, military, and economic – to maintain stability during challenging times. Sharing tech like the V-BAT strengthens strategic relationships and contributes to global stability. Our recent engagement with the Canadian Coast Guard and Kongsberg exemplifies our commitment to ensuring our allies have the cutting-edge technology and products they need."

This series of endurance trials is the second set of flight trials of the Shield AI V-BAT conducted by the Canadian Coast Guard. The first series of flight trials were conducted at a UAS test range in Oklahoma last year to establish flight characteristics of the aircraft. The V-BAT was developed by Martin UAV, which was acquired by Shield AI last year. Kongsberg Geospatial is a subsidiary of Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace.

Navy Delayed Announcement of First MQ-8C Deployment Five Weeks

An MQ-8C Fire Scout attached to the “Sea Knights” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5, takes off from the flight deck of the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), Jan. 6, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Petty Officer 2nd Class Danielle Baker*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy has deployed the MQ-8C version of its Fire Scout unmanned helicopter for the first time but waited five weeks to make the announcement.

An MQ-8C, built by Northrop Grumman, was deployed operationally on Dec. 14 on board the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), the Navy and Northrop Grumman announced in Jan. 24 releases.

The deployment was apparent before Jan. 24 in a series Navy photographs taken Jan. 6 while the MQ-8C was operating from the USS Milwaukee in the Caribbean Sea. The ship was deployed in the U.S. 4th Fleet’s area of operations in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South’s mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, according to the caption.

The Milwaukee had departed Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on Jan. 3 after two weeks in port following an outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in the crew.

The MQ-8C was being operated by the "Sea Knights" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5. The squadron also operates the MH-60S Seahawk manned helicopter and is using both aircraft in counter-narcotics operations.

The Fire Scout "will identify targets of interest and refine surveillance data of existing targets of interest, allowing for enhanced capabilities for counter illicit drug trafficking missions," the Navy said in a release.

"This is a significant milestone in the MQ-8C Fire Scout program," said Navy Capt. Eric Soderberg, the Navy's Fire Scout program manager. "The transition from the MQ-8B to the MQ-8C Fire Scout has brought improved sensors and more than doubles the on-station endurance. Advances in Fire Scout's capabilities further our successful integration of unmanned platforms at sea and the Navy and Marine Corps unmanned campaign plan."

"Our partnership with the U.S. Navy has been critical in developing Fire Scout's multi-mission autonomous capabilities which provide greater situational awareness to the joint force," said Lance Eischeid, director, Fire Scout program, Northrop Grumman. "With the ability to operate from a range of surface ships, MQ-8C Fire Scout is a powerful platform that allows the U.S. Navy to increase the detection and tracking of targets through its onboard sensors and integration with manned assets."

"Fire Scout is a force multiplier, not only in our current mission, but in every mission the U.S. Navy conducts," said Cmdr. Brian Forster, commanding officer of Milwaukee. "I am very excited of the team I have onboard which has already, and will continue to, demonstrate how manned and unmanned assets

can work together to effectively achieve the mission.”

In December, an MQ-8C was photographed on the deck of Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Jackson (LCS 6) while in port in Apra Harbor, Guam. The caption stated the Jackson was part of Destroyer Squadron Seven “on a rotational deployment in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operation to enhance interoperability with partners and serve as a ready-response force in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.”

The MQ-8C in the Guam photograph was going through pre-deployment functional ground checks for a detachment of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 23 – based at Naval Air Station North Island, California – that will operate the MQ-8C from the USS Jackson.

The MQ-8C, which achieved initial operational capability in June 2019, is an upgrade to the Fire Scout System mainly in that it uses a Bell 407 airframe, which is larger than the earlier-design MQ-8B’s airframe and equipped with more powerful engines, thus having a greater speed, payload and endurance, up to 10+ hours of endurance on station and a range of more than 1,000 nautical miles.

The MQ-8C is equipped with the Leonardo ZPY-8 Osprey search radar or an electro-optical/infrared sensor and uses the same ground control station and the MQ-8B. The Navy plans to add more capability in the form of Link 16 data link, passive targeting, and a mine-countermeasures payload.

Northrop Grumman was under contract to deliver 38 MQ-8Cs, all of which have been delivered and will replace the earlier MQ-8B version, of which 30 have been delivered to the fleet.