

VMFA-542 Becomes First F-35B Squadron on East Coast to Achieve Initial Operational Capability



Two U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II jets with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542 taxi at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, Dec. 28, 2023. *U.S. Marine Corps | Warrant Officer Akeel Austin*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, North Carolina – Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 542, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), became the first East Coast F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter squadron in the Fleet Marine Force to achieve initial operational capability, Feb. 5.

Initial operational capability means that VMFA-542 has enough operational F-35B Lightning II aircraft, trained pilots, maintainers, and support equipment to self-sustain its mission essential tasks (METs). These METs include conducting close-air support, offensive anti-air warfare, strike coordination

and reconnaissance, and electronic attacks.

“VMFA-542 is the first operational fifth-generation squadron in II Marine Expeditionary Force, giving the aviation combat element the most lethal, survivable, and interoperable strike fighter in the U.S. inventory,” said Lieutenant Colonel Brian Hansell, commanding officer of VMFA-542. “The F-35B is unmatched in its capability to support Marines against the advanced threats that we can expect in the future.”

The F-35 is a fifth-generation fighter jet with advanced stealth, agility and maneuverability, sensor and information fusion, and provides the pilot with real-time access to battlespace information. It is designed to meet an advanced threat while improving lethality, survivability, and supportability. The F-35B Lightning II is the short-takeoff and vertical-landing F-35 variant. This capability allows the aircraft to operate from amphibious assault ships and expeditionary airstrips less than 2,000 feet long.

“I am extremely proud of the Marines and Sailors of VMFA-542,” said Colonel James T. Bardo, commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group 14, the parent command of VMFA-542. “Achieving initial operational capability at the pace and precision of which they did truly demonstrates what an exceptional unit this is. This milestone demonstrates their hard work, ingenuity, and perseverance.”

Achieving initial operational capability also means that VMFA-542 is one step closer to achieving full operational capability and completing its F-35B Lightning II transition, a process that began in December 2022.

VMFA-542 is a subordinate unit of 2nd MAW, the aviation combat element of II Marine Expeditionary Force.

U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast decommissioned after 56 years of service



Feb. 6, 2024

ASTORIA, Ore. – The Coast Guard decommissioned the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast (WMEC 623) during a ceremony, Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024, in Astoria.

Rear Adm. Brendan McPherson, deputy commander, Coast Guard Pacific Area, presided over the ceremony honoring the 56 years of service Steadfast and its crews provided to the nation.

Commissioned in 1968, Steadfast was one of 16 Reliance-class medium endurance cutters built for search and rescue, counter-narcotic operations, and migrant interdiction.

“The cutter Steadfast has been a stalwart ship for the Coast Guard, frequently conducting lifesaving missions, contributing to our national security and protecting our Marine Transportation System.” said McPherson. “I am immensely proud of Steadfast’s crew for their dedication to duty while enhancing our nation’s maritime safety and security throughout the Pacific Ocean.”

During the cutter’s most [recent deployment](#), the crew transited 11,742 nautical miles on a 64-day multi-mission deployment, from Oregon to several hundred miles off the coast of Central Mexico conducting training, law enforcement, recruiting and public affairs missions, along with helicopter operations.

“Steadfast has an incredible legacy of honorable service to our nation,” said Cmdr. Brock Eckel, Steadfast’s commanding officer. “I am grateful to have had the opportunity to lead such an amazing crew through dynamic patrols and high-risk counter-narcotics operations. I want to thank the crew for their dedication, camaraderie, and desire to serve our country; they are what make this ship so special.”

As part of the U.S. Coast Guard’s [Foreign Military Sales Program](#), Steadfast will transfer to Baltimore where she will be available for transfer to another country as an Excess Defense Article.

Steadfast was one of the Coast Guard’s 13 remaining 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutters. As part of the Coast Guard’s [acquisition](#) program, the 360-foot [Heritage-class](#) offshore patrol cutters and the 154-foot fast response cutters will replace the Coast Guard’s 270-foot and 210-foot medium endurance cutters. The offshore patrol cutters will provide the majority of offshore presence for the Coast Guard’s cutter fleet, bridging the capabilities of the 418-foot national security cutters, which patrol the open ocean, and the 154-foot fast response cutters, which serve closer to

SECNAV Del Toro Stresses DON's Support of Small Businesses During National 8(a) Conference



06 February 2024

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro today spoke to hundreds of small business owners at the National 8(a) Association Small Business Conference in Atlanta, Feb. 6.

The National 8(a) Association is a non-profit that provides

education and guidance for small businesses including minority, aspiring, current and graduate 8(a), HUBZone, SDVOB, VOSB, SDB, WOSB, DBE, and teaming partnerships.

Secretary Del Toro stressed the Department of the Navy's Office of Small Business Program's (DON OSBP) proven commitment to aggressively expanding small business opportunity to partner with the DON on its significant procurement investments for goods and services.

"In fiscal year 2023, we spent \$20.1 billion on contracts with small businesses, exceeding our target goal for the year by over 17 percent," said Secretary Del Toro. "Furthermore, we exceeded our sub-category goals for service-disabled Veteran-owned, women-owned, and HUBZone, and came within 0.04% of meeting our small, disadvantaged business goal. And this year, we are well on our way to meeting our goals, and we're not even at the halfway point, with billions of dollars committed to contracts with small businesses across all categories."

Secretary Del Toro also discussed the importance the DON's puts on supporting the small business community.

"The National 8(a) Association and other organizations like it play a critical role in educating, guiding, and supporting small businesses as they prepare to work with the federal government, and we are grateful for the role they play in our small business ecosystem," said Secretary Del Toro. "From my vantage point as Secretary of the Navy, a healthy, diverse industrial base made up of companies of all sizes—founded by American entrepreneurs from all walks of life—is absolutely crucial to the success of our Navy and our Marine Corps."

Secretary Del Toro reiterated his commitment to working with small businesses to provide the Navy and Marine Corps team with the support, systems, and platforms needed to confront the global challenges we face today.

"Strengthening maritime dominance is focused on ensuring our

Sailors and Marines have the right mix of platforms and capabilities so that they are prepared to deter our nation's potential adversaries, and, if called upon, fight and decisively win our Nation's wars," said Secretary Del Toro. "In terms of cutting-edge capabilities, we are working with small businesses to secure our advantages in technology areas such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, cybersecurity, and unmanned systems.

Before leaving the conference in Atlanta, Secretary Del Toro hosted a roundtable with about two dozen small business owners to continue the dialogue on how small businesses and the DON can support each other.

"For the companies represented here that are focused on improving the lives of our personnel, whether it be through delivering world-class education and training, or providing resources to support the health and resiliency of our Navy and Marine Corps communities, we welcome the opportunity to learn more about your offerings during or after this week's conference," said Secretary Del Toro.

Atlanta is the first leg a travel for Secretary Del Toro this week. Next, he travels to Puerto Rico, where he will participate in a U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency Business Roundtable and a joint U.S. Departments of Defense and Navy Business Roundtable. He'll also have key leader engagements and national call to service events.

Secretary Del Toro's full remarks from the National 8(a) Association Small Business Conference [can be found here](#).

Coast Guard Sails to Islands of Federated States of Micronesia with Needed Equipment, Supplies



[Release from U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam](#)

POHNPEI, Federated States of Micronesia – The USCGC Oliver Henry (WPC 1140) crew arrived at Dekhitik Harbor in Pohnpei on Feb. 1 as part of an international effort to deliver essential supplies and equipment to the drought-affected outer islands of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi Atolls.

Due to the El Niño weather phenomenon, these remote communities required immediate assistance, including water purification solutions, to combat the scarcity of potable water.

Embarked on this vital mission were RO technicians Mr. Dudley Lorrin from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Mr. Jimmy Edward from the Pohnpei Department of Public Safety (DPS). The mission was critical in providing immediate relief, including the transportation and operational setup of Reverse Osmosis (RO) units capable of converting seawater into drinkable water. These units, crucial for the survival of the island communities, can produce up to 350 gallons of fresh water daily and are powered by solar panels or high-capacity batteries.

Significantly, the deployment was supported by various partners. The U.S. Navy Seabees repaired an IOM Reverse Osmosis unit in preparation for the mission. The Government of Australia's Pacific Maritime Security Program donated specialized heavy-duty batteries to ensure the RO units' functionality. Additionally, the Pohnpei State Government contributed one ton of rice, emphasizing the collaborative nature of this humanitarian operation.

Upon reaching Nukuoro, the USCGC Oliver Henry crew swiftly made an existing RO unit operational with the newly transported batteries, demonstrating adaptability and technical proficiency. Petty Officer 1st Class Kai Ruiz, an electrician's mate, connected two 12V batteries to the island's RO pump using spare parts from both the cutter and the local community—a testament to the crew's resourcefulness and commitment to the mission.

In Kapingamarangi, the crew performed a successful systems check on the local RO unit, confirming its full mission capability. Troubleshooting efforts also extended to the solar system and HF radio, identifying the need for replacement of the decade-old solar batteries and the HF radio antenna—issues earmarked for future attention by local government authorities.

The mission's cargo included 2,000 lbs of rice, two R0 generator kits, three solar panel kits, and medical supplies, directly addressing the immediate needs of Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi. Upon departure, three medical kits, 80 gallons of bottled water donated by U.S. Coast Guard members and brought from Guam, diesel fuel, and various paper products were offloaded in Kapingamarangi, reflecting a comprehensive approach to aid delivery.

"Our visit was more than a delivery mission; it was an opportunity to strengthen ties with the island communities," said Lt. Ray Cerrato, commanding officer of Oliver Henry. "The crew's engagement with local schools and villages left a lasting impression, underscoring the U.S. Coast Guard's commitment to the well-being of these remote populations. The gratitude expressed by the village chiefs and the anticipation of future visits highlight the enduring relationships fostered by these endeavors."

This mission exemplifies the U.S. Coast Guard's dedication to humanitarian aid and international cooperation, ensuring the well-being of vulnerable communities in the Pacific. The collective effort of all parties involved, from the initial loading in Guam to the final delivery and operational support on the islands, showcases a unified response to the challenges faced by Nukuoro and Kapingamarangi, reinforcing the U.S. Coast Guard's role as a pivotal force for good in the region.

USCGC Oliver Henry's crew is conducting the first U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam expeditionary patrol of 2024 under Operation Rematau and Operation Blue Pacific. The Oliver Henry is the 40th 154-foot Sentinel-class Fast Response Cutter named for Oliver T. Henry, Jr., an enlisted African American Coast Guard member first to break the color barrier of a then-segregated Service. It homeports in Guam, working with U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam, which

comprises nearly 300 personnel to provide a significant portion of the U.S. Coast Guard's enduring regional presence in Oceania.

USNS Brunswick Returns Home After 7 Years in the Western Pacific



Military Sealift Command's sixth expeditionary fast transport vessel USNS Brunswick shifted its hub port in Saipan to Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek – Fort Story, Virginia, Feb. 3.

NORFOLK, Va. □ Military Sealift Command's sixth expeditionary fast transport vessel USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6) shifted its hub port in Saipan to Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek – Fort Story, Va., Feb. 3. The evolution signified the completion of a seven-year forward deployment that began Jan. 30, 2017, in

support of military logistics operations in U.S. 7th, 5th, and 3rd Fleets' areas of operation.

While steaming more than 21,600 nautical miles in support of a variety of high visibility, multinational U.S. Navy and partner nation operations in several Pacific countries, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom, Brunswick circumnavigated the globe, a first for the vessel and a first for an EPF.

Built for its speed and its capacity to support a wide range of operational maneuver and sustainment, relief operations in small or damaged ports, global fleet stations operations, flexible logistics support and rapid transport as an alternative to airlift, Brunswick's performance remained rock-solid throughout its seven-year deployment.

2017

While supporting military logistics operations in U.S. 3rd Fleet, Brunswick participated in Operation Triggerfish 2017, conducted several port calls to Pohnpei and Chuuk in the Federated States of Micronesia and Guam, and hosted distinguished visitors such as Robert Riley, U.S. ambassador to Micronesia. This vital cargo and passenger operation fostered relationships with the islands visited and provided potential sites for future military infrastructure projects.

2018

Brunswick operated from Saipan in support of military operations throughout the western Pacific Ocean in 2018. While there, Brunswick visited places such as Guam, Yap, Thailand and Malaysia as part the 2018 Pacific Partnership, an annual mission focused on disaster preparedness and humanitarian assistance, conducted in the Indo-Pacific with more than 500

personnel from several Pacific countries, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and the United Kingdom. The EPF also participated in several port visits to Lumut and Kuching and Malaysia. The crew took advantage of the opportunity to experience Malaysia's rich culture and strengthen ties with the local population. Port visits such as these serve as an important element in the U.S. Navy's theater security cooperation efforts by enhancing solid relationships with partner nations throughout the region.

2019

In addition to participating in its second Pacific Partnership in 2019, Brunswick, together with sister ship Fall River (T-EPF 4), conducted engineering projects, hosted medical events, and oversaw humanitarian assistance and disaster response training exercises throughout the Pacific region.

EPFs, working together, bridge the gap between high-speed, low-capacity airlift, low-speed, and high-capacity sealift in order to provide for the movement of personnel, equipment, and supplies over operational distances and the sustainment of joint theater and multinational logistics that help to augment MSC's combat logistics force. Additionally, Brunswick docked in the Lower Mortlock Islands to support local communities recovering from the aftermath of Typhoon Wutip, a Category 5 super typhoon that affected Guam, Federated States of Micronesia and the Northern Mariana Islands. The typhoon claimed the lives of 86 people and injured hundreds of others.

2020

The Brunswick crew was recognized in 2020 for their extraordinary support and contributions to the Typhoon Wutip relief efforts. U.S. Maritime Administration Administrator

Rear Adm. (Ret.) Mark H. Buzby presented the crew with the Merchant Marine Medal for Outstanding Achievement. In addition, Brunswick supported the Valiant Shield 2020, a joint force training exercise to protect the Indo-Pacific. During the exercise, more than 11,000 Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen synchronized to train in a real-world environment to demonstrate their readiness to respond to any contingency at a moment's notice.

2021

Brunswick took part in Noble Jaguar, in 2021, an integrated naval exercise in and around Japan that included units from the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF), along with elements of U.S. 7th Fleet.

2022

Brunswick, along with sister ships USNS Millinocket (T-EPF 3) and USNS Puerto Rico (T-EPF 11), in 2022, supported the CARAT exercise, Resolute Dragon, Koa Moana, Valiant Shield, and various other regional security cooperation exercises for III MEF.

2023

The expeditionary fast transport vessel played an instrumental role in exercises Talisman Sabre, Balikatan, Keen Sword and Kamandag for III MEF in 2023. Marines and other members of the U.S. military routinely embark on ships like Brunswick to transport cargo, equipment, and personnel expeditiously. Likewise, Brunswick supported I MEF for three months during its Marine Rotational Force – Southeast Asia deployment. EPFs provide warfighters flexibility as the ship's storage capacity can be tailored to meet mission objectives.

While in U.S. 5th Fleet, Brunswick accomplished a humanitarian

assistance mission that resulted in the movement of 836 evacuees from 18 nations, including 168 U.S. citizens, from the Port of Sudan to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in support of the Department of State's efforts to evacuate and assist U.S. citizens and other civilians during the civil war in Sudan.

Throughout this seven-year deployment, the superb work performed by the Brunswick crew helped to improve interoperability and foster trust and cooperation with partner nations, all of which is in keeping with the Navy's goal to enhance regional preparedness for crisis response.

MSC operates approximately 120 non-combatant civilian-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships, conduct specialized missions, and strategically preposition combat cargo at sea around the world while moving military cargo and supplies used by deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners.

To learn more about MSC visit: <https://sealiftcommand.com>.

USS Farragut Returns Home Following Successful SOUTHCOM Deployment



[By USNAVSOUTH/4TH FLEET PUBLIC AFFAIRS](#)

03 February 2024

NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Florida □ Farragut, along with the “Valkyries” of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 50 Det 2 deployed in September 2023 to support Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)-South’s counter-narcotics operations in the Caribbean Sea.

During the deployment, Farragut, with her embarked U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET), apprehended or disrupted an estimated 1,770 kilograms of cocaine worth an estimated street value of more than \$44 million and the detention of 18 suspected illicit drug runners.

“Every Sailor and Coast Guardsmen had a role in this team effort,” said Farragut Commanding Officer Cmdr. Tom Roberts. “We, alongside allies and partners, seized the opportunity to advance regional and strategic objectives in the area of operations, supporting our nation and our Navy. I could not be

more proud of our team and their accomplishments.”

Farragut, the LEDET, and HSM 50 Det 2 conducted operations with the Dominican Navy and British Royal Navy to assist with the apprehension and transfer of personnel and cargo. Farragut also conducted deck landing qualifications with Joint Task Force Bravo (JTF-B) Soldiers, qualifying 18 UH-60A Black Hawk helicopter pilots for maritime operations.

Farragut’s port visits included Willemstad, Curacao, where the ship hosted local students and military personnel to showcase the capabilities of Farragut and discuss the daily lives of Sailors onboard a U.S. naval warship.

“The crew of USS Farragut demonstrated tremendous proficiency and professionalism while executing theater security cooperation events and counter illicit trafficking operations throughout their extended 4-month deployment.” said Capt. Bryan Gallo, Commodore of Task Force FOUR FIVE.

CTF 45 is the U.S. 4th Fleet surface task force charged with executing combined naval operations, building and strengthening regional maritime partnerships, and acting as a DoD-ready service provider to JIATF-South in support of counter-illicit trafficking operations in Central and South American waters.

U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet is the trusted maritime partner for Caribbean, Central and South America maritime forces leading to improved unity, security and stability.

Cooper Hands Over Command of U.S. 5th Fleet to Wikoff



By U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs | February 01, 2024

MANAMA, Bahrain □ Vice Adm. Brad Cooper turned over command of Middle East naval forces to Vice Adm. George Wikoff during a change of command ceremony at Naval Support Activity Bahrain, Feb. 1.

The time-honored ceremony marked Wikoff's assumption of command of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), U.S. 5th Fleet, Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), and the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC).

Cooper, who assumed command in May 2021, led more than 16,000 Sailors, Marines, Coastguardsmen, and civilians. As CMF commander, he oversaw a 41-nation maritime partnership in one

of the world's most diverse and challenging area of operations.

Army Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), presided over the ceremony. During his remarks, he highlighted Cooper's accomplishments while in command, noting the importance of people at the heart of his success in ensuring maritime security.

"His investment in our people, our partners, and to developing innovative approaches has truly made a difference in 5th Fleet and across the Central Region," Kurilla said, noting Cooper's leadership advanced U.S. and coalition naval forces through numerous complex joint and combined maritime operational events, resulting in enhanced security and stability in the maritime environment.

Recently, Cooper led efforts to counter Houthi malign activities in the Red Sea through Operation Prosperity Guardian, bringing more than 20 nations together to provide a persistent presence in the Red Sea, the Bab al-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Aden. Further, he led U.S. Navy efforts to diminish Houthi drone and missile capabilities through the execution of more than 100 strikes inside Houthi-controlled portions of Yemen in conjunction with Operation Poseidon Archer.

He also established the first naval unmanned and artificial intelligence task force, Task Force 59. During his tour, TF 59 went from experimentation to operations, including the first use of weapons aboard an unmanned platform.

Cooper spearheaded Operation Unified Takedown, resulting in the largest seizure of illegal weapons and drugs, smuggled out of Iran, in the history of Middle East naval operations.

With an eye toward expanding maritime security, Cooper also forged new partnerships with Caspian Sea nations and other central European countries.

As CMF commander, Cooper expanded the coalition to its greatest point in 22 years, 41 nations, and also established two new task forces: Combined Task Force (CTF) 153, focused on the Red Sea region; and CTF-154, leading multinational maritime training at locations across the Middle East. CMF task forces provided maritime security, conducted counter piracy and counter terrorism operations, and combated illegal drug smuggling, confiscating over \$1.4 billion in narcotics during his tour. As the commander of IMSC, he grew its membership from eight to 12 nations.

Cooper said none of it could have been accomplished without the exceptional performance of the Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen deployed to U.S. 5th Fleet.

“Every success starts and ends with people, and that has certainly been the case here in the Middle East these past few years” Cooper said. “The extraordinary Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who have deployed to this region have been, and continue to be, at the top of their game. I could not be prouder of their achievements and consider it a privilege of a lifetime to serve alongside them during this tour.”

Cooper reports next to Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, as the CENTCOM Deputy Commander.

Wikoff assumes command following his most recent tour as Acting Commander, Naval Air Forces/Acting Commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. A naval aviator, Wikoff served operationally in Fighter Squadron (VF) 102 onboard USS America (CV 66) and VF 154 forward deployed to Atsugi, Japan on USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63). He commanded Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 211, deployed onboard USS Enterprise (CVN 65), VFA 122, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 3, deployed onboard USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), and Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 5, forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan, aboard USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76).

“I am particularly excited to lead our like-minded partners in

the Combined Maritime Forces with whom the United States stands shoulder-to-shoulder in the defense of Freedom of Navigation and Rules-Based International Order,” Wikoff said.

U.S. Naval Forces Central Command is the maritime component commander of U.S. Central Command in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations. It encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The expanse is comprised of more than 20 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Bab al-Mandeb.

Raytheon’s Barracuda Sea-Mine Assassin Progresses in Development

SEAPOWER

The Official Publication of the Navy League of the United States

ARLINGTON, Va. – Raytheon has completed the Technical Data

Package for a sea mine destructor developed for the U.S. Navy as the test program continues, the company said in an interview with Seapower.

The Barracuda is a 26-pound, 48-inch-long anti-mine device housed in a tube the size of an A-size sonobuoy tube. When launched, the device is propelled by four small water jets that take the device to the datum of a suspected sea mine detected by the AQS-20C towed sonar. An acoustic communications data link buoy is released to which the device is tethered. Target updates, such as GPS coordinates, are transmitted to the device, which approaches the sea mine. A sonar and a camera mounted in the nose of the device enables a man-in-the-loop operator – for now – to confirm the mine. The device then is steered to the mine and detonated. Each Barracuda is a one-shot charge.

Since May 2023, Raytheon has been building 128 Barracudas for development, 63 for contractor trials and 65 for the Navy's trials.

Dan Seamans, Raytheon's director for mine warfare, including the AQS-20 sonar, the Airborne Mine Neutralization System, and the Barracuda at Portsmouth, Rhode Island, said the Navy has yet to finalize its decisions on what the launch platforms for the Barracuda will be. Candidates include the littoral combat ship's mine-countermeasures mission package, including the Mine Countermeasures Uncrewed Surface Vessel. The company is building a surrogate launcher for the test program and will proceed to a tactical launcher.

The Navy awarded the initial design and development contract to Raytheon in 2018. The Navy's spiral Critical Design Review of the Barracuda was completed in July 2023.

Low-Rate Initial Production for Barracuda is planned for fiscal 2027

SURFACE WARFARE: The Nucleus of American Naval Power



190711-N-PJ626-5159 CORAL SEA (July 11, 2019) U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, Australian Navy, Canadian Navy and Japan Maritime Self Defense Force ships sail together in formation during Talisman Sabre 2019 . Talisman Sabre 2019 illustrates the closeness of the Australian and U.S. alliance and the strength of the military-to-military relationship. This is the eighth iteration of this exercise. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kaila V. Peters)

By Bryan McGrath

The U.S. Navy is too small for what is asked of it, and what is asked of it is insufficient to meet the nation's needs. We have too few ships, submarines, aircraft, aircraft carriers, people, sensors, weapons and networks. China's People's

Liberation Army Navy(PLAN) is growing faster than any navy has since the U.S. buildup to the Second World War, while the U.S. remains committed to efficient peacetime production levels that ignore the reality of this competition. Relative to the threats it faces, American naval power is weaker than at any time since the start of World War II. While the U.S. Navy remains the world's most powerful seaborne combat force, not even the Soviet navy posed as dangerous a threat as China's PLAN does today. The nature of that threat presents the prospect of a PLAN so powerful it could dominate the Western Pacific, destroying the legitimacy and effectiveness of America's network of friends and allies by raising questions about America's will and capability to support that network. The ability to dominate a region of the world responsible for 65% of global GDP represents a profound threat to U.S. national security and prosperity, and that of like-minded nations globally. A broad-based naval building program is required to meet China's challenge and all elements of the modern, balanced fleet should expand. This essay focuses on the surface force, comprised of large surface combatants, small surface combatants and amphibious ships. For the purposes of this essay, critical surface platforms are excluded, but they are no less critical as a result. These include logistics ships, special mission ships, ocean-going tugs, sealift ships, tenders and the like. The surface force cannot operate without these other ships, and their importance to a coherent fleet design should not be discerned by their exclusion in this essay.

Navy Mission

The Navy shall be organized, trained and equipped for the peacetime promotion of the national security interests and prosperity of the United States and for prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea. It is responsible for the preparation of naval forces necessary for the duties described in the preceding sentence except as otherwise

assigned and, in accordance with integrated joint mobilization plans, for the expansion of the peacetime components of the Navy to meet the needs of war. (10 USC Sec. 8062).

Members of the Navy League and readers of Seapower can be forgiven if this mission statement looks unfamiliar, as it has appeared in this form only since the passage of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in December 2022. Prior to this, Title 10 did not mention peacetime security interests or the promotion of American prosperity, functions the Navy has conducted since the earliest days of the republic. This disconnect between the Navy's legal mission and what was routinely demanded of it was stark, and the sole focus on "... prompt and sustained combat incident to operations at sea" led to bureaucratic maneuvering inside the Pentagon by other services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense when Navy officials sought a fleet large enough to carry out both its wartime and peacetime roles. The answer to the additional capacity necessary for operations other than war often was reduced to "that is not your mission." No more.

Congress is constitutionally obligated to "provide and maintain a Navy" (Art I Sec. 8) and the Navy is legally obligated to protect and promote the nation's security and prosperity in peace and be prepared to fight and win in war. No element of the modern fleet is as central to these missions as the surface force, and that force must be properly resourced for the things that are asked of it.

Tasks of the Surface Force

The tasks of the surface force are the tasks of the Navy, and while the following list is not doctrine, it represents a solid foundation for discussion.

Conventional deterrence.

To deter aggression against American interests, the U.S. Navy must be able to control the seas and skies where it operates

and project power from there. It must also be capable of denying control of the sea to others. A controlled sea is an unnatural condition; the seas are, and ought to be, free. Imposing and maintaining sea control is a function of conflict, and the ability to control the sea in order to project power is the Navy's primary contribution to conventional deterrence. Lethal, networked, sustainable and forward-deployed surface ships are the linchpin of the nation's forward-based efforts to promote security and prosperity, and they represent the vanguard of seapower that would turn immediately to Joint wartime operations should deterrence fail. One benefit of a strong deterrence posture is the assurance provided to allies and like-minded friends that the United States is a trusted local partner. Strategic (or nuclear) deterrence is a foundational task of the Navy, but it is the domain of the submarine force.

Crisis response

Crises occur where our interests lie, and those crises are both man-made and natural. Capable, flexible, available surface forces represent the humanity of the American people when disaster strikes or aggression flares. The forces we design and build for the delivery of violence are also forces of charity and relief, and they move from one role to the other without modification.

Naval diplomacy. This historic and critical task includes building partner capacity, assuring allies and friends, asserting U.S. rights and interests (including freedom of navigation), and exercising U.S. authority.

Warfighting. The Navy acts as the predominant maritime portion of the joint force in the waging and winning of war. It exercises sea control and sea denial to project power or to confound adversary power projection.

War termination. The Navy must prevent war, wage war and end

war. The termination of war is a pursuit – especially at sea – that differs sufficiently from war-waging as to merit its own task, and it levies different demands upon the fleet architecture. Platforms and capabilities with less value in deterring or waging war can be of significant value in the termination of war. How war is brought to conclusion cannot be an afterthought.

Note that “naval presence” or “forward presence” is not included in this list. This is because forward presence is not a mission, it is a posture, a habit of operating. It unfortunately entered the pantheon of Navy missions in the mid-1970s in a famous essay by then Naval War College President Vice Adm. Stansfield Turner, and Navy leaders have tied themselves in knots ever since attempting to explain why “being there” is a mission, as if being there were an end unto itself. If the Navy could perform its Title 10 mission and associated tasks by surging from home ports when the nation’s interests were threatened, it should be made to do so. If the Navy could perform its Title 10 mission and associated tasks as a coastal and territorial waters defense force (or coast guard) when the nation’s interests were threatened, it should be made to do so. If the Navy could perform its Title 10 mission and associated tasks by occasionally sending forth cruising squadrons to “show the flag” when the nation’s interests were threatened, it should be made to do so. All of these operating postures offer the possibility of a smaller and more economical Navy due to vastly different (from today’s) fleet architectures. None of these alternative postures offer the prospect of mission accomplishment, and that is why forward presence is the preferred posture for the U.S. Navy.



Director, Surface Warfare Division (N96) Office of the Chief of Naval Operations Rear Adm. Fred Pyle speaks on the significance of the new Next Generation Guided-Missile Destroyer (DD Test Site (LBTS) during a ribbon cutting ceremony in Philadelphia on March 21, 2023.

Vulnerability of the Surface Force

Surface ships are vulnerable to a variety of enemy threats, including missiles, mines, and torpedoes. Adversary targeting methods and competence have improved, and it grows increasingly harder to “hide” surface ships – especially large surface ships – at sea. It is true that China’s vast buildup increases the vulnerability of the surface force in the Western Pacific, but this is an incomplete understanding of the dynamic.

First, everything on the modern battlefield has become more vulnerable. This does not mean those things are no longer valued. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated both the vulnerability and the value of heavy armor, and the same would

be expected to apply to the surface force in the event of its wartime employment. How the fleet is operated influences its vulnerability, and the sea remains a difficult environment for precision targeting, especially against a competent Navy.

Second, vulnerability is a feature of conflict, after the shooting starts. Yet the Navy spends the overwhelming portion of its time not being shot at while it pursues the other functions and tasks derived from its Title 10 mission. The fleet must be capable enough to win in combat and large enough to conduct its global peacetime tasks. There is a tradeoff between the exquisite capabilities needed for the former and the mass/capacity of necessary for the former and the latter. Both must be resourced.

Next, for the United States to conduct its mission of conventional deterrence, it must have powerful, lethal, networked surface forces forward – again, not for the sake of being forward, but to demonstrate both the will and capability to deter. What in wartime contributes to vulnerability is, in peacetime, a vital contributor to deterrence: known, visible power on the horizon. There is no substitute for the certainty of response this force provides to the conventional deterrence posture. A serious threat to the surface force comes not from the Chinese navy but from American political leadership. Insufficient demand for ships caused the shipbuilding industry to shrink to the point where it is challenged to provide the peacetime needs of the Navy when the country needs to produce at a war footing. There is an “if you build it, they will come” aspect to growing the shipbuilding industrial base, and the first step is for political leadership to agree to a substantial naval buildup, one that workers with options can depend on, and that attracts new workers to critical trades. Pointing at the industrial base as the reason we cannot expand our Navy confuses cause and effect.

Needs of the Surface Force

It must grow. As indicated in the previous paragraph, the

surface force must grow. The Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan should commit to three large surface combatants a year, four small surface combatants a year, and a building rate sufficient to meet and maintain a fleet of 38 amphibious ships. The Navy and Marine Corps should continue to develop the landing ship medium class, but not at the expense of 38 large, capable amphibious ships.

It must be more lethal. There is no excuse for any ship of the surface force to be without offensive missiles capable of targeting other ships, targets ashore, or both. Whether through bolt-on expeditionary launchers or installed and integrated systems, amphibious ships and all littoral combat ships retained in service must become more lethal. By creating additional operational dilemmas for the adversary, each individual ship becomes less vulnerable. Those launchers (and the launchers already fielded) must be filled with increasingly more capable missiles, and more of those missiles must be acquired. Expeditionary reloading of any launching system we field cannot no longer be delayed. It must be more capable. The operational dilemmas posed by a more lethal surface force are increased when that surface force can employ its weapons at their maximum range. To do so, the surface force must have a capable organic intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platform to replace its aging helicopter fleet, one that can find and fix targets hundreds of miles from the ship from which it launched. Finally, we must build on the legacy of excellence in the Aegis Weapon System by moving to the Navy's Integrated Combat System, or ICS, an approach to command and control that ties individual ships together in a fighting network that provides in-stream battle management, weapons pairing and allocation and response options across the ensemble. It must evolve. We cannot build Arleigh Burke-class destroyers forever and continuing to avoid moving to the next-generation destroyer (DDG(X)) will preclude fielding of advanced weapons the fleet needs today. The Navy must propose, and the Congress ratify, a plan to move from

building three Flight III DDG's a year to three DDG(X)'s a year in the next decade. We must move faster in supplementing the current fleet with unmanned platforms that extend sensor coverage and magazine depth. And we must field a class of single-mission patrol boats built in numbers to employ surface-to-surface missiles in archipelagic seas. We can no longer aim for efficient peacetime production as the standard for acquisition; we must prepare for conflict and accept that there may be inefficiency involved.

Conclusion

This essay is timed for publication coincident to the January 2024 gathering of the Surface Navy Association in Arlington, Virginia, and is designed to encourage conversation and debate there and elsewhere. To this point, there is no evidence the alteration to the Title 10 mission of the Navy has had any impact on Department of Defense resource allocation, at least as can be discerned from the fiscal year 2024 DoD budget submission. It is for those interested in seapower – readers of this journal and members of the Navy League – to demand that our elected officials hold DoD and Navy officials accountable for fully implementing the Navy mission and resourcing accordingly. A strong, capable surface force is central to that mission, and there is considerable work to be done in achieving it.

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CNO Releases Priorities: America's Warfighting Navy

By CNO Public Affairs

WASHINGTON (Jan. 9, 2023) – Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti released her priorities in a paper titled “America's Warfighting Navy,” at the Surface Navy Association's National Symposium, Jan. 9.

The text of America's Warfighting Navy reads as follows:

Who We Are. We are the United States Navy, the most powerful navy in the world. We are the Sailors and Civilians who have answered our Nation's call to service. We are Americans who embody character, competence, and dedication to our mission. Our identity is forged by the sea and we serve with honor, courage, and commitment.

What We Do. We are here to preserve the peace, respond in crisis, and win decisively in war. We operate far forward, around the world and around the clock, from the seabed to space, in cyberspace, and in the information environment to promote our Nation's prosperity and security, deter aggression, and provide options to our nation's leaders. We deliver power for peace, but are always postured and ready to fight and win as part of the Joint Force and alongside our Allies and partners.

Where We Are Going. The threats to our nation and our interests are real and growing. The strategic environment has changed; gone are the days of operating from a maritime sanctuary against competitors who cannot threaten us. The National Defense Strategy makes clear that we must defend our homeland, deter strategic attack, deter and be prepared to

prevail in conflict against the People's Republic of China, and meet the acute challenge of an aggressive Russia and other persistent threats. Our adversaries have designed their militaries to overcome our traditional sources of strength. We must move rapidly to stay ahead and continuously create warfighting advantages. We must think, act, and operate differently, leveraging wargaming and experimentation to integrate conventional capability with hybrid, unmanned, and disruptive technologies. Tomorrow's battlefield will be incredibly challenging and complex. To win decisively in that environment, our Sailors must be the best warfighters in the world with the best systems, weapons, and platforms to ensure we can defeat our adversaries. We will put more players on the field—platforms that are ready with the right capabilities, weapons and sustainment, and people who are ready with the right skills, tools, training, and mindset.

Our Priorities. We will focus on Warfighting, Warfighters, and the Foundation that supports them.

Warfighting: Deliver Decisive Combat Power. We will view everything we do through a warfighting lens to ensure our Navy remains the world's preeminent fighting force. We will prioritize the readiness and capabilities required to fight and win at sea, and the logistics and shore support required to keep our Navy fit to fight. We recognize that we will never fight alone. We will advance naval integration with the Marine Corps, and synchronize and align our warfighting efforts with the Joint Force. We will design and drive interoperability with our Allies and partners to deliver combined lethality.

Warfighters: Strengthen the Navy Team. We will use the principles of mission command to empower leaders at all levels to operate in uncertain, complex, and rapidly changing environments, ready to take initiative and bold action with confidence. We will build strong warfighting teams, recruiting and retaining talented people from across the rich fabric of America. We will provide world-class training and

education to our Sailors and Civilians, honing their skills and giving them every opportunity to succeed. We will ensure our quality of service meets the highest standards, and we will look after our families and support networks, who enable us to accomplish our warfighting mission.

Foundation: Build Trust, Align Resources, Be Ready. We will earn and reinforce the trust and confidence of the American People every day. We will work with Congress to field and maintain the world's most powerful Navy and the infrastructure that sustains it. We will team with industry and academia to solve our most pressing challenges. We will cooperate with the interagency to bolster integrated deterrence. We will align what we do ashore with the warfighting needs of our Fleet.

Our Charge. America is counting on us to deter aggression, defend our national security interests, and preserve our way of life. With the right tools, a winning mindset, and the highest levels of integrity, we will operate safely as a team to deliver warfighting excellence.

I am proud to serve alongside you. I thank you and your families for your continued commitment to ensuring we are always ready.

We have taken a fix and set our course. Together we will deliver the Navy the Nation Needs. The time is now to move with purpose and urgency: ALL AHEAD FLANK!

America's Warfighting Navy can be found online [here](#).