

USS O'Kane Returns Home from Deployment



The guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane (DDG 77) arrives returns to its homeport in San Diego. O'Kane, a part of the Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group, returned to Naval Base San Diego Feb. 6, following an independent deployment to the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleets in support of national tasking and to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kevin C. Leitner*

SAN DIEGO – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS O'Kane (DDG 77) returned home to Naval Base San Diego on Feb. 6, completing an eight-month independent deployment to the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleet areas of operation, said U.S. 3rd Fleet public affairs.

O'Kane deployed in June 2021 in support of national tasking, serving as the ballistic missile defense commander for Carrier Strike Group 1 while operating in the U.S. 7th Fleet and the primary ballistic missile defense asset while in the U.S. 5th

Fleet.

The Sailors aboard USS O’Kane lead the way in demonstrating resiliency and dedication to support the mission and each other,” said Cmdr. Michelle R. Fontenot, O’Kane’s commanding officer. “As an independent deployer serving in both the U.S. 5th and 7th Fleets, O’Kane met each mission with success.”

While operating in U.S. 5th Fleet, O’Kane escorted multiple high-value units through 30 strait transits, including the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal. O’Kane participated in several high-end exercises such as maritime security operations in support of the International Maritime Security Coalition, collaborating with seven partner nations for security and the free flow of commerce.

O’Kane also participated in Indigo Defender, a bilateral maritime exercise between Saudi naval forces and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command. In addition, O’Kane conducted maritime interdiction operations; board, search, and seizure operations; and operated alongside international navies, including the Egyptian naval force, Royal Saudi navy and the Indian navy.

Following Israel’s transition from the U.S. European Command theater to U.S. Central Command area of responsibility in September, O’Kane Sailors were able to enjoy a visit to Haifa, further strengthening the U.S. partnership with Israel.

O’Kane served as a key facilitator in a highly successful seizure of illicit cargo from a stateless fishing vessel during a flag verification boarding in accordance with customary international law in the North Arabian Sea on Dec. 20. O’Kane worked alongside the Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships USS Tempest (PC 2), USS Typhoon (PC 5), and the U.S. Coast Guard Advanced Interdiction Team to seize 1,400 AK-47s and 226,000 rounds of ammunition.

Upon completion of the missions in U.S. 5th Fleet, O’Kane

entered U.S. 7th Fleet and took part in expeditionary strike force operations with the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2) and the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). The U.S. force of more than nine ships conducted underway replenishments, including vertical and connected replenishments. O’Kane executed anti-submarine warfare operations while escorting high-value assets through the South China Sea.

“O’Kane’s tireless commitment and unparalleled performance are above reproach. I am very proud of every O’Kane Sailor and what we have accomplished as a team,” said Fontenot. “O’Kane Sailors represent the Navy’s fighting spirit and it is an honor to serve them as their commanding officer.”

Rep. Luria: Congress Needs Frank Budget Requirements from Navy – and Consequences of Not Funding Them



Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Virginia), speaking at the Jan. 31 ribbon cutting for the Center for Maritime Security. *NAVY LEAGUE / Brett Davis*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy needs to be frank in telling Congress what it needs to meet its warfighting requirements in the National Defense Strategy and the consequences if requirements are not funded, the vice chair of the House Armed Services Committee said Feb. 7.

“As a member of Congress, what do we want to hear? We want the services to come to us and essentially say, ‘This is what we need, this is why, and – most of all – this is the risk of not doing it,’” said Rep. Elaine Luria, (D- Virginia), deputy chair of the HASC, in a conversation with the Hudson Institute’s Bryan Clark. “And that is a portion of what is not being communicated.

“It’s like a shell game,” Luria said. “The Navy comes to us and says, ‘We only want to build one DDG this year,’ but the other DDG is on your unfunded list?”

She said Congress needs to know the risks of not funding budget requirements.

“Then it is on Congress to make a decision about the risk of not doing those things,” she said. “It is never articulated. It shouldn’t be up to Congress to say to the Navy, ‘Hey, we really want to give you more,’” she said.

“It’s all backwards,” Luria said. “There should be a strategy, the strategy drives the requirements, the requirements drive the POM [Program Objective Memorandum], the POM [becomes] the budget.”

Luria, a retired Navy nuclear-trained surface warfare officer, said she watched recordings of the testimony before Congress during the 1980s of then-Navy Secretary John Lehman advocating his Maritime Strategy and a 600-ship Navy.

“Essentially, where the discussion led [was], ‘This is what we need – that equals 600 ships – and here’s the risk of not doing that,’” she paraphrased Lehman as saying.

“That’s not being communicated in that way [today],” noting that things like 30-year shipbuilding plans are not “put into context, what that means, what presence delivers, and what deterrence that equates to with regard to China potentially trying to take Taiwan by force. It’s not being communicated in a way that’s compelling.

“There is a lack of a maritime strategy, and it is important to understand what the strategy is,” Luria said. “I think the previous administration had a good focus on what needed to be done. ... We’re kind of starting over again without really understanding what the future of the fleet looks like.”

Luria questioned the integrated deterrence concept of the current administration as not something new, but a “just the newest buzzword. Has anyone clearly defined what it is?”

The lawmaker said for deterrence, “you actually have to have deterrence – you have to have the forces.”

She has been critical of Navy plans to “divest to invest,” noting the investments are frequently short-changed, resulting, for example, in “two decades of lost shipbuilding opportunities.”

Luria affirmed that more budget resources “need go to the Navy and the Air Force because that’s the nature of the [Pacific] theater.”

HII Completes Initial Sea Trials of Virginia-class Submarine Montana



USS Montana has successfully completed sea trials, Huntington Ingalls Industries announced Feb. 7. *HUNTINGTON INGALLS INDUSTRIES / Ashley Cowan*

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Huntington Ingalls Industries announced Feb. 7 the successful completion of the initial sea trials last week of fast attack submarine USS Montana (SSN 794). The Virginia-class submarine, built at HII's Newport News Shipbuilding division, spent several days at sea last week to test the ship's systems and components.

Testing included submerging the submarine for the first time and high-speed maneuvers while on the surface and submerged. HII teams will continue the testing program and will deliver the boat to the U.S. Navy later this year.

"We are very proud to say the Montana and her crew performed exceptional," said Jason Ward, Newport News Shipbuilding vice president of Virginia-class submarine construction. "Taking the ship to sea for the first time is a huge milestone for everyone involved. The crew, thousands of suppliers from around the country and shipbuilders from HII and Electric Boat

can be proud the ship was successfully brought to life and will soon be part of the world's greatest Navy."

Construction of Montana began in 2015. The boat – the 21st Virginia-class submarine built as part of the teaming partnership with General Dynamic's Electric Boat – was christened in September 2020.

Icebreaker Polar Star Arrives in Antarctica



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star sits hove-to on a cloudy day in Antarctica, Jan. 17. Polar Star is in its 25th year participating in Operation Deep Freeze, one of many operations in the Indo-Pacific region in which the U.S. military promotes security and stability across the region. *U.S. COAST GUARD /*

Petty Officer 3rd Class Diolanda Caballero

MCMURDO STATION, Antarctica – The 157 crewmembers of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) arrived at McMurdo Station in Antarctica Feb. 7 following an 86-day transit from the United States and the cutter's departure from its Seattle homeport Nov. 13, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a release.

This deployment marks the Polar Star's 25th journey to Antarctica supporting Operation Deep Freeze, an annual joint military service mission to resupply the United States Antarctic stations in support of the National Science Foundation, lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program.

Each year, the crew pilots the 399-foot, 13,000-ton cutter to break a navigable channel through miles of ice, sometimes as much as 21 feet thick, to allow fuel and supply ships to reach McMurdo Station, the U.S. Antarctic Program's logistics hub and largest station.

Polar Star reached the Ross Sea, Antarctica, Jan. 3, and commenced breaking the 37 miles of ice that extended from the ice pier in Winter Quarters Bay at McMurdo Station out to open water. Polar Star spent four weeks breaking ice and grooming the shipping channel. The crew's efforts were aided by favorable winds and currents and by month's end had created an open and ice-free approach for the supply vessels.

The cleared channel to McMurdo Station will enable two supply vessels, Maersk Peary and Ocean Giant, to safely offload over eight million gallons of fuel and 1,000 cargo containers. Together these two ships carry enough fuel, food, and critical supplies to sustain USAP operations throughout the year until the next sealift opportunity in the austral summer of 2023.

The cutter made international stops in Wellington and Lyttelton, New Zealand on the way to Antarctica. While in New

Zealand, the crew engaged with the Royal New Zealand Navy, United States Embassy and volunteered in Christchurch at the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Polar Star will also partner with the Royal New Zealand Navy's largest ship, Her Royal Majesty's New Zealand Ship Aotearoa, in support of resupplying Scott Base, New Zealand's year-round Antarctic research facility.

"It is a tremendous honor to lead the men and women of Polar Star on this important mission," said Capt. William Woityra, commanding officer of Polar Star. "This team brought renewed energy and passion to this 46-year-old ship, and overcame significant challenges to deliver exceptional results."

Assigned to Operation Deep Freeze each year, the icebreaker spends January and February breaking ice in Antarctica. Polar Star returns to the United States after completing the mission.

This year also marks the Polar Star's return to Antarctica following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2020-2021 season, Polar Star conducted a winter Arctic deployment, during which the cutter trekked to the Arctic Circle to project constructive presence in the northern high latitudes under winter conditions and train the next generation of polar sailors. Their efforts resulted in setting a record for the furthest north any American surface vessel has been in the winter months.

Littoral Combat Ship USS

Savannah Commissioned



The U.S. Navy commissioned its newest Independence-variant littoral combat ship, USS Savannah (LCS 28), on Feb. 5 in

Brunswick, Georgia. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist
2nd Class James S. Hong*

BRUNSWICK – The U.S. Navy commissioned its newest Independence-variant littoral combat ship, USS Savannah (LCS 28), Feb. 5 in Brunswick, Georgia, the commander, Naval Surface Forces, said in a release.

“It’s fitting that it would find its home in Savannah – a city whose agility has allowed her to be a defining force in the entire scope of American history,” said principal speaker U.S. Rep. Earl L. “Buddy” Carter (R-Georgia).

Diane Davison Isakson is the ship’s sponsor and wife of the late Johnny Isakson, former senator from Georgia. Their daughter, Julie Isakson Mitchell, served as the matron of honor. Meredith Berger, performing the duties of the undersecretary of the Navy, recognized Isakson.

“It is said that the character and spirit of the ship’s sponsor serves to enrich, guide, and protect the ship and her crew,” said Berger. “You come from a family steeped in service. You’ve got Navy in your blood.”

Guest speakers for the event also included Mayor of Savannah Cosby Johnson, Mayor of Brunswick Van Johnson, and Vice Adm. Carl Chebi, commander of Naval Air Systems Command.

“The USS Savannah is poised to represent its motto across the globe, not for self but for others,” said Chebi. “Today as we commission her as an operating force of the U.S. Navy. The ship and her crew will carry on the legacy of the five other ships that had the honor to bear the name Savannah since 1798. They participated in the Mexican War, the Civil War, World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War. The sixth USS Savannah’s history has yet to be written but will be enriched in stories of honor, courage, and commitment.”

During the ceremony, Savannah's commanding officer, Cmdr. Kevin M. Ray, reported the ship ready, and Isakson gave the traditional order to "man our ship and bring her to life."

"To the city of Savannah, I assure you, the fine men and women of our crew, who I am humbled to lead, represent everything that is great about your city. Pride, patriotism, resiliency, diversity, and hospitality," said Ray. "We will carry your name forward, wherever our Nation asks us to go, and we will represent you well."

Following commissioning, Savannah will sail to California to be home ported in San Diego, joining sister ships USS Coronado (LCS 4), USS Jackson (LCS 6), USS Montgomery (LCS 8), USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10), USS Omaha (LCS 12), USS Manchester (LCS 14), USS Tulsa (LCS 16), USS Charleston (LCS 18), USS Cincinnati (LCS 20), USS Kansas City (LCS 22), USS Oakland (LCS 24) and USS Mobile (LCS 26).

Cutter Active Returns Home to Port Angeles Following Counterdrug Patrol



An aircrew and a HH-65 Dolphin helicopter from Air Station Port Angeles prepares to land on the Coast Guard Cutter Active's flight deck during a counter-drug patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, Sept. 17, 2018. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Joshua Wood*

PORT ANGELES, Wash. – The Coast Guard Cutter Active (WMEC 619) and crew returned to their homeport in Port Angeles Feb. 2 after a 10,572-mile, 55-day deployment to the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 13th District said Feb. 4.

The crew—deployed off the coast of Central America in support of counterdrug operations.

Shortly after getting underway, Active participated in helicopter proficiency operations off the coast of Southern California. Pilots from multiple Coast Guard air stations and crews from a number of West Coast-based cutters converged on Active to perform necessary training and proficiency evolutions.

During a 48-hour period, Active's crew participated in 72 takeoffs and landings from the flight deck in addition to

performing a helicopter in-flight refueling and a vertical replenishment. In total, Active directly assisted in the qualification and certification of eight pilots across two helicopter platforms in addition to certifying eighteen shipboard aviation support crewmembers.

While moored in San Diego, Active embarked a joint aircrew and helicopter from HITRON [Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron] and Coast Guard Air Station San Francisco. HITRON is a Jacksonville, Florida-based specialized law enforcement unit. HITRON crews are trained to use airborne use of force for non-compliant vessels suspected of violating U.S. and international laws to comply with lawful orders.

“The Active crew performed superbly in every assigned mission during this patrol,” said Cmdr. Brian Tesson, Active’s commanding officer. “Presented with myriad challenges, from engineering casualties to Omicron safety protocols, this crew made a bold statement by stepping out with a positive, can-do attitude in the face of adversity, defining what it means to work aboard the ‘Li’l Tough Guy.’ Bringing their best selves to the job daily, the crew patrolled the Eastern Pacific Ocean to deter and suppress transnational crime and narcotics smuggling while training and qualifying crewmembers as they honed new personal and professional skills. I watched this team overcome each consecutive obstacle with ingenuity, fortitude and professionalism. I could not be more proud to be a part of it.”

Active’s crew departed in mid-December and were unable to spend time with family and loved ones during the holiday season. However, as is typical for the Active and Coast Guard cutter crews in general, they came together as a family to create a number of great memories during the patrol. The Active’s crew found ways to keep spirits high while patrolling the high seas through conducting drills and training or gathered during one of our onboard holiday meals cooked by the Chiefs’ Mess, or over a sparkling apple cider New Year’s Eve

toast.

Nicknamed the Li'l Tough Guy, the 55-year-old medium-endurance cutter routinely operates from the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Central America conducting search and rescue, domestic fisheries enforcement, counter-narcotics law enforcement, and other statutory Coast Guard missions.

CNO and MCPON Visit Norfolk for Naval Safety Command Establishment, Fleet Engagement



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday salutes Sailors

assigned to USS Mason (DDG 87) during a visit to the ship on Feb. 4. CNO Gilday and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith were in Norfolk for an establishment ceremony for the Naval Safety Command, previously known as the Naval Safety Center, and to visit various local commands. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jeremy R. Boan*
NORFOLK, Va. – U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith visited Norfolk Naval Station to attend the establishment ceremony of the Naval Safety Command and visit local Norfolk-based commands on Feb. 4.

Gilday was the guest speaker for the establishment ceremony, during which the Naval Safety Center was elevated to the Naval Safety Command.

This elevation, highlighted during his remarks at the Surface Navy Association symposium in January, was a key component of Gilday's call to action for the U.S. Navy to "get real, get better."

"The establishment of the Naval Safety Command expands our focus on safety and leverages 'get real get better' principles, while we evaluate safety management and performance of the Navy and Marine Corps," said Gilday.

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

"The significance of today's establishment can be summarized simply: It's a vital change that will increase warfighting readiness," said Gilday. "Almost no aspect of naval operations can be separated from risk, but risk can be reduced."

The Navy elevated the Naval Safety Center to the Naval Safety Command following the USS Bonhomme Richard fire and the Major

Fires Review.

“We will empower our Sailors, Marines and civilians by collecting their insights to bolster our safety culture,” said Commander, Naval Safety Command Rear Adm. Frederick Luchtman. “Ultimately, the command will serve as a force multiplier of a culture that incorporates risk management and accountability by all individuals, regardless of rank and position.”

Gilday, Luchtman and Hailey unveiled the command’s new seal during the ceremony. Key elements of the seal include a blue and red shield representing protection across the naval enterprise, blue for the Navy’s dominance on, under and over the maritime domain, and red for the courage and tenacity of the Marine Corps, said the command’s press office. The globe behind the shield symbolizes naval warriors, wherever they serve worldwide, under the protection of safety principles.

The new command motto featured on the seal, “Enabling Warfighting Readiness,” is a testament to the command’s mission to preserve warfighting capability, combat lethality and enable readiness by working with its stakeholders to identify and mitigate or eliminate hazards to reduce unnecessary risk to people and resources.

“The Naval Safety Command will provide transparency into emerging risk trends and the current safety status of all commands through enhanced risk identification, communication, and accountability, as well as data collection, management, and product dissemination, which will protect our most important resource, our Sailors, Marines, and civilians whose lives we value above all else.” Luchtman said.

For more information or resources from the Naval Safety Command, visit the command website at <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil>.

Other Visits

While in Hampton Roads, Gilday and Smith also visited the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mason (DDG 87) and the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG 64) where they met with Sailors and leadership.

“Having the opportunity to travel with CNO while having unfiltered, candid conversations with Sailors provides essential feedback that improves our fleet and increases combat readiness. Our people are truly paramount to readiness; without them, Gettysburg and Mason could not perform the multitude of missions they were designed for. It is our Sailors who will ensure we prevail in combat,” said Smith.

Navy, Marine Corps Dismissals for Declining COVID-19 Vaccination on the Rise



Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro talks with Chief Engineman Stephen Bashore, aboard the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5) in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Jan. 25. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class T. Logan Keown*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The number of U.S. Marines and Sailors dismissed from the services for refusing vaccination against COVID-19 has grown to well over 600, officials say.

On Feb. 2, the Navy announced it has dismissed 118 Sailors, 96 active duty and 22 recruits who had served less than 180 days. All have received honorable discharges, according to the Navy. No reservists have been dismissed to date.

The next day, the Marine Corps reported 469 uniformed personnel have been separated from the service for incomplete vaccination. According to Marine Corps guidance, any active duty Marine who did not receive a final vaccination dose, by Nov. 14, 2021, or reservist by Dec. 14, 2021 “is considered unvaccinated.”

According to Defense Department statistics, 194,689 active duty and reserve Marines were fully vaccinated by Feb. 2 and

384,586 Sailors and reservists met full vaccination requirements. Both the Navy and Marine Corps, as well as the Pentagon, consider COVID-19 a readiness issue requiring full vaccination for all military personnel.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro became the latest Pentagon official to test positive for COVID-19 on Jan. 31. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley, all tested positive in early January.

Del Toro, who was fully vaccinated and had received a booster shot, said he would quarantine for a minimum of five days in accordance with the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He planned to attend key meetings and discussions virtually and when necessary, be represented by Meredith Berger performing the duties of undersecretary of the Navy.

The Navy has granted 269 Sailors medical exemptions to mandatory vaccination, all but 10 of them temporary. The nine medical exemptions granted reservists were all temporary. By Feb. 2, the Navy also granted 60 administrative exemptions for active duty Sailors and 23 for reservists. However, not a single request for exemption from vaccination on religious grounds, has been granted to any of the 3,288 active duty Sailors and 773 reservists who requested one.

The Marine Corps reported a combined 665 administrative or medical exemptions had been approved by Feb. 2. Of 3,538 requests for religious accommodation to skip the vaccine mandate, 3,414 have been processed and only three requests were approved. The Marines are the only armed service, so far, to issue a religious exemption for the vaccine mandate. In a letter to Rep. Darrell Issa (R-California), first reported by Military.com, a Marine Corps official explained that even those three Marines granted religious accommodation were, in effect, no longer serving or soon leaving the Marine Corps.

The high rejection numbers for exemption requests, particularly for religious accommodation, have sparked numerous complaints to members of Congress that they are being handled in a pro forma review with nearly identical rejection letters.

That prompted Issa, a highly vocal critic of the Pentagon's vaccination mandate, to write Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger Jan. 17 for an explanation of the exemption process. In a statement released by his office, Issa said the vaccine mandate "is ending careers of distinction, ruining lives of service, and weakening America's force readiness. This isn't how the military wants to treat its own – it's how the president and his team show their unprecedented hostility to our men and women in uniform. I will not stand for this betrayal."

Issa and 14 other House Republicans have written House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-Connecticut) urging funding for the vaccination mandate be prohibited in any pending defense spending bill.

In a Jan. 21 letter to Issa, J.J. Daly, deputy legislative assistant in the Marines' Office of Legislative Affairs, explained that of the three Marines who received a religious exemption, two were "on terminal leave" and the other "has transitioned into the Department of Defense Skill Bridge Program, a 180-day training program in private industry." Marine Corps leadership determined that "the likelihood of their vaccination status impacting military readiness and health and safety was remote because the requestors are no longer serving with Marine Corps commands."

He noted chaplains counsel every Marine who submits a religious accommodation request and provide advice to the adjudication authority for each request. However, "the ultimate question is whether or not approving the request will have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion,

good order and discipline, or health and safety. This is a decision that requires consideration of factors that fall outside the expertise of a trained chaplain,” Daly wrote.

Navy to Commission Future Littoral Combat Ship Savannah



USS Independence (LCS-2), shown here at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida in 2010. The newest Independence-class littoral combat ship, the future USS Savannah, will be commissioned Feb. 5. *U.S. NAVY*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will commission the future USS Savannah (LCS 28) as the newest Independence-variant littoral combat ship during a 10:00 a.m. EST ceremony Saturday, Feb. 5,

in Brunswick, Georgia, the Defense Department said Feb. 4.

Remarks will be provided by Rep. Earl L. "Buddy" Carter, R-Georgia; Meredith Berger, performing the duties of the undersecretary of the Navy; Vice Adm. Carl Chebi, Commander, Naval Air Systems Command; Van Johnson, mayor of Savannah; Cosby Johnson, mayor of Brunswick; and Larry Ryder, vice president of Business Development and External Affairs, Austal USA.

The ship's sponsor is Dianne Davison Isakson, wife of the late Johnny Isakson, former senator from Georgia. In a time-honored Navy tradition, Isakson, along with the matron of honor, her daughter Julie Isakson Mitchell, will give the first order to "man our ship and bring her to life."

"The city of Savannah, Georgia, has played an important role in our nation's naval history," said Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro. "I have no doubt the Sailors of USS Savannah will carry on the fighting spirit of this city and will play an important role in the defense of our nation and maritime freedom."

The LCS class consists of two variants, the Freedom and the Independence, designed and built by two industry teams. Lockheed Martin leads the Freedom variant team, or odd-numbered hulls, constructed in Marinette, Wisconsin. Austal USA leads the Independence variant team in Mobile, Alabama for LCS 2 and the subsequent even-numbered hulls.

Savannah is the 14th Independence variant LCS and the sixth ship to bear its name. USS Savannah will homeport at Naval Base San Diego, California.

The ceremony will be live streamed at: [USS Savannah Commissioning](#). The link becomes active approximately 10 minutes prior to the event (9:50 a.m. EST).

Navy Orders Nine Additional CH-53K Helicopters for the U.S. Marine Corps



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*

STRATFORD, Conn. – Prioritizing affordability and utilizing advanced manufacturing techniques, Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company, will build nine additional CH-53K aircraft at a lower unit price than previous lot buys, resulting in significant savings for the U.S. government and taxpayers, the company said Feb. 3. The company's experienced supply chain coupled with its active digital approach drives speed and

affordability throughout design, development, production, and sustainment.

The CH-53K will further support the U.S. Marine Corps in its mission to conduct expeditionary heavy-lift assault transport of armored vehicles, equipment, and personnel to support distributed operations deep inland from a sea-based center of operations, critical in the Indo-Pacific region.

These nine helicopters are part of 200 aircraft program of record for the U.S. Marine Corps with deliveries beginning in 2025.

“By embracing resilient, predictive logistics and sustainment, we are enabling CH-5K crews to make smarter, faster decisions, to increase reliability, and improve readiness and material availability at reduced burden to the fleet,” said Bill Falk, Sikorsky Director, CH-53K programs. “After 50 years of supporting the CH-53E, Sikorsky has a deep understanding of the heavy-lift mission and an enduring partnership with the U.S. Marines Corps enabling our team and our proven supply chain to offer tailored solutions resulting in more efficient missions.”

The aircraft will be built at Sikorsky headquarters in Stratford, Connecticut, leveraging the company’s digital build and advanced technology production processes.

The factory is active with seven CH-53K aircraft in build and there are 47 more aircraft in various stages of production.

Sikorsky has made significant investments in workforce training, tooling, and machinery to increase the number of aircraft built and delivered year over year.

In total, Sikorsky has delivered five operational CH-53K King Stallion heavy-lift helicopters to the U.S. Marine Corps in Jacksonville, North Carolina, with four more planned for delivery this year.

The CH-53K program operated by the U.S. Marine Corps entered Initial Operational Test and Evaluation in 2021 and is set to conclude in 2022.

Sikorsky has a strong foundation to support the CH-53K because the company already provides the U.S. Marines with predictive maintenance on the legacy CH-53E by utilizing the Fleet Common Operating Environment enabling the shift from reactive to predictive maintenance.

The CH-53K aircraft is equipped with Integrated Vehicle Health Management System, which will transition the U.S. Marines from fixed-interval to on-condition maintenance resulting in lower maintenance crew hours, reduced life cycle costs, and increased aircraft readiness.

Lockheed Martin is working with the U.S. Navy on a performance-based logistics contract that expands from the CH-53E to add the CH-53K with a contract award expected this year.