Navy Awards $500M Design Contract for Shipyard Modernization in Hawaii, Washington

Dry Dock 1 at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard is flooded during the undocking of the Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine USS City of Corpus Christi (SSN 705). City of Corpus Christi was in dry dock for a maintenance availability. *U.S. NAVY / Petty Officer 3rd Class Dustan Longhini*

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) awarded a $500-million indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity architecture-engineering contract Sept. 7 for structural and waterfront-related projects at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility (PHNSY & IMF) in Hawaii and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility (PSNS & IMF) in Washington state, NAVFAC Announced in a Sept. 13 release.

The five-year contract will mainly support construction, repair, and alteration projects at both shipyards as part of the Navy's comprehensive Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program (SIOP) and will help ensure that both shipyards – originally designed and built in the 19th and 20th centuries – are able to maintain, modernize, and repair Navy ships and submarines and return them to the fleet on time.

"To create the public shipyards that our nation needs requires investments to improve their capacity and capability," said Capt. Warren LeBeau, program manager for SIOP. "This contract directly supports the vital roles that Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard have in terms of our national defense by executing maintenance and modernization on

submarines and aircraft carriers to provide combat-ready ships to the fleet.”

SIOP is a joint effort between Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), NAVFAC, and commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) to recapitalize and modernize the infrastructure at the Navy’s four public shipyards, including repairing and modernizing dry docks, restoring shipyard facilities and optimizing their placement, and replacing aging and deteriorating capital equipment.

“SIOP will provide critical infrastructure investments into the shipyards that enable our Navy’s lethality and ability to operate forward in the era of strategic competition,” said Rear Adm. Dean VanderLey, commander, NAVFAC Pacific. “The award of this contract provides NAVFAC with the capacity and capability to plan and execute critical NAVSEA and CNIC projects at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Puget Sound Naval Shipyard to meet urgent fleet readiness needs.”

Honolulu, Hawaii-based WSM Pacific SIOP, a joint venture, was awarded the indefinite-delivery/indefinite quantity architect-engineer contract under a competitive process via the www.sam.gov website.

The Navy’s Super Hornet Block III Takes to the Skies

F288, the first Block III F/A-18 Super Hornet, closes its landing gear after performing a touch-and-go near Boeing’s St. Louis flight ramp. *BOEING / Mike Irvine*

St. LOUIS – The most advanced Super Hornet in history has

completed its first flight, Boeing News Now said Sept. 10.

Boeing test pilots Ty “Grouch” Frautschi and Sam “Splat” Platt last week lifted off from Boeing’s St. Louis flight ramp and checkout center in the first combat-capable Block III F/A-18 Super Hornet.

“It was a good day. The jet flew great,” Frautschi said. “It is a real pleasure to fly and I know the Navy is looking forward to getting all this capability that Block III is going to bring to the fleet.”

The previous 28 F/A-18 Super Hornet deliveries to the U.S. Navy have been fighters for the Kuwait Air Force as outlined by the Foreign Military Sales process. Block III is a return to putting new fighters in U.S. Navy squadrons.

“It means a lot to me, I was in the Navy for 20 years,” Platt said. “The reason I like to do this job is to bring these airplanes back to the sailors I still care about.”

F/A-18 Block III capabilities include the advanced cockpit system (ACS) with a 10-inch-by-19-inch touch-screen display, enhanced networking, open mission systems, increased survivability and a 10,000-hour airframe. The ACS is the largest cockpit screen of any fighter in the world, shared with the F-15.

“It’s like the difference of a dial telephone and your cellphone,” Platt said. “All these integrated displays put on a big piece of glass where you can really get an idea of what the sensors are doing and have a much more tactical display for the operator. It’s a revolutionary increase in capability.”

Block III capabilities were developed in partnership with the Navy. The flight is the result of years of work and hundreds of Boeing employees – a fact not lost on the test pilots.

“It’s a team effort. There’s a lot of preparation that goes into not just getting ready for the flight but building it and even earlier than that – the engineering and development,” Fraustchi said. “It is not a short list of activities to get to today, that’s for sure, and we appreciate everything they do to keep us safe.”

The first production Block III F/A-18F is construction number F288.

Navy Establishes New Medal to Honor Fallen Civilians

Photo of the Angela M. Houtz Medal for Fallen Civilians.The new award aims to honor Department of the Navy (DON) civilian employees who are killed or sustain serious injury through considerable personal sacrifice in the performance of their duties. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ford Williams*

WASHINGTON – Department of the Navy (DON) civilian employees who are killed or sustain serious injury through considerable personal sacrifice in the performance of their duties are now eligible to receive the Angela M. Houtz Medal for Fallen Civilians, said Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ford Williams in a release.

The award honors the fidelity and essential service of civilian employees who were killed or sustain serious injury in the performance of their official duties as a result of criminal act, natural disaster, terrorist act, or other circumstances as determined by the secretary of the Navy.

“While Department of the Navy civilians may not be on the front lines, they do face many of the same dangers as our uniformed personnel because of where they work and what they do,” said Garry Newton, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for civilian personnel. “It was long past time to make it possible for commanders to fully recognize the service of all department personnel.”

The medal is named for Angela M. Houtz, a DON intelligence analyst who died during the terrorist attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

GA-ASI Flies MQ-9 in the Canadian Arctic

General Atomics Aeronautical Systems’ MQ-9A “Big Wing” UAS flew in the hostile climate of the Canadian Arctic. *GA-ASI*

SAN DIEGO – In a flight that originated from its Flight Test and Training Center (FTTC) near Grand Forks, North Dakota, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI) flew a company-owned MQ-9A “Big Wing” configured unmanned aircraft system north through Canadian airspace past the 78th parallel, the company said in a Sept. 10 release.

A traditional limitation of long-endurance UAS has been their inability to operate at extreme northern (and southern) latitudes, as many legacy SATCOM datalinks can become less reliable above the Arctic (or below the Antarctic) Circle – approximately 66 degrees north. At those latitudes, the low-look angle to geostationary Ku-band satellites begins to compromise the link. GA-ASI has demonstrated a new capability for effective ISR operations by performing a loiter at 78.31°

North, using Inmarsat's L-band Airborne ISR Service (LAISR).

The flight over Haig-Thomas Island, in the Canadian Arctic, demonstrated the UAS's flexibility by operating at very high latitudes. The flight, which took off on Sept. 7 and returned to the FTTC on Sept. 8, was conducted with cooperation from the Federal Aviation Administration, Transport Canada and Nav Canada.

Covering 4,550 miles in 25.5 hours, it was one of the longest-range flights ever flown by a company MQ-9. The flight was performed under an FAA Special Airworthiness Certificate and a Transport Canada Special Flight Operations Certificate.

GA-ASI partnered with Inmarsat Government, a leading provider of secure, global mission-critical telecommunications to the U.S. government in the design, acceptance testing and deployment of an enhanced SATCOM system. The SATCOM was one of the key enablers of the flight and consisted of a GA-ASI designed L-band high data rate system, as well as an Inmarsat low data rate backup datalink that could retain the aircraft's link to the ground control station even when operating in the high-latitude environment.

"As the global leader in UAS, we have enabled our UAS to operate in Arctic regions, over land and sea, where effective C2 and ISR-data transfer was previously not feasible," said Linden Blue, GA-ASI CEO. "As new customers come online, we want our aircraft to be able to provide them with the high data rate surveillance and high endurance that our aircraft are known for, and be able to do so in any environment."

GA-ASI coordinated between domestic and international airspace authorities for the flight. This is part of the company's ongoing airspace Integration initiative, designed to demonstrate how UAS can fly safely across international borders, in controlled airspace, and in this case, to extreme

northern latitudes.

“At Inmarsat Government, we take pride in delivering SATCOM solutions that empower our customers’ current and future UAS missions around the world, even in the most challenging environments,” said Tom Costello, chief commercial officer, Inmarsat Government. “We are proud to partner with organizations like GA-ASI that enable the government and military to enhance their use of UAS and deliver the SATCOM required for full situational awareness and mission success.”

MQ-9A has unmatched operational flexibility, and when modified with the Big Wing, it has endurance over 43 hours, speeds of 220 KTAS, and can operate at altitude of up to 45,000 feet. It has a 4,800-pound (2,177-kilogram) payload capacity that includes 4,000 pounds (1,814 kilograms) of external stores. It provides long-endurance, persistent surveillance capabilities, with full-motion video and synthetic aperture radar/moving target indicator/maritime radar. An extremely reliable aircraft, MQ-9A Big Wing is equipped with a fault-tolerant flight control system and triple redundant avionics system architecture. It is engineered to meet and exceed manned aircraft reliability standards.

GA-ASI’s newest models, the MQ-9B SkyGuardian and SeaGuardian, represent the next generation of UAS, having demonstrated airborne endurance of more than 40 hours, automatic takeoffs and landings under SATCOM-only control, and a detect and avoid system. Its development is the result of a company-funded effort to deliver a UAS that can meet the stringent airworthiness certification requirements of various military and civil authorities.

GA-EMS Receives Navy Qualification as an Approved Alteration Installation Team

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) departed Naval Station Norfolk to make the transit to Newport News Shipyard in support of her Planned Incremental Availability (PIA), a six-month period of modernization, maintenance, and repairs, Aug. 20, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ryan Seelbach*

SAN DIEGO – General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems (GA-EMS) has been approved as an Alteration Installation Team (AIT), a qualification that enables the Navy to contract with GA-EMS subject-matter experts capable of independently performing alterations and system installations onboard U.S. Navy ships during maintenance availability periods, the company said in a Sept. 9 release.

"AIT qualification is recognition of the outstanding work our teams have performed over the years installing and maintaining first-of-kind electromagnetic aircraft catapult launch and recovery systems on land-based sites and onboard Ford-class carriers," said Scott Forney, president of GA-EMS. "The AIT designation provides ease of access for the Navy to contract GA-EMS' integrated team of experts. Our team's depth of knowledge and 'hands-on' skillsets building and maintaining these critical systems enables them to work independently to complete shipboard modification and installation tasks to help ready ships for redeployment within the allotted maintenance period."

GA-EMS has made significant investments in developing its facilities, workforce, quality management, and ISO 9001-compliant processes to support a broad range of critical naval programs. GA-EMS will manage the AIT effort from its newly

expanded Hampton, Virginia, facility, which provides close proximity to the Newport News shipyard where Ford-class carriers are under construction, and where the USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) is undergoing a Planned Incremental Availability maintenance period. In addition, GA-EMS' office in Patuxent River, Maryland, will serve as a customer engagement center supporting maritime and naval aviation programs, including delivery of the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and Advanced Arresting Gear (AAG) to the Naval Air Systems Command for Ford-class aircraft carriers.

"The Navy regularly experiences the challenge of sourcing a qualified workforce when shipyards must simultaneously manage new ship construction and maintenance tasks for ships already in the inventory," said James Donnelly, GA-EMS director of Maritime Program Operations. "Our decades of experience managing large, complex programs, and our expertise in the design, manufacture, installation and maintenance of next generation system technologies such as EMALS and AAG have equipped GA-EMS to provide best-value support to meet the challenge. This expertise is applicable not only for Ford-class carriers, but for other ship classes in the U.S. Navy's inventory as well."

Coast Guard Continues to Support Hurricane Ida Recovery Efforts

Coast Guard Capt. Wade Russell, commanding officer of Marine Safety Unit Houma, reviews navigation charts with a member of the Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving in Morgan City,

Louisiana, Sep. 9, 2021. *U.S. COAST GUARD*
NEW ORLEANS – The Coast Guard continues to respond to impacts to the waterways and assess the environmental threats across Southeast Louisiana Sept. 9, post-Hurricane Ida, the Coast Guard 8th District said in a release.

In partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving (SUPSALV) the Coast Guard is continuing efforts to reopen waterways impacted by Hurricane Ida in the areas of Bayou Lafourche, Houma Navigation Canal and portions of the Intracoastal Waterway.

Obstructions to the affected waterways are being identified and removed to restore the area to pre-storm conditions.

To date, 25 obstructions comprised primarily of fishing vessels, crew vessels, and offshore supply vessels have been identified in the Bayou Lafourche channel. Additionally, 30 submerged targets have been identified in the Houma Navigation Canal. Fifteen of those targets in the Houma Navigation Canal have been cleared or removed.

The Coast Guard also continues to receive and investigate all reports made to the National Response Center.

Coast Guard crews are working to identify and prioritize threats to the environment and navigable waterways through overflights and surface inspections of areas impacted by the storm.

The Coast Guard is working closely with the State of Louisiana, Environmental Protection Agency, and Department of Environmental Quality, to respond to reports of pollution.

International Partners Collaborate to End Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

Crew members from the Coast Guard Cutter Munro (WMSL 755) prepare to conduct a law enforcement boarding from the cutter's 35-foot Cutter Boat in the Central Pacific, Dec. 2, 2018. The cutter was conducting its first operational patrol and was enforcing conservation and management measures established by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew West*

The 2021 Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Exchange was conducted virtually from Hawaii, with a focus on the global problem of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The event took place Sept. 8-9, and was moderated by retired Navy Capt. Larry Osborn, Navy League Pacific Region vice president, and hosted by the East West center, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies and the Pacific Forum.

The Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Exchange (IMSE) is produced annually by Navy League of the United States Honolulu Council. The enduring IMSE theme is "building partnerships for security, stability and prosperity. IMSE's purpose is to provide a forum for senior leaders, subject matter experts and interested members of the general public to engage in dialogue about maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

The two-day event concentrated on the problems created by IIU fishing and the solutions available to counter the illegal fishing and the impacts on this vital global food resource.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, IUU fishing is a pervasive, far-reaching security threat.

“IUU fishing has replaced piracy as the leading global maritime security threat. If IUU fishing continues unchecked, we can expect deterioration of fragile coastal states and increased tension among foreign-fishing nations, threatening geo-political stability around the world,” said Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Karl Schultz in the service’s IUU Fishing Strategic Outlook, released in September 2020.

The IMSE conference examined new technologies to conduct all-domain sensing and gather information through satellite imagery and acoustic data, as well as methods to share and analyze huge amounts of data to deter illegal fishing.

Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, vice commandant of the Coast Guard, and Rear Adm. Blake Converse, deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, both delivered keynote addresses that emphasized the importance of partnerships, especially between multi-national organizations, nations and agencies with the means to detect and interdict violators and those countries who rely on their fisheries. Rear Adm. Matthew W. Sibley, commander of USCG District 14, shared the Coast Guard’s support to the nations in Oceania, which have limited assets and resources, to help them combat IUU fishing.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, IUU fishing is “a broad term that captures a wide variety of fishing activity. IUU fishing is found in all types and dimensions of fisheries; it occurs both on the high seas and in areas within national jurisdiction. It concerns all aspects and stages of the capture and utilization of fish, and it may sometimes be associated with organized crime.”

Capt. Holly Harrison, commanding officer USCG Kimball (WMSL 756), detailed the actual operations involved in approaching, boarding, inspecting and taking any necessary action aboard

fishing vessels on the high seas.

There is no one solution to the problem that affects both large and small nations in so many ways. "Combating IUU fishing has to be a whole of government and a whole of society approach," said retired Rear Adm. Pete Gumataotao, head of the East West Center at the University of Hawaii-Manoa.

Osborn said IUUF is a maritime security threat that has a destabilizing effect on the Indo-Pacific region.

"The war on IUUF is won through trust and international collaboration. Data from commercial SIGINT [signals intelligence], EO [electro-optical imagery] and SAR [synthetic aperture radar] satellite constellations, as well as commercial acoustic arrays attached to unmanned surface vehicles, will make it impossible for 'dark vessels' to conceal their locations and identities."

Osborn said the conference examined the application of artificial intelligence and machine language learning, which have become indispensable tools in creating actionable intelligence from disparate datasets.

"We found academics, NGOs, and small entrepreneurial companies with relevant technologies and solutions," he said. "I think this made our conference a success.

"The international stakeholders have done a commendable job in illuminating the problem and holding the violators accountable. The key has been collaboration and transparency," Osborn said. "Once you have that many of the other problems go away."

CNO Creating Unmanned Systems Task Force to Ensure Reliability, Command and Control

System technicians perform a safety test on a MANTAS T38 Devil Ray unmanned surface vehicle in San Diego Bay for an operational test run during U.S. Pacific Fleet's Unmanned Systems Integrated Battle Problem (UxS IBP) 21. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alex Perlman*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Getting the right mix of unmanned air, surface and undersea vehicles in the U.S. Navy's future fleet is so critical, the Chief of Naval Operations is creating an unmanned systems task force to sort out nagging issues like scalability, reliability, command, and control.

In a virtual appearance Sept. 8 at the Defense News online conference, Adm. Michael Gilday said he was unsatisfied with the Navy's pace of unmanned development, citing reservations about the reliability of unmanned vessels for long range, long duration missions, as well as command and control issues.

"Over the next few months, we'll be standing up an unmanned task force," similar in terms of scope and purpose to Project Overmatch, Gilday said. A group of technical experts, along with operators, will focus on problems "to move forward in all three domains, at speed, to make unmanned a reality by the end of this decade."

Gilday likened the new unmanned task force to Project Overmatch, the Navy's plan to develop a new fleet architecture using artificial intelligence (AI) and manned/unmanned teaming to enable distributed maritime operations. Highly mobile and widely distributed Navy and Marine Corps element are a basic

game plan for dealing with near-peer adversaries like China in contested areas of the vast Indo-Pacific region.

As the Navy plans future fleet battle problems, “One of the things I’ll be looking for is how we utilize unmanned [systems] at scale into the fleet, because we know that in the future. They’re going to be a significant part of distributed maritime operations,” Gilday said.

Gilday said the task force will include both Sailors and Navy civilians. “We have a lot of technical expertise in the Navy today that we can leverage,” including warfighting labs and systems commands, he said. Still in the early stages of planning, Gilday said he would be able to share more details about the task force “by early 2022.”

Gilday, and some key lawmakers, have expressed concern about the reliability of unmanned surface and undersea vessels deployed at sea for extended periods of time with little or no maintenance. The CNO said he’s seen progress in that area this year, noting three successful missions by unmanned surface vessels transiting more than 4,000 miles from the Gulf Coast, through the Panama Canal to California, while operating autonomously 98% of the time. However, “we’re not yet satisfied where we need to be with respect to reliability but we are quickly moving in that direction” although it’s still a few years before the Navy can go to the Pentagon and Congress with a plan to produce unmanned vessels at scale.

Concerns about command and control over unmanned systems was the genesis for Project Overmatch, Gilday said. With an initial plan to have a third of the fleet unmanned or minimally unmanned “we knew we couldn’t command and control, let’s say well over 100 vessels, without changing the way we were networked,” the CNO said.

“I do think as we look at AI applications for unmanned, it’s going to be a journey for us before we talk about an

autonomous, unmanned fleet," Gilday said. Initially, such platforms will be minimally manned or teamed with manned vessels. "The man in the loop is going to be an important piece for a while," he said.

The U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) also will establish a new task force to accelerate integration of unmanned systems of all domains and artificial intelligence, the NAVCENT commander said recently.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander, U.S. Fifth Fleet and commander, U.S. Naval Forces U.S. Central Command, speaking Sept. 8 to reporters by phone conference, said Task Force 59 (TF59) would be established on Sept. 9 in Manama, Bahrain.

Marine Corps' First MQ-9A Reaper Delivered to 3rd MAW

U.S. Marine Corps Captain Joshua Brooks, an unmanned aircraft system representative, and Master Sergeant Willie Cheeseboro Jr., an enlisted aircrew coordinator with Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron (VMU) 1, prepare to launch and operate the first Marine Corps owned MQ-9A Reaper on Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona, Aug. 30, 2021. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Gabrielle Sanders*

YUMA, Ariz. – Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron One (VMU-1), 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing procured the Marine Corps' first MQ-9A Reaper remotely piloted aircraft after transitioning from contractor-owned, contractor-operated (COCO) to government-owned, contractor-operated (GOCO) at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma on Aug. 30, said Cpl. Levi Voss, a spokesperson for the wing.

To achieve the commandant of the Marine Corps' vision of future force design, VMU-1 has transitioned from the RQ-21 Group 3 unmanned aircraft to the MQ-9A. Since 2018, flight operations of the MQ-9A have fallen under a COCO construct. However, the MQ-9A has since transitioned to a GOCO unmanned aerial system, signifying the Marine Corps' ownership of these assets and progressing toward an organically trained and qualified aircrew. This noteworthy flight is the culmination of three years of training, safety, and operational planning, contractor maintenance, process development, and staff analysis of risk management to ensure complete procedural adherence to Navy and Marine Corps aviation policies.

"VMU-1 is living the commandant's vision of Force Design 2030 and our unit is laying the groundwork for future squadrons to execute similar missions within INDOPACOM [U.S. Indo-Pacific Command] or anywhere else that we are needed," said Maj. Keenan Chirhart, executive officer of VMU-1.

VMU-1's procurement of the Marine Corps' first MQ-9A evolves the service as a force, making it capable of further integration of operations in naval, ground, air, and cyber domains. As the Marine Corps transitions to government-owned, government-operated employment of the MQ-9A, Force Design 2030 presents opportunities for similar implementation across the globe. This transition gives VMU-1 the capability of piloting the forward-deployed MQ-9A that aligns with the Commandant's directive for persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, which have supported daily combat operations around the world.

"The MQ-9A is a medium-altitude, long-endurance Group 5 remotely piloted aircraft capable of conducting multiple mission sets to include multi-sensor imagery reconnaissance, unmanned aerial escort, and electronic support," said Chirhart.

Aside from being the first Marine Corps-owned MQ-9A flight in

history, this flight is also a huge step toward verification of policies and procedures that have been developed by VMU-1. With this transition to the MQ-9A, VMU-1 is currently engaged in executing maritime domain awareness operations in highly-contested areas, providing friendly forces a multi-domain reconnaissance capability across the electromagnetic spectrum.

Moreover, it proves that VMU-1 is uniquely positioned to enable naval and joint force targeting from a remote location by a Marine aviator and sensor operator, while the aircraft is physically located within another combatant commander's area of operation.

The MQ-9A was developed by General Atomics Aeronautical Systems. The remotely piloted aircraft capability revolutionizes military operations by allowing the system operator to operate from ship and shore and employ both collection and lethal payloads while integrating with command and control centers, allowing the synchronization of remotely piloted aircraft with ground and air assets.

Carl Vinson CSG Enters South China Sea, Upholds Freedom of Seas

Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) transits the South China Sea with Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Tulsa (LCS 16), Sept. 7, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Haydn N. Smith*

SOUTH CHINA SEA – The Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group (VINCSG) is operating in the South China Sea for the first

time during the group's 2021 deployment, said Ens. Charina Camacho, a spokesperson for the Carl Vinson.

While in the South China Sea, the strike group is conducting maritime security operations, which include flight operations with fixed and rotary wing aircraft, maritime strike exercises, and coordinated tactical training between surface and air units. Carrier operations in the South China Sea are part of the U.S. Navy's routine presence in the Indo-Pacific.

"The freedom of all nations to navigate in international waters is important, and especially vital in the South China Sea, where nearly a third of global maritime trade transits each year," said Rear Adm. Dan Martin, commander, Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group. "As we've transited the Pacific from San Diego to the South China Sea, we have had the privilege and pleasure to work alongside our allies, partners, and joint service teammates in training, exercises, engagements and operations – all with a common goal to ensure peace and stability throughout the region. It is in all of our interest that the international community plays an active role in preserving the rules-based international order."

The carrier strike group is led by Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 1 and includes aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70); embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 2; embarked staffs of CSG 1 and Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 1; Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Lake Champlain (CG 57); Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Chafee (DDG 90); and Independence variant littoral combat ship USS Tulsa (LCS 16).

In the month prior to entering the South China Sea, the VINCSG participated in Large Scale Exercise 2021, conducted interoperability flights with U.K. Carrier Strike Group (CSG-21), and conducted a bilateral exercise with Joint Maritime Self Defense Forces units.

The strike group is committed to upholding a rules-based international order with regional allies and partners, demonstrating the capability of forward-deployed naval forces to quickly respond across the region.

The Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group is deployed to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. U.S. 7th Fleet conducts forward-deployed naval operations in support of U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific area of operations. As the U.S. Navy’s largest forward-deployed fleet, 7th Fleet interacts with other maritime nations to build partnerships that foster maritime security, promote stability, and prevent conflict.