Textron’s Next-Generation SSC Completes Navy Acceptance Trials

NEW ORLEANS – Textron Systems announced in a Dec. 17 release the successful completion by its first next-generation landing craft, Ship-to-Shore Connector (SSC), Craft 100 of the U.S. Navy’s acceptance trials after completing a series of in-port and underway demonstrations on Dec. 6.

“Our customers depend on our products to take them ashore and sustain the landing forces until the job is done,” said Henry Finneral, senior vice president and general manager of Textron Systems.

“We are proud to support the United States Marine Corps and United States Navy in producing this next generation of landing vehicles, designed to cover a broad spectrum of missions with rapid transport of material and personnel into combat zones or assisting with critical humanitarian aid missions.”

During the trials, Craft 100 underwent integrated testing to demonstrate the capability of the fly-by-wire steering, electrical and propulsion systems to successfully meet its basic requirements as a test asset for Program Executive Office-Ships.

As the replacement for the existing fleet of Landing Craft, Air Cushion (LCAC) vehicles, follow-on SSCs will primarily transport weapon systems, equipment, cargo, and personnel of the assault elements through tough environmental conditions from the amphibious ships to the beach.

The craft can travel at a sustained 35 knots, transport Marines and shares less than 1% of legacy LCAC original parts,

representing a true upgrade for the LCAC forces at Assault Craft Units 4 and 5 and Naval Beach Unit 7. The SSC also has an increased service life of 30 years.

The SSC is constructed at Textron Systems Marine and Land Systems operating unit in New Orleans and are built with similar configurations, dimensions and clearances to existing LCAC, ensuring the compatibility of this next-generation air cushion vehicle with existing well deck equipped amphibious ships, as well as Expeditionary Transfer Dock and Expeditionary Sea Bases.

Textron Systems expects to deliver SSC Craft 100 in January 2020. There are several SSCs in various states of production.

HII Launches Aircraft Carrier John F. Kennedy

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Nine days after christening the U.S. Navy's newest nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News Shipbuilding division launched John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) into the James River for the first time on Dec. 16, the company said in a release.

With the aid of six tugboats, Kennedy was guided down the river about a mile from Newport News Shipbuilding's Dry Dock 12, where it has been under construction, to the shipyard's Pier 3. There, the ship will undergo additional outfitting and begin its testing program three months ahead of its original schedule.

"This move is significant in that it represents a shift in focus from erecting the ship in dock to final completion and

outfitting at the pier," said Mike Butler, program director for Kennedy.

"It is also a testament to the amazing teamwork I see every day between Newport News Shipbuilding and the Navy as we work together to build Kennedy with valuable first-of-class lessons from the Ford."

During this phase of construction, which is expected to take about two and a half years, habitability spaces, such as berthing and mess areas, will be completed, and distributive, mechanical and combat systems, such as catapults and radar arrays, will be tested.

Kennedy is scheduled for delivery to the Navy in 2022.

Future USS St. Louis Completes Acceptance Trials

The future USS St. Louis launches sideways into the Menominee River in Marinette, Wisconsin, following its christening last December. U.S. Navy

MARINETTE, Wis. – The future USS St. Louis has completed acceptance trials in Lake Michigan, Lockheed Martin said in a release.

Now that trials are complete, the ship will undergo final outfitting and fine-tuning before delivery. LCS 19 is the tenth Freedom-variant LCS designed and built by the Lockheed Martin-led industry team and is slated for delivery to the U.S. Navy early next year.

"The LCS fleet is growing in numbers and capability, and LCS

19’s completion of acceptance trials means the Navy will shortly have 10 Freedom-variant fast, focused-mission ships in the fleet,” said Joe DePietro, Lockheed’s vice president and general manager of small combatants and ship systems.

“As each Freedom-variant hull deploys, we seek out and incorporate fleet feedback and lessons learned to roll in capabilities for new hulls. As a result, LCS 19 includes a solid-state radar, upgraded communications suite, increased self-defense capabilities and topside optimization, among other updates.”

More than 500,000 nautical miles are under the keel of Freedom-variant LCS. The Freedom variant has completed three successful deployments with a fourth ongoing. In October, LCS 7 (USS Detroit) deployed to the U.S. Southern Command supporting the Martillo campaign, a multinational effort targeting illicit trafficking routes in Central American coastal waters.

LCS is designed to deliver speed to capability and to grow as the missions it serves evolve. Today, the Freedom-variant LCS delivers advanced capability in anti-submarine, surface and mine countermeasure missions. The Freedom-variant LCS is targeted for warfighting upgrades to enhance situational awareness and evolve the ship’s self-defense capabilities. These upgrades are already underway; LCS computing infrastructures are receiving cyber upgrades and over-the-horizon missiles are being installed in support of upcoming deployments.

Czech Republic Orders AH-1Z and UH-1Y Helicopters from Bell

WASHINGTON – The U.S. secretary of defense, Mark Esper, and Czech Republic Minister of Defence, Lubomir Metnar, signed a letter finalizing the foreign military sale by Bell Textron Inc. of H-1 helicopters to the Czech Air Force, the company announced in a release.

“We are privileged to support the Czech people and applaud the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces of the Czech Republic for selecting AH-1Z and UH-1Y helicopters.” said Vince Tobin, executive vice president of Bell’s Military Business.

The H-1 mixed fleet shares 85-percent commonality between parts, reducing the logistics, maintenance, and training costs of the AH-1Z and UY-1Y helicopters while offering a lethal combination of integrated weapons systems to counter ground, air and maritime targets effectively. The AH-1Z is the only helicopter in production equipped with the AIM-9 Sidewinder providing the most advanced air-to-air combat capabilities.

“This mix allows the Czech Republic to accomplish a diverse mission set, from humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to close air support and air-to-air warfare,” said Joel Best, director of Military Sales and Strategy, Europe. “The advanced capabilities of the H-1 program help ensure the safety and security of Czech sons and daughters for years to come.”

The purchase of four AH-1Z and eight UH-1Y military helicopters represents the first foreign military sale of a mixed H-1 fleet. Bell anticipates the delivery of the first H-1 aircraft to the Czech Republic will begin in 2023 and complete delivery by 2024.

The AH-1Z and UH-1Y are operated by U.S. Marine Corps light attack helicopter squadrons. Thee AH-1Z also is operated by Pakistan and has been approved for sale to Bahrain.

Scientists Warn U.S. Running Out of Time to Modernize Nuclear Weapons Systems

America's current nuclear deterrent force is safe, secure and effective, but the nation is running out of time to modernize the weapon systems in the nuclear triad and the infrastructure that produces and sustains them, three senior military commanders and a group of civilian managers and scientists warn.

Potential adversaries have modernized, increased and diversified their nuclear capabilities, while the United States has failed to make the necessary investments to counter the emerging threat, the officers and civilian experts said Dec. 12.

As a result, the missiles, strategic submarines and bombers in the nuclear deterrent triad are aging and approaching the end of their effective service lives and the nuclear warheads they employ are suffering from natural decay and obsolescent components, they said.

A prime example of that emerging crisis is the tight time line the Navy faces to have the new Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines operational before the current Ohio-class boomers can no longer submerge for their strategic missions.

The Ohio-class boats were designed for a 30-year service life, but extended to 40 years and “we have no more margin,” said Vice Adm. Johnny R. Wolfe, director Navy Strategic Systems Programs. “We have to get Columbia out there to replace Ohio.”

Asked about meeting that deadline, Wolfe would not specify how much leeway they have but said the Columbia program managers “do have a margin to get to that operational date.”

Wolfe said he was “confident” the program had corrected the problems of faulty welding in the Columbia missile tubes, which badly reduced the program time margin. But, he said, “we can’t allow anything to push (the program) to the right.”

Wolfe is responsible for the strategic systems that arm the boomers, including the Trident D-5 missiles, which have aged rocket engines and guidance systems that are being updated. The Navy test fired five unarmed Tridents this year, two with the new electronics, and all worked as expected, he said. But they will not be able to continue to keep the D-5s flying forever, he added.

Vice Adm. David M. Kriete, deputy commander of Strategic Command, said the command's primary challenges are "understanding the threat, so we can stay ahead, and modernizing the nuclear forces." On the threat, Kriete said, "Russia, has continued to develop a whole range of nuclear weapons outside the New Start treaty," but the United States "has not." And, "China is moving very aggressively to field new capabilities." They also are watching North Korea, which has tested nuclear warheads and long-range missiles, and Iran, which currently has no nuclear weapons.

The current nuclear deterrent "is safe, secure and effective. … We go to great length to ensure those weapons can get the job done. But we can't maintain those standards in the future," Kriete said, citing the age of the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, the nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and the nuclear weapons they employ. Despite questioning of the need for the triad, Kriete insisted that the combination of the responsive land-based ICBMs, the survivable ballistic missile submarines and the flexible bombers give national leaders options and create problems for any adversary.

Lt. Gen. Richard Clark, deputy Air Force Chief of Staff for strategic deterrence and nuclear integration, noted that numerous studies, including the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, confirmed the need for the triad, for which the Air Force provides the ICBMs, the bombers and the nuclear command and

control system. They all must be modernized, he said.

Charles Verdon, deputy administrator of the National Nuclear Security Agency, and officials from the nuclear laboratories said a major challenge to sustaining and modernizing the deterrent capabilities is the badly aged infrastructure and the need to rapidly replace the nu

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P-8A Poseidon to Support Chilean-Led Search for C-130

NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Fla. – U.S. Southern Command directed U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command to deploy a P-8A Poseidon multimission maritime aircraft to Punta Arenas, Chile, on Dec. 10 to support Chile's ongoing search for a Chilean Air Force C-130 Hercules that went missing in the Drake Passage while transporting 38 passengers and crew to the Antarctic.

In response to a request from the government of Chile, the aircraft and its 20-person crew departed El Salvador's Comalapa Air Base and arrived in Punta Arenas on Dec. 11. The aircraft and crew are expected to begin supporting the ongoing search on Dec. 12.

Prior to the P-8A deployment, SOUTHCOM assisted the Chilean search efforts by providing satellite imagery of the search area.

The aircraft was in El Salvador's Comalapa Air Base supporting counter-illicit trafficking maritime patrol operations as part of a bilateral agreement between the U.S. and El Salvador.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Chile and with the families of the missing as we join other regional partners supporting Chile’s ongoing search for the C-130, its crew and their passengers,” said U.S. Navy Adm. Craig Faller, commander of U.S. Southern Command.

The P-8A Poseidon is the Navy’s newest maritime, patrol and reconnaissance aircraft and is configured with state-of-the-art sensors and communications equipment, allowing it to support a wide range of missions over large bodies of water, including subsurface search-and-rescue operations. It can reach an airspeed of 564 mph, has a ceiling of 41,000 feet and a range of 1,200 nautical miles with four hours on station, allowing it to loiter over search areas.

In 2017, SOUTHCOM deployed two P-8A Poseidon aircraft to Bahia Blanca, Argentina, where they contributed to an internationally supported search for the Argentinean Navy’s submarine A.R.A. San Juan after it went missing in Southern Atlantic waters.

Saab Receives Order for Components for Marine Corps G/ATOR Radar

STOCKHOLM – Saab has received an order for components and subsystems for full-rate production systems for the U.S. Marine Corps Ground/Air Task Oriented Radar (G/ATOR), which has the U.S. designation AN/TPS-80, the company said in a Dec. 9 release.

The initial order value is $31.9 million, and the contract

includes options for additional systems over a five-year period. G/ATOR provides the Corps with capability for air surveillance, air defense and ground weapon locating missions in one single ground-based radar solution.

Saab received the order from Northrop Grumman Systems Corp., which is the prime contractor for G/ATOR to the Marine Corps. Saab's order includes options for additional sets of assemblies and associated spares. Deliveries are anticipated to take place between 2020 and 2024.

"We look forward to continue strengthening the next generation U.S. radar program with our radar expertise and to further deepen our collaboration with [Northrop Grumman] as part of the G/ATOR delivery team," said Anders Carp, senior vice president and head of Saab's surveillance business area.

Saab received the initial G/ATOR order, which covered low-rate initial production units, from Northrop Grumman in 2014. Saab will carry out the work in Syracuse, New York.

Navy Accepts Delivery of 11th EPF, USNS Puerto Rico

The expeditionary fast-transport ship USNS Puerto Rico successfully completed the first integrated sea trials for an EPF on Aug. 22. Austal USA

MOBILE, Ala. – The U.S. Navy accepted delivery of its 11th Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF), the future USNS Puerto Rico, from Austal USA on Dec. 10.

Delivery marks the official transfer of the ship from the

shipbuilder to the Navy. EPF 11 will be owned and operated by Military Sealift Command.

“We are excited to accept delivery of another versatile ship, further expanding the advantage of our civilian mariners at sea,” said Capt. Scot Searles, strategic and theater sealift program manager, Program Executive Office-Ships. “Delivery of our 11th ship is a testament to the inherent flexibility of the EPF class.”

EPFs are shallow-draft, all-aluminum, commercial-based catamarans that are capable of intra-theater personnel and cargo transport, which provide combatant commanders high-speed sealift mobility. EPFs enable rapid projection, agile maneuver and transport of personnel, equipment and supplies over operational distances with access to austere and degraded offload points.

As versatile, noncombatant vessels, EPFs provide increased operational flexibility for a wide range of activities including maneuver and sustainment, relief operations and flexible logistics support.

These vessels are capable of interfacing with roll-on/roll-off discharge facilities, and on/off-loading a combat-loaded Abrams Main Battle Tank. EPFs include a flight deck to support day and night aircraft launch and recovery operations and airline-style seating for 312 embarked forces, with fixed berthing for 104.

Austal USA is also in production on the future USNS Newport (EPF 12) and USNS Apalachicola (EPF 13) and is under contract to build the future USNS Cody (EPF 14).

Bell Boeing Delivers First Modified Osprey for Improved Fleet Readiness

Test pilots conduct the maiden flight of the first V-22 Osprey under the CC-RAM program. Boeing

PHILADELPHIA – Boeing and Bell Textron Inc. have delivered the first modified MV-22 Osprey to the U.S. Marine Corps for improved readiness and reliability of the tilt-rotor fleet, Boeing said in a release.

The Marines have multiple configurations of the MV-22 aircraft in service. Under the Common Configuration-Readiness and Modernization (CC-RAM) program, Bell Boeing is reducing the number of configurations by upgrading block "B" aircraft to the current block "C" configuration.

"Our first CC-RAM aircraft returning to Marine Corps Air Station New River was a key program benchmark," said U.S. Marine Corps Col. Matthew Kelly, program manager, V-22 Joint Program Office (PMA-275). "We are excited to see the capability, commonality and readiness improvements these CC-RAM aircraft bring to the fleet as part of the Marine Corps' V-22 readiness program."

As a block "B" configuration, this MV-22 was originally delivered to the fleet in 2005. In 2018, the aircraft flew from Marine Corps Air Station New River to the Boeing Philadelphia facility for modernization.

"This milestone marks the beginning of an Osprey evolution," said Kristin Houston, vice president of Boeing tilt-rotor programs and director of Bell Boeing's V-22 program. "Through a shared focus on safety and quality, the Bell Boeing team is delivering modernized MV-22 aircraft that are ready to

serve our dedicated servicemen and women who rely on this essential aviation resource.”

The next CC-RAM delivery is expected in early 2020.

“We look forward to having the remaining MV-22 block “B” aircraft rejoin the fleet in a block “C” configuration,” Kelly said.

In November 2019, the U.S. Navy awarded Bell Boeing $146 million to upgrade nine additional MV-22 aircraft under the CC-RAM program, with work expected to be completed in March 2022.

NATO, U.S. See Rise in Russian Naval Activity in Seas Around Europe, Top Commander Says

Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, NATO’s supreme allied commander and commander of U.S. European Command, speaks to a Defense Writers’ breakfast Dec. 10. George Washington University

NATO and U.S. forces in Europe are seeing increased Russian naval activities in all the seas around Europe. But following a meeting with Russia’s military chief they have seen no unprofessional or unsafe incidents at sea or in the air in at least 90 days, the top allied and U.S. commander in Europe said Dec. 10.

“I see Russian activity in the Arctic, see it in the Baltic, see it in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean,” Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, NATO’s supreme allied commander and commander of U.S. European Command, told a Defense Writers’ breakfast.

“I see Russia doing everything they can to expand their coverage, to see as much of the space as they possibly can, and it’s something we will continue to dialogue about so that our sailors and their sailors are appropriately deconflicted, and we don’t have any future incidents of unprofessional actions at sea and in the sky.”

In recent years, allied commanders have complained repeatedly about dangerously close maneuvers by Russia aircraft near alliance planes or ships and aggressive conduct, including near collisions, by Russian warships, particularly in the Black Sea.

“Since my last face-to-face with Gen. Gerasimov we have seen zero unprofessional incidents at sea, zero in the sky,” Wolters said, referring to Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Russia’s chief of staff, who he met in the fall.

Asked what the alliance is doing in response to the growing presence of Russian submarines, Wolters said, “we’re always looking at exercises and investments to improve our view of the maritime environment. We’re heavily engaged in the Arctic, we’re heavily engaged in the central Atlantic, in the western Med, the eastern Med. Every single day we’re looking to see what we can possibly do to improve our ability to see the maritime

environment, to command and control the maritime and we do so comprehensively,
360 degrees, all around the European continent."

Wolters said the Standing NATO Maritime Force is "focused on both" anti-submarine and counter-surface capabilities. NATO has two surface standing
groups and two mine countermeasure groups, made up of rotating ships from
alliance members.

Asked about his biggest technology needs, Wolters cited resources that allow commanders to act faster, that allow them "to see the
entire battlespace, so they could better defend" resources to command and
control. He noted NATO's decision to buy Northrop Grumman's Global Hawk
long-endurance "remotely piloted aircraft," as the Air Force calls UAVs, with
five in the initial order.

Wolters spoke extensively about the upcoming Defender Europe 20 exercise, which will involve moving 20,000 U.S. troops from the United
States to join with more than 8.000 American and a similar number of allied
troops forces in Europe. It would be the largest movement of U.S. forces from
the states to Europe since the Cold War Reforger Exercises.

"It would be a huge benefit to show we can deploy from anywhere on earth" to deter a potential adversary, he said. Asked about the
challenge of moving forces and supplies across the Atlantic in the face of the
growing Russian submarine threat, Wolters said: "I'm always concerned about

that. And the reason we’re doing Defender is to improve our ability to shift
and maneuver those forces over long distances. When we’re done, we’ll critique
it and get better in the future.”