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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lt. Cmdr. Joe Johnson assigned to the “Sea Knights” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 5, mans the flight deck control tower during flight quarters aboard the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5), Dec. 15, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Danielle Baker*

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

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

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

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

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

The Leonardo ZPY-8 on the Fire Scout gives the host ship a far greater ability to detect and track surface contacts and maintain over-the-horizon situational awareness.

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

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

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

Soderberg said although the detachment’s officers all can control the Fire Scout, one officer is assigned as the main specialist for the system. The Navy also is qualifying MQ-8B

and MQ-8C operators separately now, as opposed to personnel operating both types.

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

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

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

He also said the MQ-8C is ready if needed for on the Lewis B. Puller-class expeditionary sea base ship. The mobile mission-control station is ready and certified for the ship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pilot Ejects as F-35C Lightning II has Landing Mishap on USS Carl Vinson

An F-35C Lightning II, assigned to the “Argonauts” of Strike

Fighter Squadron (VFA) 147, lands on the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70), Jan. 2. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Megan Alexander*

ARLINGTON, Va. — An F-35C Lightning II suffered a landing mishap Jan. 24 on the flight deck of USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) while the carrier was conducting routine flight operations in the South China Sea, the U.S Pacific Fleet said Jan. 24.

The pilot safely ejected from the aircraft and was recovered by U.S. military helicopter, according to a release.

"The pilot is in stable condition," the release said. "There were seven total Sailors injured; three Sailors required medevac to a medical treatment facility in Manila, Philippines, and four were treated by on-board medical personnel."

All three medevacs were in stable condition and of the four Sailors treated by on-board medical, three have been released. Additional details and the cause of the inflight mishap is under investigation.

The F-35C was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 147 (VFA-147), a unit of Carrier Air Wing Two. VFA-147 is the first F-35C squadron to deploy overseas on an aircraft carrier, having deployed Aug. 2, 2021. A second F-35C squadron, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 314, is deployed a unit of Carrier Air Wing Nine on board USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72).

U.S. Navy Interdicts

Stateless Vessel Previously Caught Smuggling Weapons

U.S. service members conduct a boarding on a stateless fishing vessel transiting international waters the Gulf of Oman as a rigid-hull inflatable boat and patrol coastal ship USS Chinook (PC 9) sail nearby. *U.S. NAVY*

MANAMA, Bahrain – On Jan. 18, U.S. 5th Fleet ships interdicted a stateless fishing vessel in the Gulf of Oman that was caught smuggling illicit weapons off the coast of Somalia last year, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command / U.S. 5th Fleet said Jan. 23.

Guided-missile destroyer USS Cole (DDG 67) and patrol coastal ship USS Chinook (PC 9) interdicted the stateless vessel transiting from Iran in waters outside of any state's territorial sea along a route historically used to traffic weapons to the Houthis in Yemen.

During a flag verification boarding and subsequent search,

U.S. forces discovered 40 tons of urea fertilizer, a chemical compound with agricultural applications that is also known to be used as an explosive precursor.

The vessel was the same stateless dhow interdicted in February 2021 off the coast of Somalia by guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) and discovered to be carrying weapons. Among the cache of weapons seized during the February 2021 interdiction were thousands of AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and crew served weapons. The inventory also included barrels, stocks, optical scopes and weapon systems.

Following the Jan. 18 interdiction, the U.S. Navy transferred the vessel, cargo and five Yemeni crewmembers to Yemen coast guard officials Jan. 21.

U.S. naval forces regularly perform maritime security operations in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of legitimate trade and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and other unlawful activity.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses approximately 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Suez Canal and Strait of Bab al Mandeb.

Navy’s Newest Fire Scout UAV Version Apparently on First

Deployment

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

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy has not officially announced it yet, but its newest version of the Navy’s Fire Scout unmanned helicopter — the MQ-8C — apparently is on its first deployment, according to Navy photographs.

An MQ-8C Fire Scout was depicted in series of Navy photographs taken Jan. 6 while the MQ-8C was operating from the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee (LCS 5) in the Caribbean Sea. The ship was deployed in the U.S. 4th Fleet’s area of operations in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South’s mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, according to the caption.

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USS George Washington Next Carrier in Line for F-35C Capability

Capt. Joshua Appezzato, air boss, aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), delivers motivating remarks to the air department at quarters on the flight deck in this 2021 photo. The carrier will be the next to receive modifications to operate the F-35C Lightning II. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Robert Stamer*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's next aircraft carrier to receive modifications to operate the F-35C Lightning II strike fighter is the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), according to a Navy official.

USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) – the first carrier to deploy with the F-35C – and USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) currently are deployed to the Western Pacific with F-35Cs as part of their air wings. USS George H. W. Bush (CVN 77), having emerged in August from a Drydock Planned Incremental Availability at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Portsmouth, Virginia, operated the F-35C in mid-December for the first time.

Rear Adm. Jim Downey, program executive officer for carriers, speaking Jan. 21 to reporters, detailing the plan through fiscal 2025, said the George Washington was in the final stages of its mid-life Refueling and Complex Overhaul at Newport News Shipbuilding in Newport News, Virginia. The USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) would follow George Washington in receiving the F-35C modifications and would be followed by USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), which recently began RCOH.

The second Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), will be the first ship of its class to receive F-35C modifications. The lead ship, USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), is scheduled to receive the modifications during a Planned Incremental Availability period in fiscal 2025.

7th Fleet Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea

On Jan. 20, USS Benfold (DDG 65) asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law. *U.S NAVY*

YOKOSUKA, Japan – On Jan. 20, USS Benfold (DDG 65) asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law. At the conclusion of the operation, USS Benfold exited the excessive claim and continued operations in the South China Sea, the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a release.

This freedom of navigation operation, or FONOP, upheld the rights, freedoms and lawful uses of the sea recognized in international law by challenging restrictions on innocent passage imposed by the People's Republic of China, Taiwan and Vietnam and also by challenging the PRC's claim to straight baselines enclosing the Paracel Islands.

The PRC's statement about this mission is false, the 7th Fleet said, adding that USS Benfold conducted this FONOP in accordance with international law and then continued on to

conduct normal operations in international waters. The operation reflects its commitment to uphold freedom of navigation and lawful uses of the sea as a principle. The United States is defending every nation’s right to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, as USS Benfold did this week.

The People’s Liberation Army Navy Southern Theater’s statement is the latest in a long string of PRC actions to misrepresent lawful U.S. maritime operations and assert its excessive and illegitimate maritime claims at the expense of its Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea, 7th Fleet said. The PRC’s behavior stands in contrast to the United States’ adherence to international law and our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. All nations, large and small, should be secure in their sovereignty, free from coercion, and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules and norms. To this end, the United States works with a broad range of allies and partners across the region to promote and enable cooperative approaches to regional security challenges.

Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations.

Paracel Islands

The PRC, Taiwan and Vietnam each claim sovereignty over the Paracel Islands. All three claimants require either permission or advance notification before a military vessel engages in “innocent passage” through the territorial sea. Under international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention, the ships of all states, including their warships, enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea. The unilateral imposition of any authorization or

advance-notification requirement for innocent passage is unlawful. By engaging in innocent passage without giving prior notification to or asking permission from any of the claimants, the United States challenged the unlawful restrictions imposed by the PRC, Taiwan, and Vietnam, 7th Fleet said. The United States demonstrated that innocent passage is not subject to such restrictions.

The United States also challenged the People's Republic of China's 1996 declaration of straight baselines encompassing the Paracel Islands. Regardless of which claimant has sovereignty over these features, it is unlawful to draw straight baselines around the Paracel Islands in their entirety, 7th Fleet said. With these baselines, the PRC has attempted to claim more internal waters, territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf than it is entitled to under international law. By conducting this operation, the United States demonstrated these waters are beyond what the PRC can lawfully claim as its territorial sea, and the PRC claimed straight baselines around the Paracel Islands are inconsistent with international law.

CNO Visits Stennis Space Center

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday talks to Aerographer's Mate 2nd Class Kevin Rolka in the oceanographic high bay of Fleet Survey Team headquarters during his first visit to Naval Oceanography and Meteorology Command at Stennis Space Center, Mississippi, Jan. 20. *NAVAL METEOROLOGY AND OCEANOGRAPHY / Lt. Bobby Dixon*

STENNIS, Miss. – Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday and Vice Adm. Jeffrey Trussler, the deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare and director of naval intelligence, visited Navy commands at Stennis Space Center, Mississippi, Jan. 20, the CNO's public affairs officer said in a release.

Gilday met with Sailors and civilians and toured Commander, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command (CNMOC) facilities where he received updates about unmanned capabilities, electromagnetic maneuver warfare and undersea warfare.

"As we find ourselves in the breach of strategic competition,

the Navy’s role in this competition remains clear,” said Gilday. “We need to control the seas and project power across all domains, and to support that we will leverage innovation, technology and our people to maintain our competitive advantage.”

During the visit to the Glider Operations Center, Gilday observed glider pilots directing unmanned littoral battlespace gliders deployed worldwide using satellite communications. The Naval Oceanographic Office, a subordinate command of CNMOC that maximizes seapower by applying relevant oceanographic knowledge in support of U.S. national security, currently has the largest fleet of gliders in the world.

Throughout the visit, Gilday received updates about unmanned underwater vehicles, unmanned sensor operations and various ocean projects.

“Unmanned systems have and will continue to play a key part in future operations on, above and under the sea,” Gilday added. “I’m thankful for the work and dedication of Naval Oceanography who continues to help ensure the Navy can meet the demands and challenges of today and tomorrow.”

This visit marked CNO’s first trip to CNMOC, the Department of Defense’s authoritative source for environmental characterization and transforming knowledge of physical battlespace into winning decisions.

Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command directs and oversees more than 2,500 globally distributed military and civilian personnel who collect, process, and exploit environmental information to assist fleet and joint commanders in all warfare areas in making better decisions faster than the adversary. The Sailors and civilians who support the mission serve in a wide range of operational, technical, scientific and service support billets around the globe.