

Navy Demos New Mine Countermeasure Prototype on MQ-8C Fire Scout



An MQ-8C Fire Scout demonstrates a new mine countermeasure prototype technology in May 2022 at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, proving a capability that could allow the warfighter to rapidly detect and respond to threats. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Navy recently demonstrated a mine countermeasure prototype technology aboard the MQ-8C Fire Scout UAS at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, proving a capability that could allow the warfighter to rapidly detect and respond to threats, Naval Air Systems Command said July 7.

The objective of the demonstration was to gather performance data for both the MQ-8C Fire Scout and Single-system Multi-

mission Airborne Mine Detection (SMAMD) System to inform future MCM integration efforts.

“The team successfully demonstrated that the prototype SMAMD System effectively operates as designed aboard the MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned helicopter in relevant real-world environments,” said Capt. Thomas Lansley, Fire Scout program director. “This cutting-edge technology could really enhance Fire Scout’s capability going forward.”

The team conducted operations from the Naval Surface Warfare Center using drifting, tethered and moored mines throughout beach zone to deep waters. They gathered data day and night, across all water depths and in mild to difficult weather conditions.

The demonstration also proved the reliable and repeatable high performance of the MQ-8C Fire Scout. The air vehicle handled the dual podded system with ease, being the first MCM capability flown on the MQ-8C as well as the heaviest payload carried to date. Fire Scout successfully operated in restricted and unrestricted air space alongside other aircraft platforms.

The SMAMD System, developed by BAE Systems under a Future Naval Capability Program sponsored by the Office of Naval Research, is an airborne optical sensor suite that, in a single pass, detects and localizes mines and obstacles on land and at sea. With a low false alarm rate, SMAMD provides real-time detection sent via data link enabling warfighters to respond much quicker to threats than the current MCM technologies allow as post-mission analysis is required.

This effort, led by ONR, included support from multiple organizations across the Navy and industry including the MQ-8 Fire Scout program office, the Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants, Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Aircraft Prototype Systems Division,

Webster Outlying Field, the Digital Analytics Infrastructure and Technology Advancement Group Prototyping, Instrumentation and Experimentation Department, and Air Test and Evaluation Squadron Two Four (UX-24).

ONR and PMA-266 engaged NAWCAD AIRWorks to manage the demonstration taking advantage of AIRWorks' project execution expertise and ability to connect warfare center resources.

"The AIRWorks SMAMD Team was proud to be a part of demonstrating a future naval capability which provides real-time threat detection to the warfighter," said AIRWorks' project lead Kristina Hewitt-Thompson. "Through this effort, we were able to assist in risk reduction and provide critical data for future integration."

Throughout the project, the team facilitated execution of a complex demonstration including airworthiness and cyber certifications, design, fabrication and hardware integration along with flying qualities testing prior to the final demonstration at Eglin, she said. They assured close coordination between the U.S. Air Force, ONR, NAVAIR, NAVSEA and other stakeholder organizations to successfully achieve their objectives in less than 24 months and at a reduced cost.

NAVCENT to Reward Individuals for Tips on Illegal Maritime Activity



An MH-60R Seahawk from Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 35, Detachment 1, provides aerial support to an interdiction team from guided-missile destroyer USS Momsen (DDG 92) approaching a fishing vessel May 16. The vessel was seized while transiting international waters in the Gulf of Oman. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Lily Gebauer*

BAHRAIN – U.S. Naval Forces Central Command announced July 5 it will begin rewarding individuals for voluntarily providing information that leads to the detection of illegal maritime activity and seizure of illicit cargo in waters across the Middle East.

NAVCENT is establishing a program for the first time to reward individuals who voluntarily report information that meets specific criteria under the Department of Defense Rewards Program.

“Launching this program represents another example of our commitment to this region and its security,” said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of NAVCENT, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces. “This also enhances our vigilance and

supports counterterrorism efforts, which are essential to safeguarding the free flow of commerce.”

NAVCENT could potentially reward a maximum \$100,000 payout for information or nonlethal assistance that supports counterterrorism operations or leads U.S. naval forces to successfully seize illicit cargo such as illegal weapons or narcotics. Rewards can also be non-monetary and include items like boats, vehicles, food or equipment.

U.S. citizens are not eligible for rewards under the program.

Last year, illicit cargo seizures in the Middle East skyrocketed after U.S. and multinational forces increased patrols in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.

U.S. 5th Fleet warships seized nearly 9,000 illicit weapons, three times the amount seized in 2020. Additionally, the U.S.-led Combined Maritime Forces seized illegal drugs worth \$500 million in street value, a higher amount than the previous four years combined.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The region is comprised of 21 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb at the southern tip of Yemen.

Tips can be reported by calling +973 3914-5845. The phone line is staffed by personnel with regional language expertise. Individuals with information can also report online by going to <https://dodrewardsprogram.net>.

For additional information on how to report a tip or reward eligibility criteria, go to NAVCENT’s website at <https://www.cusnc.navy.mil/DoD-RP/>.

MQ-25 Team Completes First Lab Integration Event



An MQ-25 unmanned aircraft on the flight deck of USS George H.W. Bush (CVN-77) for the Unmanned Carrier Aviation Demonstration in December 2021. *BOEING*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Navy's Unmanned Carrier Aviation program office (PMA-268) conducted its first lab integration event June 28-30 at Patuxent River to demonstrate how the MQ-25's ground control station will command the unmanned aircraft in the carrier environment, Naval Air Systems Command said June 30.

The government team and its two prime industry partners led the effort at the program's System Test and Integration Lab, where Lockheed Martin's GCS controlled Boeing's hardware-in-the-loop air vehicle for the first time. The Hardware-in-the-

loop uses aircraft hardware and software to provide a realistic surrogate for the air vehicle.

“This achievement is the result of weeks of preparation and dedication by highly skilled teams,” said T.J. Maday, MQ-25 labs and integration manager. “Bringing multiple systems together is never easy, but the joint government-industry team, coming together, understanding problems and finding solutions made this event successful. We learned how the system works as a whole and that early learning and discovery is key to keep the program moving forward.”

Maday said the team set a goal to send a basic command between the ground control station and the hardware-in-the-loop system. To meet that objective, Boeing and Lockheed Martin needed to deliver functional software for the government to exercise the GCS, the hardware system and the network components allowing connectivity between the systems.

“The team met the initial goal ahead of schedule and used the remaining time to exercise more functionality, like sending taxi commands,” Maday said. “They also simulated a lost link that verified the proper GCS display indicators, which is a critical function to ensure network connectivity between development environments.”

This fall the team plans to simulate a complete flight using the hardware-in-the-loop air vehicle and will also demonstrate switching connections “links” to the aircraft as well as adding other aircraft hardware and software into the mix.

“It’s great to see the combined team working side-by-side, learning and ultimately demonstrating success,” said Capt. Sam Messer, PMA-268 program manager. “This is how we get to IOC [initial operational capability] – we integrate, test, and learn early and at pace.”

The MD-5 GCS is part of the Unmanned Carrier Aviation Mission Control System, the system-of-systems required for MQ-25A

command and control. UMCS also includes carrier and shore site infrastructure modifications, Navy produced ancillary equipment, and integration with command, control, communications, computers and intelligence systems.

MQ-25 will be the world's first operational carrier-based unmanned aircraft to provide an aerial refueling capability to the fleet.

The Navy Reserve is Looking for a Few Good Ideas



Sometimes the difference between a good idea and a great one is somebody to listen to it.

And that's what the Navy Reserve has done to help generate great ideas to help the fleet, reserve force and Sailors everywhere.

Chief of Navy Reserve and Commander, Navy Reserve Force, Vice Adm. John B. Mustin, introduced i3 Waypoints as a way to fast-track transformative ideas from across the Navy directly to the highest levels of the Navy Reserve, without filters or bureaucratic barriers.

"Sailors and civilians on the front lines of challenges and roadblocks in their daily lives are invaluable sources of

ideas for change,” Mustin said. “i3 Waypoints is an approach to inventing: innovate something entirely new; improve on something already established; or integrate several ideas, products or processes rendering the former completely obsolete.”

According to Capt. Colette Murphy, the CNR public affairs officer, “Waypoints challenged the entire U.S. Navy – from Selected Reserve, Training and Administration of the Reserve, Individual Ready Reserve, Active Duty and civilians, in all ranks, rates and grades – to propose new or better ways for the Navy Reserve to operate.”

Murphy said 107 i3 Waypoints ideas were submitted in just over five weeks. These submissions were then reviewed by a team led by Rear Adm. John A. Schommer, commander, Navy Reserve Forces Command. Five finalists were selected and presented their ideas on June 28 before a panel hosted by Vice Adm. Mustin, along with retired Vice Adm. “Woody” Lewis, Bruce Mosler, chairman of Global Brokerage & the Veterans Initiative Program at Cushman & Wakefield, the 2021 Reserve Sailor of the Year Chief Yeoman (select) Jasmyn Phinizy, and Navy Reserve Force Master Chief Tracy L. Hunt.

Murphy said there were five finalist entries who appeared before the panel. One winner was selected, but more than one idea may be implemented.

The winners will be announced July 11, along with a special video presentation on military media platforms.

Navy Orders Long-Lead Materials for Two Fleet Oilers, One Expeditionary Sea Base



General Dynamics NASSCO has been awarded two contracts for long-lead materials for two fleet replenishment oilers and one

expeditionary sea base ship. *GENERAL DYNAMICS NASSCO*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has awarded two contracts totaling \$600 million for long-lead materials for three ships to be built by General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego. The materials will be used to build two fleet replenishment oilers and one expeditionary sea base ship.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded General Dynamics National Steel and Shipbuilding Co. a \$500 million contract modification for long-lead-time material in support of the seventh and eighth John Lewis-class fleet replenishment oilers T-AO 211 and 212, according to a June 28 Defense Department contract announcement. The company also was awarded a \$100 million contract modification for long-lead-time material in support of Lewis B. Buller-class expeditionary sea base (ESB) 8, the sixth ship of the class.

The Lewis B. Puller class ESB is a development of the Montford Point-class mobile landing platform ship. The 784-foot-long ESB is equipped with a 52,000 square-foot flight deck that can handle H-1, H-53 and H-53 helicopters and V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft. The ship is a capable platform to support mine-countermeasures missions, special operations forces, patrol boat support and unmanned systems.

Three ESBs are serving in the fleet – USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3), USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) and the USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) – and two more, the future USNS John L. Canley and USNS Robert E. Simanek (ESB 7), are under construction.

NASSCO is scheduled to deliver later this year the lead ship of the new 742-foot-long, 49,850-ton fleet oiler class, the John Lewis (T-AO 205). Three more are under construction – the future USNS Harvey Milk (T-AO 206), the future USNS Earl Warren (T-AO 207), and the future USNS Robert F. Kennedy (T-AO 208) – and two more are under contract. The oilers each will have a fuel capacity of 157,000 barrels of oil as well as other dry stores to replenish ships at sea.

“NASSCO shipbuilders are honored to build T-AO 211, T-AO 212 and ESB 8,” Dave Carver, president of General Dynamics NASSCO, said in a release. “The NASSCO team is excited to work with our Navy partners to ensure the success of both historic programs which are critical in supporting the Navy’s forward presence.”

NASSCO said the construction of the three ships is planned for third quarter of 2023 and continue into 2027. The company sees the contracts as helpful in sustaining and growing its workforce.

CNO, Japanese Chief of Staff Meet to Discuss Maritime Security



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday meets with Chief of Staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Adm. Ryo Sakai during an office call at the Pentagon on June 28. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Chief Amanda Gray*

WASHINGTON – Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday hosted the chief of staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), Adm. Ryo Sakai, in Washington, D.C., for an office visit on June 28, the CNO's public affairs office said in a release.

The two leaders discussed maritime security and ongoing efforts to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"The alliance between Japan and the United States is the cornerstone of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific," said Gilday. "Our bond with Japan has never been stronger. We share a common vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific and, together, we will work tirelessly to ensure and maintain security and stability in one of the world's most important regions. Adm. Sakai's visit provides a great opportunity to gain his first-hand strategic insights into regional security issues as well

as engage in productive discussions on how our navies can accelerate critical advances in interoperability.”

“The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force will be celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, and our history has always been with the U.S. Navy, protecting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific Region,” said Sakai. “The importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance is growing by the day, and today Adm. Gilday and I confirmed our strong bond and will to realize our common values of peace and stability in Indo-Pacific region.”

The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss how Japan and the U.S. can increase readiness, deter and counter malign gray-zone activities in the Indo-Pacific, and focus on interoperability and interchangeability between the two forces.

JMSDF and U.S. naval forces regularly operate together around the globe. This year the two navies participated in exercises such as Noble Fusion, Sea Dragon, Resilient Shield, and numerous other bilateral engagements.

This is the first opportunity for the two leaders to meet since Sakai became JMSDF’s chief of staff in March 2022.

Navy Confirms Wreck Site off Philippines Coast that of USS Samuel B. Roberts



The U.S. Navy destroyer escort USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE-413) circa June 1944, while off Boston, Massachusetts. *NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND*

WASHINGTON – Seventy-eight years after its loss during World War II, the U.S. Navy confirmed on June 25 the location of USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE 413), the Naval History and Heritage Command said June 27.

As announced on Twitter June 24 by retired naval officer and underwater explorer Victor Vescovo, he and a team from the undersea technology company Caladan Oceanic located the destroyer escort ship more than four miles beneath the surface in the Philippine Sea.

Vescovo tweeted, “With sonar specialist Jeremie Morizet, I piloted the submersible Limiting Factor to the wreck of the Samuel B. Roberts [DE 413]. Resting at 6,895 meters, it is now the deepest shipwreck ever located and surveyed. It was indeed

the 'destroyer escort that fought like a battleship.'"

USS Samuel B. Roberts was the first ship named for Coxswain Samuel Booker Roberts Jr., who was killed in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Commissioned April 28, 1944, the destroyer escort was lost that same year during the Battle off Samar when it, along with several other U.S. warships, engaged Japanese forces off the Philippine coast and selflessly put itself in harm's way to protect U.S. invasion forces in Leyte Gulf.

"USS Samuel B. Roberts was lost in one of the most valiant actions in the history of the U.S. Navy," said Naval History and Heritage Command Director Samuel Cox, a retired rear admiral. "The gallantry of her crew serves to inspire U.S. Navy personnel today, knowing they are entrusted with upholding the legacy and example of this ship and crew."

Now that USS Samuel B. Roberts has been positively identified, the wreck site is considered a Department of the Navy sunken military craft protected from unauthorized disturbance by the Sunken Military Craft Act. Violations of the act can carry penalties of up to \$100,000 a day, confiscation of the vessel used to disturb the sunken military craft and liability for damages caused. Permission to disturb U.S. Navy sunken military craft for archaeological, historical, or educational purposes is sought from the Naval History and Heritage Command. There are no plans to disturb USS Samuel B. Roberts.

"The site of the wreck marks the location of a hallowed war grave," Cox added. "It serves to remind all Americans of the great cost born by previous generations for the freedom we should not take for granted today."

More than 40 years after the ship's historic actions in WWII, the story of DE 413 and its crew's heroism inspired another generation of Sailors serving on a ship with the same name.

A bronze plaque commemorating the crew of DE 413 was aboard the Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided missile frigate USS

Samuel B. Roberts (FFG 58) when the ship struck an Iranian mine in the Persian Gulf April 14, 1988. The mine blew a 15-foot hole in the hull of the ship, breaking its keel. Because of the fast actions of the crew, after a five-hour effort to purge water and fight fires, the ship was saved. The captain of the vessel, Cmdr. Paul Rinn, noted that while running to their stations to save the ship, the FFG crew would touch the plaque for good luck to honor and recognize the bravery of the crew of DE 413.

The plaque is now in the collection at the National Museum of the U.S. Navy at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. It reads: "In Memory of Those Who Have Sailed Before Us/USS Samuel B. Roberts (DE-413)/LCDR R. W. Copeland, Commanding Officer." The remainder of the plaque includes the names of the original crew of the USS Samuel B. Roberts.

Two DDGs from Truman Strike Group Return Home



The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gravelly (DDG 107) returns to Naval Station Norfolk after a regularly scheduled deployment in support of maritime security operations and theater security cooperation efforts, June 23. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Nathan T. Beard*
ARLINGTON, Va. – The USS Gravelly (DDG 107) returned to Naval Station Norfolk June 24, becoming the first ship of the strike group to return home. USS Jason Dunham (DDG 109) followed on June 26, returning to its homeport of Naval Station Mayport, Florida.

USS Gravelly participated in numerous exercises during its time in European waters, including Neptune Strike 2022, Cold Response, Operation Songwright, Dynamic Manta, Neptune Shield 2022, and Hedgehog 22 with forces from Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom, according to a release.

“Exercises with our allies and partners allowed for a more cohesive alliance and fluid operations,” Cmdr. Hunter Washburn, Gravelly’s commanding officer said in the release. “Operating with allies and partners is paramount to further

developing our communication and operational capabilities to ensure mission readiness at a moment's notice."

USS Jason Dunham also operated in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of responsibility, but also spent part of its deployment perated with the U.S. 5th Fleet in the Middle East. The DDG escorted ships through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait multiple times.

During operations in U.S. 6th Fleet, the DDG operated with Forward Deployed Naval Forces-Europe ships, the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 and the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group.

"In the Mediterranean, Jason Dunham took part in NATO-led activity Neptune Shield 22, demonstrating NATO's ability to integrate the high-end maritime warfare capabilities of allied aircraft carrier strike groups, amphibious ready groups and marine expeditionary units to support the defense of the alliance," according to a release.

U.S. 5th Fleet Gains First LCS, USS Sioux City, in Historic Deployment



Littoral combat ship USS Sioux City (LCS 11), arrives at Naval Support Activity Bahrain, June 25. *U.S. Army / Sgt. Terry Vongsouthi*

MANAMA, Bahrain – USS Sioux City (LCS 11) arrived at Bahrain for a scheduled port visit, June 25, marking the completion of a 10,000-mile journey while becoming the first littoral combat ship to operate in the Middle East, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs said June 25.

The ship and crew of 75 personnel departed Mayport, Florida, in April. While in the U.S. 5th Fleet region, Sioux City has provided maritime security presence enabling the free flow of commerce in key corridors of trade.

“We’re thrilled to have Sioux City’s crew here helping us understand how to integrate the LCS platform into our operations, and we’re exercising every one of the ship’s support capabilities,” said Capt. Robert Francis, commander of Task Force 55. Task Force 55 oversees U.S. surface forces operating in the Middle East.

After arriving in the Middle East in May, Sioux City operated in support of Combined Task Force (CTF) 153 and focused on maritime security and partner capacity building in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb and Gulf of Aden. CTF 153 is one of four multinational task forces organized under Combined Maritime Forces, the largest international naval partnership with 34 nations. Led by the United States, Combined Maritime Forces is headquartered in Bahrain with U.S. 5th Fleet.

“I’m incredibly proud of our Sailors for executing every mission we’ve been tasked with,” said Cmdr. Scott Whitworth, commanding officer of USS Sioux City. “We are forging a new frontier for littoral combat ships.”

Sioux City is deployed with an MH-60 Seahawk helicopter from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 22.

The U.S. 5th Fleet region includes 21 countries, the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb and Suez Canal.

Munsch Assumes Command of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa



The change of command ceremony of Allied Joint Forces Command Naples (JFC Naples) from Adm. Robert P. Burke to Adm. Stuart B. Munsch took place at JFC Naples, Italy, June 27, 2022. The Change of Command Ceremony at JFC Naples symbolizes the continuity and unity that is NATO and comes during a time of a changed security environment in Europe. *U.S. Marine Corps / Master Sgt. Scott McAdam*

ALLIED JOINT FORCES COMMAND NAPLES, Italy – U.S. Navy Adm. Stuart B. Munsch relieved Adm. Robert P. Burke as commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa (NAVEUR-NAVAF) during a change of command ceremony held onboard Joint Forces Command (JFC) Naples Headquarters in Naples, Italy, June 27, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. Sixth Fleet Public Affairs said in a release.

U.S. Army Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, commander, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), and U.S. Air Force Gen. Tod D. Wolters, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and commander, U.S. European Command (EUCOM), served as the presiding officers of the ceremony.

Townsend commenced the official remarks and reflected on Burke's steadfast leadership as the commander of U.S. Africa Command's maritime component.

"At U.S. Africa Command, we fully appreciate how important sea lines of communication are to Western economies and to our ability to project power," said Townsend. "It is also apparent to me that our adversaries appreciate these facts as well. Every day, they are competing with us, the United States, NATO and our other allies and partners to gain an edge in the maritime domain."

Townsend spoke to NAVAF's critical role in stemming malign activities in Africa, highlighting Burke's unwavering support to African partners to promote maritime security and stability across the continent.

"In the face of these challenges, and arguably a more complex portfolio than Europe, Bob Burke ensured that NAVAF was always at the right place at the right time to maximize our strategic impact and provide seamless support to our allies and our partners," said Townsend.

Townsend noted that despite heavy operational demands and fiscal pressures, Burke didn't just hold the line, he advanced America's interests in Africa and every facet of the maritime domain.

During his remarks, Townsend also welcomed the incoming commander, Munsch.

"You have an impressive resume of operational experience, and your time at key strategic positions in the Pentagon is going to pay off for us here," said Townsend. "I know that NAVAF has steady hands on the helm."

Wolters also praised Burke and his wife Barbara for 39 years of dedicated service during the ceremony.

"Barbara, we know that you have delivered to us, one of the most spectacular commanders in the history of conflict, and we thank you so much for facilitating the extraordinary accomplishments of your husband, and we thank you so much for the sacrifices that you've made in the past," said Wolters. "Bob, I am so proud of you. We're old shipmates, I'm going to miss you. We talked a lot on the phone because there has been a lot of late night duty and the one thing that you knew about Bob Burke is that 1000 percent of the time, he was going to be ready. Bob, we wish you and Barbara the calmest of seas and the bluest of skies, as you press back to Florida and congratulations on 39 years of superior service. Well done my friend."

Wolters acknowledged the tremendous responsibilities that Burke managed during his tenure as commander of NAVEUR-NAVAF as well as his many NATO duties as the commander of JFC Naples, chief among them being Operation Allies Welcome and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which he called Burke's most important task.

"For me as the SHAPE Commander, the single human being on planet earth that is most responsible for deterring our sovereign soil and the effectiveness that we've been able to sustain to this point is Bob Burke," said Wolters.

Burke touched on his role in the current geopolitical situation in Europe, underscoring the gravity of the moment and the continued work that will be required from the NAVEUR-NAVAF team.

"We are living through a seminal moment in trans-Atlantic security. You have been front and center for the U.S. response to that reality, playing key roles in the most fundamental recalibration of the U.S. Navy in Europe I've seen in 40 years of service," said Burke. "I am so grateful for your commitment to service, teamwork, learning and innovation – all of which ensures this inspiring team of teams stands ready to fight and

win should the need arise.”

During his tenure, Burke assumed operational responsibility for naval forces and activities in a wide expanse of territory, including 93 countries from the North Pole to the Cape of Good Hope and eastward from the mid-Atlantic to the Caspian Sea. In addition to overseeing units and personnel typically assigned to Commander, Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central and U.S. Sixth Fleet, Burke also led multiple carrier strike groups as well as amphibious ready groups and marine expeditionary units. Burke and the NAVEUR and SIXTHFLT teams established Task Force 61 Naval Amphibious Forces Europe/2d Marine Division (TF-61/2) to synchronize Navy and Marine Corps efforts across Europe and Africa.

Under Burke’s leadership, Naval Forces Europe enhanced interoperability with NATO allies and partners through some of the largest and most successful multinational exercises and activities, including BALTOPS, Formidable Shield, and the Project Neptune Series, Allied multi-carrier operations, and unprecedented support to NATO enhanced air policing missions.

As the commander of Naval Forces Africa, he bolstered relations throughout the African continent, spearheading projects like Women, Peace and Security and the expeditionary sea base USS Hershel “Woody” Williams’ (ESB 4) circumnavigation of the African continent. Williams’ circumnavigation also featured the first voyage repair availability of the ESB platform in South Africa. Additionally, NAVAF facilitated the regional Express Series exercises, Obangame in Western Africa, Cutlass in Eastern Africa and Phoenix in Northern Africa, as part of a comprehensive strategy to provide collaborative opportunities amongst African forces and international partners that addresses maritime security concerns, including interdiction operations.

“Together, you are maintaining an unprecedented level of

activity throughout the European Command and Africa Command areas of responsibility and demonstrating that our collaborative network at sea remains the Joint Force's asymmetric advantage," said Burke.

Munsch, a native of North Dakota, recently served as director for Joint Force Development, J-7, Joint Staff, Washington D.C. Other notable assignments include serving aboard USS Will Rogers (SSBN 659), USS Jefferson City (SSN 759), USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), on the staff of Commander, Cruiser Destroyer Group 5, and USS Tucson (SSN 770). He also commanded USS Albuquerque (SSN 706) from 2002 to 2005, followed by duty in the Pentagon as the military assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Defense and then as executive assistant to the Director, Submarine Warfare, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV N87).

"In some way, this tour represents coming full circle for me. My father was in the Navy for one enlistment, but it gave him a lifetime of stories," said Munsch. "And his favorite place to visit was always Italy, and in particular, Naples because of the people and of course because of the food."

Munsch thanked Burke for his enduring contributions and outlined his goals upon assuming command as NAVEUR-NAVAF and JFC Naples.

"I would like to thank the Burkes, you have been most gracious both professionally and personally to ease us into this transition. Thank you so much," said Munsch. "I look forward to working with [JFC Naples and NAVEUR-NAVAF] to deter and defend, to advance our interoperability and strengthen our alliance."

In closing, Burke thanked Sailors and leadership for their extraordinary work and urged all hands to continue to confront emerging challenges with steadfast resolve.

"Our two headquarters here in Naples continue to punch well

above their weight. It's what we've needed and what we'll continue to rely on as our margins for error are getting thinner and two revisionist powers continue to exploit their perceived advantages," said Burke. "Uncertainty is the new normal, leaving us with the imperative to always press the advantages that we have while staying ready for anything, from any direction, at any time."

For over 80 years, NAVFAC-NAVAF has forged strategic relationships with allies and partners, leveraging a foundation of shared values to preserve security and stability.

Headquartered in Naples, Italy, NAVFAC-NAVAF operates U.S. naval forces in the EUCOM and AFRICOM areas of responsibility. U.S. Sixth Fleet is permanently assigned to NAVFAC-NAVAF, and employs maritime forces through the full spectrum of joint and naval operations.