HII Responds to Post-COVID World with Flexibility, Supply Chain Support

Sailors man the rails during the commissioning ceremony for the Arleigh Burke-class Flight III guided-missile destroyer USS Jack H Lucas (DDG 125) in Tampa, Florida Oct. 7, 2023.
CREDIT: Department of Defense | EJ Hersom

Shipbuilder HII (Booth 1323) has embarked on a range of efforts to improve its workforce, bolster the supply chain and boost its capital investments, HII President and CEO Chris Kastner said in a briefing on the eve of Sea-Air-Space 2024.

The company saw as far back as 2015 there would be significant demand for ships, but couldn't anticipate a worldwide pandemic that affected supply chains and the workforce, followed by rampant inflation, Kastner said.

"There's really unprecedented demand in shipbuilding right now

that we saw coming, and it has arrived," he said. "With Navy leadership … the industry has been getting after this since COVID started."

The company and its subsidiaries have been outsourcing some of the work they used to do, which helps bolster the supply chain, Kastner said. Since 2020, HII has helped create more than 200 new suppliers and outsourced 3.6 million hours of work.

It has also spent $450 million on workforce training and is providing new technology tools at its workforce, including artificial intelligence to help make its practices more efficient. "If we can use AI to improve our processes, we're going to do that," Kastner said.

Issues with shipbuilding came to the fore just this past week, as the preliminary results of a Navy shipbuilding study showed major programs are years behind schedule, including the first Columbia-class submarine and the future USS Enterprise aircraft carrier.

Advanced procurement is critical to avoiding such issues, Kastner said, one reason the shipbuilder has been pushing for a two-carrier buy for CVNs 82 and 83, similar with what was done for the future Enterprise (CVN 80) and Doris Miller (CVN 81), which were procured as a two-ship buy.

"We would like to get started in [20]26, potentially in 25 on the critical suppliers, in regard to 82," Kastner said. "There's no doubt that a two-ship buy with 80 and 81 really reduced the risk of 81. The risk we had on 80 was alleviated with 81."

As for the future USS District of Columbia, the first boat in the Columbia class, Kastner said it has a "very robust" risk management effort, "but you're going to have first-in-class issues. And couple that with a lot of green labor, that can yield to workmanship issues, and efficiency issues, and you

get potential schedule issues. It’s a first-of-class ship, and you’re rebuilding a workforce coming out of COVID.”

He noted that two shipbuilding programs involving HII are doing well, the LPD amphibious transport dock and DDG Flight III.

“What are the characteristics of those programs? Stable designs – and when the design changed it was very thoughtfully implemented, I’m talking about DDG Flight III – on time advanced procurement. Consistent workflow. All of those … and a really good core group of shipbuilders,” Kastner said.

Workforce Adjustments

“It’s a fact of life that you have a less experienced workforce than you had before, across the board. There’s significant loss of skill after covid. That’s been broadly understood, and it’s been a cross section of our talent base,” Kastner said.

That’s where HII is trying new things, including providing more flexibility for shipbuilders when they come in, including more time off early in the process. The company also has more programs to help their new hires enter the shipbuilding workforce.

“We used to just train them and send them out to a crew. Now, we train them, we bring their foreman in the training center and we put them out as a team. So, they have a framework and a cultural that they’re developing with their team, so they feel like they’re not alone when they go out into the shipyard,” he said.

HII is also recruiting from areas where people are likely to stay, according to data analytics. It is also using targeting incentives, where good performance and attendance lead to a boost in pay.

STEM Expo Brightens National Harbor with Exciting Science Demonstrations

The STEM Expo brought 5th through 12th grade students face to face with exciting science concepts on Sunday, April 7, filling the Cherry Blossom ballroom with laughter and gasps of wonder.

The event featured interactive workshops, hands-on demonstrations, STEM career information and just plain fun, including the famous nitrogen ice cream booth and a visit from Slapshot, the feathered mascot for the Washington Capitals hockey team.

While the event was fun, there was a serious purpose behind it, according to representatives from HII, the shipbuilder that was the Champion Sponsor for the event, alongside sponsors CACI and Booz Allen.

VR and 3D Printing

HII gave attendees a slice of real-life modern shipbuilding, demonstrating the use of virtual reality for ship inspections and welding and also showcasing 3D printing, or additive manufacturing, which is being used to create some components in the real world.

“It’s a safe space to fail, is what it really is. They learn these objectives here and don’t have any real-world consequences like injuries or anything,” said Grant Ronquillo, a software engineer at HII’s Newport News Shipbuilding.

It’s also the kind of training these students could expect to get if they pursued a career in shipbuilding.

“We’re working with our training programs to get this implemented as part of the standard training within Newport News Shipbuilding and across HII,” Ronquillo said, while behind him a STEM Expo visitor made her way through a simulated 3D room.

Visitors to HII’s booth were also shown a virtual welding booth and a 3D printer. The VR welding demonstration allowed students to take a turn, receive instruction on how to do better, and then try again, said Brian Treat, the lead general foreman at Newport News Shipbuilding.

“They think it’s the real thing,” he said, but it removes all the risk. “What’s key here is removing all the risk of real-life welding, allowing them to feature the same attributes and talk through it before somebody would go do it in real life.” Again, it’s how welders are actually being trained.

The additive manufacturing is another technology that some kids are already familiar with, said Perry Haymon, the chief technology engineer at HII's Ingalls Shipbuilding.

"We brought this today to demonstrate to the kids how 3D parts are printed," Haymon said. It's a technology that's making its way into shipyards.

"We do polymer as well as metallic," he said. "It's a great technology, it's a good thing to get into, for the kids to learn, because they like to draw, they like to create, so by doing solid models, now they can actually take that and put it into a printer and actually see what they've created."

Engaging Students

STEM is important because "it's such a broad field and it can be used in so many ways," said Notashia Thomas, a program manager at STEM sponsor CACI.

"When students come to this particular expo, they are exposed to just a myriad of options, and I think it really excites them. I absolutely see the children getting engaged. At our table we've been doing design principles. They try a design, they try it again, they try it again until they see it work, and that's what STEM is all about; the problem solving, the persistence that's involved. It's just great to see them engaged."

The Navy sees the value of STEM as well, contributing several displays and demonstrations for the expo, including in robotics and medicine.

"What is the value of STEM? The importance of STEM in the Navy cannot be overstated," said Commander Shannyn Fowler, commanding officer of Navy Talent Acquisition Group Richmond. "It's the backbone of how we operate, in terms of our engineering programs, in terms of our aviation programs, information technology, cyber warfare, explosive ordnance

disposal, and so many more. It’s what keeps our Navy afloat, it’s what keeps our aircraft in the sky, and it’s what keeps our enemies afraid of us.”

Fowler said she was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm she saw in the students coming through the expo.

“The enthusiasm is beyond measure,” Fowler said. “The excitement of young people between the ages of 5th grade and 12th grade and in STEM programs is beyond my expectation walking in on this.”

NAVAIR Sees AI as Future of Air Wing

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. — In a well-attended presentation by Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) on April 3 at Sea-Air-Space 2023, RDML Stephen Tedford, program executive officer for Unmanned Aviation and Strike Weapons (PEO (U&W)) explained the need for trust in autonomous systems while providing an overview of the Navy's unmanned aircraft, weapons, and target systems.

"If we have trust in autonomy, we can then make the move to truly artificial intelligence and in the future of the air wing," Tedford said.

He encouraged a real-world perspective when thinking about autonomous systems, remarking that, "I know many of you here that are in suits now are retired military. Many of you […] flew jets. At some point all of you were up and trying to find the tanker late at night, trying to get on the back side of the hose to get home. We learned that lesson over Afghanistan."

"How can you make in-flight refueling autonomous possible?" Tedford queried. "What if a pilot just has to get close enough and then let the system take over for itself. And make it more reliable, make it consistent and make it easier," he continued.

Open architecture may be the key.

"We always want open architecture systems," Tedford said. "We need them for flexibility in our systems. Just like applications on your phone that you can add and get rid of. We need to be able to do that with our mission systems in the unmanned environment as well."

Tedford also focused on the people behind the tech and stressed that autonomous systems and artificial intelligence don't operate in a bubble. Fundamentally, an unmanned system is still a human system.

“We know that unmanned really isn’t actually unmanned,” said Tedford. “There’s a huge support staff that’s involved in getting an aircraft in the air and conducting the mission. What we’re talking about […] having direct connectivity between our unmanned platforms and a manned platforms where the unmanned becomes an extension of the manned mission.”

Combatting Climate Change

Captured by SD 1078 in the Atlantic Ocean during Hurricane Fiona, Sept. 22, 2022. (Video: NOAA and Saildrone)
Excerpted from the upcoming article in the May 2023 issue of Seapower Magazine

As climate change increasingly affects weather patterns over the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, tracking hurricanes and monitoring their intensity has become more critical than ever.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that between 1980 and 2021, hurricanes caused 6,697 deaths and over $1.1 trillion in damages. Hurricanes’ massive waves and roaring winds can also have catastrophic effects on ships at sea, making accurate forecasting a must for naval operations.

While new technology has steadily improved hurricane-tracking forecasts since the 1990s, predicting how rapidly a tropical storm or hurricane may intensify has been more problematic. To understand storm intensity, scientists measure heat and momentum, collecting data on the exchange of energy between the ocean and atmosphere. But in order to do this in the most accurate way, scientists need data from inside the storm itself.

That’s where uncrewed systems come in. “With uncrewed systems, we can either do what we’re already doing, but do it more productively and efficiently, or we can go get data we just couldn’t get before,” said NOAA Corps Captain William Mowitt, director of NOAA’s Uncrewed Systems Operations Center.

You can read the full article about how the U.S. Navy, NOAA, and private partners are using uncrewed systems and new technologies to forecast hurricanes in the May issue of Seapower Magazine.

Vicky Uhland is a Colorado-based writer and editor who also covers the Navy League’s annual Sea-Air-Space conference.

Navy’s Frigate Program Pushing Hard for 2026 Delivery of USS Constellation

Captain Kevin Smith responds to workforce pipeline question from Ann Tropea, Editor-in-Chief at Seapower. Photo Credit: Dan Goodrich

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. —The Navy is pressing full bore to ensure that its new guided-missile frigate joins the fleet on time, the ship's program manager said.

"We're pushing hard with our industry partners to deliver that ship in 2026," said Captain Kevin Smith, program manager, Constellation Class Frigate, speaking to an audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space Expo in National Harbor. "A lot of hard work has gone into the design, the production readiness, and now we're actually building it up in Marinette, Wisconsin."

A frigate, in modern terminology, is "primarily an escort for high value units that don't have their own self-defense," Smith said. "It's also to help offset some of the work of the large surface combatants like the cruisers and destroyers. It is a primary anti-submarine warfare platform, just like the FFG 7 [the Perry class frigates which have been decommissioned]."

"I am very happy with the performance we're seeing thus far," Smith said. "Obviously, we did change to a different variable to sonar a few years ago. … The performance is astounding. … Its integration with the [SQQ]-89 [antisubmarine warfare system] is going to be huge for the United States Navy and will be welcomed by the fleet."

Smith also said the Aegis Baseline 10 combat system and the Enterprise Air Search Radar will give the new ship "a lot of capability."

Fincantieri Partnership

The future USS Constellation (FFG 62) is one of three frigates under contract to Fincantieri's Marinette Marine shipyard, the others being FFGs 63 and 64, under a 10-ship contract,

including options. Smith said construction of FFG 62 will start soon and he expects the option for FFG 64 to be awarded this year as part of a four-ship buy.

The Navy worked with Fincantieri to design an advanced construction pilot, “to really exercise all of the capital improvements, all of their workflow processes, all of their instructions, all the way through the value stream … from materials planning and getting the work orders to the workforce, making sure all those are understood.”

The frigate’s Aegis Combat System and SPY-6 Enterprise Air Search Radar are being integrated at the Lockheed Martin test lab in Moorestown, New Jersey, and at Wallops Island, Virginia. The propulsion plant and machinery control systems will be tested at a land-based test site in Philadelphia.

Need for Skilled Workforce

Smith said the Navy is working closely with Marinette Marine in strengthening the company’s supply chain and develop and retain its skilled work force “to make sure we have a good strong industrial base workforce to build these frigates for the next decade and decades to come. We need that as part of our industrial base risk reduction.”

The program manager also discussed the challenges of recruiting a skilled work force, in response to a question from Seapower.

“How do you build a community that people want to live and grow and raise families and be shipbuilders?” he asked rhetorically. “We have people on our staff that have experience in that. The other part is working with Marinette on how we can really build the workforce. There’s training, there’s investments on how they can get people to come work and stay and then be retained.”

“Some shipbuilding people come out of high school … and they

stay there a year, maybe two," Smith said. "But if they don't make it past two years, they're not going to stay. So how do we get people to stay for longer than a year or two? And how do we how do we really get them excited about shipbuilding?"

"You may read about some of the things Colombia [the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine program] is doing," continued Smith. "We're looking at doing the same exact thing … to think about Wisconsin … There's other jobs out there that maybe are better … but we're working on a lot of those things with the company and kind of coaching them with some of this funding we got from Congress. The big message here is I would predict that this company is going to be around for a long time and we need to get into the shipbuilding business long term as far as a prime and then we'll be able to count on them for decades."

Shall We Play a Game? Winning Isn't the Point, Experts Say

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – War games may be a useful tool for leaders dealing with regional conflicts and great power rivalry, but the purpose isn't to win, according to a panel of gaming experts.

"Many people think war games are a boot camp for victory, in reality, war games get you to think about multiple choices, courses of action for the tactical, the operational and the strategic levels of war, so it's really not necessarily about winning," said panel moderator Dr. Steven Wills, Navalist, at the Center for Maritime Strategy, Navy League of the United States.

Panel members echoed Wills' comment at the Navy League's 2023 Sea-Air-Space Expo.

"A single, well-designed game predicts 'a' future, not 'the' future," said Commander Phillip Pournelle, USN (Ret.), Senior Operations Analyst and Wargame Design at Group W, an analysis, modeling and research company. The best it can do is provide insights into the future, "in a manner similar to how a

shotgun hits a duck."

"Winning is the wrong way to look at wargaming," said Jeremy Sepinsky, Lead Wargame Designer, CNA. "If you win a war game, you have discovered one potential way of success among an infinite number of choices that all must follow that exact alignment for your success to be realized." But losing a wargame identifies "how your systems are going to fail," Sepinsky said, adding even if you don't know how it failed it can point to what happens if it fails and how to mitigate that failure.

The session ended with all of the panelists demonstrating wargames they had developed like the Taiwan Straits game by Dr. Matt Cancian, of the U.S. Naval War College and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Most were complex with a blizzard of rules like IUU (illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) Fishing game, with a variety of dice, playing cards representing fishing boats, tiny fish, zoned areas marked with numbers indicating fisheries' size. "You are a fishing fleet, your job is to fish," explained Sepinsky, "each of the ships has a certain profit quota that you're trying to make."

The cards representing the ships have two sets of gauges "one for the welfare of the people on your ship. What are you wages. How are your social security benefits? Are you paying into their retirement plans," said the game-co-creator." On the right hand side you've got the safety of the ship. Is it patched? Is it leaking oil. Does it meet regulations and standards for the waters you're going to be fighting in?"

In some wargames "you want them to lose just a little bit," Dr. Yuna Wong of the Institute for Defense Analyses said. The purpose was to see what could go wrong and identify potential problems and weaknesses. Some organizations want to use wargames to validate or prove plans. "Remember wargames can't

prove anything and they can’t validate anything,” she said.

Navy’s Newest Carrier to Deploy in May, Program Official Says

Caption: Captain Kevin Smith responds to workforce pipeline question from Ann Tropea, Editor-in-Chief at Seapower.

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. —The Navy is pressing full bore to ensure that its new guided-missile frigate joins the fleet on time, the ship’s program manager said.

“We’re pushing hard with our industry partners to deliver that ship in 2026,” said Captain Kevin Smith, program manager, Constellation Class Frigate, speaking to an audience at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space Expo in National Harbor. “A lot of

hard work has gone into the design, the production readiness, and now we're actually building it up in Marinette, Wisconsin."

A frigate, in modern terminology, is "primarily an escort for high value units that don't have their own self-defense," Smith said. "It's also to help offset some of the work of the large surface combatants like the cruisers and destroyers. It is a primary anti-submarine warfare platform, just like the FFG 7 [the Perry class frigates which have been decommissioned]."

"I am very happy with the performance we're seeing thus far," Smith said. "Obviously, we did change to a different variable to sonar a few years ago. … The performance is astounding. … Its integration with the [SQQ]-89 [antisubmarine warfare system] is going to be huge for the United States Navy and will be welcomed by the fleet."

Smith also said the Aegis Baseline 10 combat system and the Enterprise Air Search Radar will give the new ship "a lot of capability."

Fincantieri Partnership

The future USS Constellation (FFG 62) is one of three frigates under contract to Fincantieri's Marinette Marine shipyard, the others being FFGs 63 and 64, under a 10-ship contract, including options. Smith said construction of FFG 62 will start soon and he expects the option for FFG 64 to be awarded this year as part of a four-ship buy.

The Navy worked with Fincantieri to design an advanced construction pilot, "to really exercise all of the capital improvements, all of their workflow processes, all of their instructions, all the way through the value stream … from materials planning and getting the work orders to the workforce, making sure all those are understood."

The frigate’s Aegis Combat System and SPY-6 Enterprise Air Search Radar are being integrated at the Lockheed Martin test lab in Moorestown, New Jersey, and at Wallops Island, Virginia. The propulsion plant and machinery control systems will be tested at a land-based test site in Philadelphia.

Need for Skilled Workforce

Smith said the Navy is working closely with Marinette Marine in strengthening the company’s supply chain and develop and retain its skilled work force “to make sure we have a good strong industrial base workforce to build these frigates for the next decade and decades to come. We need that as part of our industrial base risk reduction.”

The program manager also discussed the challenges of recruiting a skilled work force, in response to a question from Seapower.

“How do you build a community that people want to live and grow and raise families and be shipbuilders?” he asked rhetorically. “We have people on our staff that have experience in that. The other part is working with Marinette on how we can really build the workforce. There’s training, there’s investments on how they can get people to come work and stay and then be retained.”

“Some shipbuilding people come out of high school … and they stay there a year, maybe two,” Smith said. “But if they don’t make it past two years, they’re not going to stay. So how do we get people to stay for longer than a year or two? And how do we how do we really get them excited about shipbuilding?”

“You may read about some of the things Colombia [the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine program] is doing,” continued Smith. “We’re looking at doing the same exact thing … to think about Wisconsin … There’s other jobs out there that maybe are better … but we’re working on a lot of those things with the company and kind of coaching them with some of this

funding we got from Congress. The big message here is I would predict that this company is going to be around for a long time and we need to get into the shipbuilding business long term as far as a prime and then we'll be able to count on them for decades."

CMS Panelists Envision Future American Sea Power

L to R – Admiral James Foggo (Ret.) Dr. William LaPlante, Admiral Christopher Grady, USN, General Eric Smith, USMC and James Geurts discuss issues relating to Reestablishing American Seapower at the CMS breakfast.

During the Center for Maritime Strategy (CMS) Breakfast on Tuesday morning, eggs and pastries provided food for the body, while four leaders from the maritime security community provided food for thought.

The breakfast panel, "Reestablishing American Seapower," offered a front-row view of how the U.S. military is addressing new threats from adversaries and foreign regimes.

“We face far more challenges today than I have ever seen in my 40 of years of active service,” said moderator Admiral James Foggo, USN (Ret.), dean, Center for Maritime Strategy, Navy League of the United States. He asked each panelist to explain how their teams are addressing those challenges.

William LaPlante, PhD, under secretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, said what really matters is, “production, production, production. Everything depends on it.”

LaPlante said Navy production is defined as ship construction and other weapons development. He said since the start of fiscal year 2022, the Navy has delivered 14 battle ships, and there are plans to build seven more ships this year and as many as 17 in the following 12 months.

“But we have to do more procurement, more production, and the Navy is going to lead the way,” he said.

Capital Acquisition is Key

The magic bullet is figuring out how to acquire capital, and LaPlante said the Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) is instrumental in that. “But if we’re trying to attract capital, investors want to see a return on investment,” he said. “We need to do a better job explaining that there are production and sustainability possibilities, not just prototypes.”

Admiral Christopher Grady, USN, vice chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, discussed his role as head of the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC). He said four transformations are taking place in the JROC:

- Building on the work of predecessors who established more of a top-down culture.
- Breaking out of system-oriented stovepipes and getting into consolidation management.

- Transitioning to Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA) process acquisition review. “It helps us go faster,” Grady said.

- Keeping a scorecard for what the JROC does.

General Eric Smith, assistant commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, detailed how the force is pivoting from several decades of land fighting in the Middle East and transforming for the future of combat.

Training and Retaining the Force

“The threat is getting more assertive, more challenging,” he said. “If you want to be ready for the next fight and not the last fight, you have to move.”

Smith said when people talk about force design, they focus on how it affects quantifiable things. “But there’s more than that. It’s about a force that’s mature, experienced and that you can retain,” he said.

“We’re doing better at training,” Smith said, noting that basic infantry training has gone from eight weeks to 14 weeks, with more of an emphasis on teams rather than individuals. In terms of retention, “we hit our recruiting numbers last year and will hit them this year,” he said.

Currently, the Marine Corps is working on organic mobility, which Smith said “provides opportunity to get where you need to go and cuts down on risk.”

Industry Partnerships

James Geurts, former assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition; distinguished fellow for Business Executives for National Security, closed the panel session with a discussion of how the Navy is working

with private industry.

The key is to transition to network thinking on the industrial base – "what I call the future industrial network," he said. "The industrial base is not going to carry us for the next 30, 40 years." The future industrial network is more dynamic and diverse, including international partners, venture-backed startups, traditional contractors and the tech base, he said.

Geurts also touched on capability, which he defined as a combination of equipment and training tactics supported by logistics. "Too much in the industrial base focuses only on equipment," he said. On the industry side, Geurts said it's key to think about networking, to reverse the urge to vertically integrate everything, and to concentrate on how to apply new technologies and innovation to more than just equipment.

U.S. Navy Embraces Diversity Initiatives

The seal of the United States contains just three words: E Pluribus Unum, or Out of Many, One. But achieving that unity has been an ongoing challenge in the military.

During the Tuesday morning session, "Towards a Culture of Unity," a diverse panel of soldiers engaged in what moderator Admiral John Richardson, USN (Ret.) called a "very practical, authentic discussion" on how to foster more diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) in the Navy.

Richardson launched the discussion with a question he's been asked numerous times – is the Navy weaker because it's

spending too much time on “woke” topics like diversity and environmentalism?

“It’s sometimes posed as a choice between diversity and strength, or taking care of the planet and strength,” he said. “But rather than approach this as a choice, a much better way to approach it as “yes, and …” We can do both. Just like operations and safety – the teams best at operations are best at safety. Unity through diversity enhances your strength as a force.”

But this doesn’t happen on its own, Richardson said. It takes positive encouragement and a daily commitment.

RADM Sinclair Harris, USN (Ret.), president emeritus, National Naval Officers Association (NNOA), agreed.

“Our Constitution says “a more perfect union. That takes work,” he said. “But Constitutionally, this whole discussion of DEI and A is what you signed up for when you took that oath.”

Transforming Roles

Harris said the most important transformation during his time in the Navy was the elevation of the role of women in the service.

“My first four ships were all boy,” he said. “We got a whole of a lot smarter when we started to elevate women on our platforms. They’ve raised the bar.”

Harris, who is Black, said four things have been important in his career: role models, mentors, coaches and advocates. “Make sure they don’t all just look like you,” he advised.

LCDR Rolando Machado Jr., vice president, Association of Naval Services Officers (ANSO), said it took him a while to understand that a person can serve in all four of these roles at the same time.

“When you meet someone, figure out what role they can play in your life and what role you can play in their life,” he said. “It’s going from a place of ‘what can I get?’ to ‘what I give also brings something back to me.’”

Machado said it’s important to look within the Navy’s ranks and acknowledge the stories of diversity in the past. He told the story of Dorie Miller, a Navy cook third class who was killed in action during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Miller, who helped several sailors who were wounded and shot down four to six Japanese planes using an anti-aircraft machine gun for which he had no training, was the first African American to be awarded the Navy Cross.

As a Black man, mess attendant was one of the only options Miller had in the Navy at that time. “Can you imagine if the Navy had trained him how to be a gunner, medic, or commanding officer, what type of impact he could have had?” Machado asked. “It’s powerful to think about our past, but also important to recognize the present.”

Deckplate Unity

Lieutenant Andrea Howard, navigator PCU New Jersey (SSN 796), provided context of what it takes to transfer the ideal of a more perfect union to the reality on the deckplate. As one of the first women deployed on a submarine, she’s been part of the evolution over the last decade.

Howard compared DEIA to a patchwork quilt. Like pieces of a quilt, soldiers should be encouraged to keep their own identity while unifying as a whole.

Howard said there are three steps to creating that patchwork quilt:

- Cultural forging, which is most effective when sailors are leading the charge.

- Representation, which shows there’s a future for others like you in this community.
- Allyship, in which people from the majority – especially those in the chain of command – provide a safe and welcoming space for those in the minority.

Captain Emily Bassett, president, Sea Services Leadership Association (SSLA) and founder and moderator of the webinar Lean on Navy, said she was in a Boston University ROTC class when the Navy first welcomed women into the nuclear propulsion program.

Bassett, who commanded the USS Manchester (LCS 14), said she’s always been in the first class of women throughout her Navy career. “In a lot of ways I felt different and not part of the team,” she said. But after a commander told her to focus on her strengths rather than her differences, she started to feel like she belonged.

Bassett encouraged all soldiers to join an organization like SSLA, ANSO or NNOA, where they can talk about challenges they face and learn how to be part of the conversation around solutions.

A Navy of 1,000 Ships

The Honorable Carolos Del Toro sees a global navy as vital to our future

Keynote speakers: The Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy and Admiral Mike Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations

In a ballroom filled to capacity, the Honorable Carlos Del Toro once again took the stage to provide leadership, guidance, and a vision for the future of our Navy at the annual Navy League Luncheon at Sea-Air-Space 2023.

That vision includes a commitment to allies and partners from navies across the globe. Indeed, he prefaced his formal remarks by asking the entire Finnish delegation to stand and be recognized in honor of that commitment – the ballroom echoed with the claps and cheers of a standing ovation.

“Isn’t it great to be back in force?” Del Toro said as the applause died down. “Our national defense strategy calls upon the joint force to be ready to meet our nation’s challenges, from countering China in the Indo-Pacific, to reassuring our

allies and partners in Europe as Russia continues its campaign in Ukraine, annexing territory in a flagrant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. And we will not give up. We will continue to support the Ukrainian people and the Ukrainian military for as long as it takes," he said.

"We're working to strengthen our partnerships both internationally and here at home," said Del Toro, asking for all the international partners in attendance to stand and be recognized. "Now, I'd love to have a thousand ship navy myself. Maybe one day we'll get there. Let's work on it incrementally [with] the power of all our allies and partners working together across the world," he said.

Del Toro also acknowledged the contribution of the legislative and executive branches, praising the "president's administration and the Congress for their commitment to our Navy and Marine Corps team," and citing the budget increase from $210 billion in 2021 to over $250 billion in the upcoming fiscal year.

We Can Do More

"There's still a lot more work and a lot more commitment that needs to come here at home," Del Toro said. "We are working with our defense industrial based partners, all of you, to reduce the maintenance delays for ships and submarines, to improve our shipyard infrastructure, develop a skilled workforce to deliver game changing technologies and capabilities to our sailors and marines and subs. If there's one thing that's easy to do in Washington, D.C., it's to criticize, to constantly criticize the efforts that are going on. Let me tell you, this leadership team here, the CNO, the entire aviation team, has worked […] tirelessly to produce these ships faster and work with industry to come up with solutions that make sense," he said.

Del Toro went on to laud the innovations and efforts of small

businesses as vital contributors to the success of our fleet. “Between my previous experience as small business owner in the defense ecosystem and current position as a secretary, I’m aware of how critical our planning, partnership and industry is to fielding advance capabilities,” he said. “We have to continue to grow the department, the Navy and Partner Defense Marketplace, inviting new small businesses, medium sized businesses, and even large businesses that don’t traditionally do work with the department. It’s the only way that we’re actually going to fix the problems that we face today,” said Del Toro.

A Hybrid Navy

Admiral Mike Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations reiterated the need to partner with new companies able to innovate and expand technological capabilities that can “improve our ability to command and control this ocean of things that a manned and unmanned Navy brings to the fore.”

He also spoke of the need for a hybrid navy that routinely employed an increased number of unmanned systems and craft, citing Task For 59 as a way to, “bring together the very best in platform engineers and software designers so that we make the magic happen and improve maritime domain awareness.”

Speaking about the vast coastline of the Middle East, Gilday remarked that, “These waters are vital to the global economy. With these [hybrid] systems and artificial intelligence, we’re building a better picture of the surrounding seas by getting our hands on new systems. We’ve got to figure out what works and what doesn’t. Or apply what we’ve learned with a suite of unmanned systems deployed across the region right now. Adding value to the mission by enabling human operators to make smarter decisions faster,” Gilday said.

Del Toro ended with enthusiasm for the future. “I cannot express to you how excited I am about our endeavors in

unmanned in both the Fourth and Fifth Fleet areas of responsibility as we advance towards our integration of unmanned platforms to the fleet and support of distributed maritime operations," he said.

"If that doesn't excite you, I don't know what will," said Del Toro.