

CNO Says LCS Will Still Have a Role After Propulsion Issue is Fixed



U.S. Sailors sail the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Detroit (LCS 7) through the Pedro Miguel Locks while transiting the Panama Canal. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Nathan T. Beard*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Despite serious propulsion problems with the newest Freedom-class littoral combat ships (LCS), Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday says he is “very bullish” about the small surface combatant.

“We’ve got 33 of them. We’ve got to wring the most operational availability that we can out of those ships,” Gilday told a livestreamed edition of the United States Navy Memorial’s SITREP speakers series May 6.

To that end, Gilday said, the Navy will place the long-range Raytheon-Kongsberg Naval Strike Missile on all the LCS, and in about 18 months, start delivering either anti-submarine warfare or mine counter measures modules to the ships – once a defect with the Freedom variant’s combining gear is corrected.

In 2020, problems with the combining gear, which links two gas turbines to the ships’ two diesel-powered engines, enabling acceleration to 40 knots, sidelined the USS Detroit (LCS-7) and USS Little Rock (LCS-9). Both are assigned to the 4th Fleet, a component of U.S. Southern Command.

In January, the Navy said it would not accept any more of the odd-numbered Freedom ships until the Lockheed Martin-led manufacturing team fixed the design flaw in the complicated mechanism. The Freedom variant is manufactured by Marinette Marine in Marinette, Wisconsin. Even-numbered Independence-

class LCS are built at Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama.

“The vendor is doing land based testing,” Gilday said, “and once that new design is proven, we will first install those new combining gears in the ships delivering out of Wisconsin, and then we’ll back fit some of the older hulls.”

There is plenty of work for the LCS to do, whether it is in SOUTHCOM or the Western Pacific, Gilday said. “I’m very bullish about the LCS,” he said. ‘We intend to put them forward in the 5th Fleet and, of course, in the 7th Fleet. They were designed to operate inside, close to land and transit at high speed. You better believe we’re going to make use of that capability in the Western Pacific.”