

Forging the Future: Training Center Opens to Train Next Generation of Defense Manufacturers



Jim Hook, an Accelerated Training for Defense Manufacturing (ATDM) instructor, teaches a student how to use a Haas CNC machine at the newly opened National Training Center in Danville, Virginia. This state-of-the-art facility, which opened on January 13, 2025, expands the program's capacity to train skilled workers for submarine and surface ship manufacturing. (Courtesy photo from ATDM)

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DANVILLE, Va. – The U.S. Navy strengthened its efforts to revitalize the nation's shipbuilding capability with the opening of a new training center in Danville, Virginia.

The Accelerated Training in Defense Manufacturing (ATDM) program, launched in 2021, has graduated more than 777

students from 45 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Australia. About 25% of participants are veterans, and the program boasts a 90% job placement rate within the defense industrial base. New cohorts begin every eight weeks, offering a fast track to meaningful careers across five trades.

The new National Training Center, a state-of-the-art, 100,000-square-foot facility on the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR) campus, opened its doors on January 13. On that day, the center welcomed its first cohort of students, marking the beginning of an expanded operation that will train 1,000 students annually, creating a pipeline of skilled workers critical for building and maintaining the nation's submarines and warships.

"This facility helps address our immediate workforce needs," said Frederick "Jay" Stefany, the Direct Reporting Program Manager for the Maritime Industrial Base (MIB) Program. "It advances our efforts to restore our industrial base and ensure our industry partners have the skilled workforce they need to build and maintain the Navy's fleet."

ATDM's graduates are essential in addressing the maritime industry's expanding workforce needs. The Navy's shipbuilding plans include the construction of Columbia-class and Virginia-class submarines, along with more than 10 different classes of surface ships, including aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, amphibious warships, and support vessels. This unprecedented scale of shipbuilding requires a comprehensive strategy to rebuild America's manufacturing capabilities. The establishment of the National Training Center marks a significant milestone in this endeavor.

A National Imperative

The MIB Program leads the Navy's workforce development initiatives while advancing shipbuilding and repair capabilities through industrial base development, supply chain

resilience, and advanced manufacturing technologies. With the U.S. manufacturing base having shrunk to a third of its size from 30 years ago, the program must overcome major challenges. One of these pressing challenges involves recruiting and training 140,000 new workers over the next decade for submarine production and sustainment, with an additional 110,000 workers needed for surface vessel construction and maintenance.

“The decline in American manufacturing has created a critical skills gap,” said Erica Logan, Workforce Director for the MIB Program. “But we’re not just filling jobs—we’re rebuilding America’s maritime manufacturing capability and offering meaningful careers for the next generation of workers. Every graduate represents another step toward restoring our nation’s industrial strength.”

This workforce development initiative is vital for both new construction and fleet maintenance, underscoring the strategic importance of programs like ATDM in maintaining America’s naval readiness. This national revitalization effort takes shape through individual success stories and community partnerships.

The IALR campus, which hosts the National Training Center, also houses another key MIB Program initiative: the Navy’s Additive Manufacturing Center of Excellence. This co-location creates a hub for maritime manufacturing innovation.

Transforming Lives, Strengthening Communities

Natasha Barnes, part of the inaugural class that began training January 13 in the new facility, represents a growing wave of skilled workers entering the defense manufacturing workforce.

“ATDM has done an excellent job adapting during the transition into the new facility,” said Barnes, a CNC student. “It’s been an uplifting experience to learn in such a clean and well-

maintained environment. I am very excited to see what the future holds for the program.”

For Telly Tucker, president of the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research (IALR), the program’s impact goes beyond the classroom.

“This facility is about more than training—it’s about revitalizing southern Virginia,” Tucker said. “It’s creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and building a pipeline of skilled workers who will strengthen our nation’s security.”

To deliver on this promise of regional revitalization and support to national security, the National Training Center provides intensive, hands-on preparation.

Hands-On Training for Real-World Impact

ATDM’s intensive, 16-week accelerated training program provides students with 600 hours of hands-on experience in one of five trades critical to maritime manufacturing: welding, CNC machining, additive manufacturing, quality assurance, and non-destructive testing. Training runs on three shifts, mirroring the 24/7 operations of the defense industry.

“This program isn’t theoretical—it’s practical,” said Christa Reed, ATDM’s Interim Vice-President. “When our students graduate, they’re not just trained—they’re ready to hit the ground running.”

The curriculum, developed in collaboration with industry leaders, ensures students are equipped with the skills and certifications needed to meet the Navy’s rigorous standards. By

simulating real-world manufacturing environments, the program prepares graduates to succeed in high-demand roles. This focused training approach directly enhances America’s maritime security.

A Shared Mission

The opening of the National Training Center represents a milestone in the Navy's efforts to address workforce challenges and bolster the maritime industrial base. For Stefany, it's a reminder of how these efforts impact national security.

"Every ship we build, every submarine we launch, is a promise to the American people," Stefany said. "That promise begins here, with the people we train."

As the Navy ramps up its fleet expansion, programs like ATDM and the new National Training Center are creating a ripple effect—transforming communities, empowering individuals, and ensuring America's maritime superiority. The center highlights innovation, collaboration, and resilience, its impact extending beyond Danville to strengthen America's maritime future.

For more information about ATDM and its programs, visit www.atdm.org.