

July ANTX Exercises in N.C. Yield Wealth of New Ideas, Three Navy Officials Say



Naval leadership – James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, and Gen. Gary L. Thomas, assistant commandant of the Marine Corps. – and Gyrene Engineering Management members drink water on July 18 during ANTX East from a GEM vehicle integrated atmospheric water generator. U.S. Navy/Kelley Stirling

The latest in a series of advanced naval technology exercises (ANTX) provided a lot of new ideas on how to improve maneuverability, communications, logistics and force protection in the highly contested environments expected in a future fight against a peer competitor, a trio of top Navy Department officials said Aug. 1.

But the most exciting thing about the recent ANTX was the demonstration of how the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps are working together to meet the challenges of a great power confrontation, James Geurts, the assistant Navy secretary for research, development and acquisition, said at a Pentagon briefing. It was a way “to kind of close the distance between ideas, wherever they came from” and, by using some of the new acquisition authorities, to get new technologies out into the field quicker.



An autonomous unmanned surface vehicle is demonstrated during ANTX East on July 17. The boat is a USV Lab Afloat

demonstrating autonomous safe navigation. U.S. Navy/Kelley Stirling

Geurts said they have about a 12- to 18-month window to move technologies through the acquisition process and into the hands of Sailors and Marines, instead of a "20-year development program." By bringing together the requirements and acquisition officials with the operators, "we tend to find a bunch of new ideas that we didn't think of when we didn't get all those together," he said.

The briefing focused mainly on the ANTX held July 9-19 at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in which Geurts said 53 new technologies were presented by 32 organizations, from large corporations to a company with three people, and were tested in the field. Some of those technologies could be moved into the acquisition process, while others would be cited for additional development.

Maj. Gen. Mark Wise, the deputy commander of Marine Corps Combat Development Command, said: "When we start looking at what that future fight might look like and the things we will need to enable it, this has become a really great way to start ferreting out some of those technologies that will enable our Sailors and Marines to do that." Wise mentioned technologies, including unmanned air, land, surface and undersea systems, that could help with force protection and logistics at comparatively low cost.

Michael Stewart, the deputy director of integrated warfare, said by using the ANTX process, "we're trying to increase the decision speed ... trying to leap frog [the normal acquisition process] and do it fast." It was "all about being a smart buyer."

Wise said he was excited about some of the concepts for allowing communications for small, distributed Marine units when the current methods are disrupted, including systems that were small enough to fit on a light off-road vehicle, and using unmanned systems to provide fuel and ammunition to expeditionary air fields.

Geurts said a key factor in the ANTX process was, "we don't call this a test, it's an experiment. It's OK to fail." That is part of the new push for rapid innovation, which requires an environment "where it's safe to fail."