LPD 17 Program Manager: These Ships 'Can Do Anything'

ARLINGTON, Va. – The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ships (LPD 17s) in production are incorporating improvements as the class progresses to the Flight II configuration, the Navy's program manager said.

"The mission remains the same," Capt. Brian Metcalf, the LPD 17 program manager, noted Jan. 16 at the Surface Navy Association symposium of the role of the 14 older Flight I LPDs and the forthcoming Flight II ships.

The Flight II LPD 17 ships, beginning with LPD 30, will incorporate improvements that include the Enterprise Air Search Radar (EASR), Consolidated Afloat Networks and Enterprise Services (CANES) architecture, a destroyer-style mast, boat deck, SLQ-32 Surface Electronic Warfare Improvement Program Block, and the Rolling Airframe Missile. The Flight II will retain the same hull form and propulsion plant as a Flight I ship but have improved fuel efficiency and electrical distribution. The Flight II will be capable of handling the CH-53K King Stallion heavy-lift helicopter.

The future USS Fort Lauderdale (LPD 28), a Flight I ship, will be the first LPD to have CANES installed and be fitted with a destroyer-style mast. The ship is scheduled for delivery in fall 2021. Metcalf said CANES will be back-fitted to older ships of the class.

The future USS Richard M. McCool Jr. (LPD 29), the last Flight I ship, will have the EASR installed. The ship is scheduled for delivery in 2023.

The Flight II ships will replace the Navy's eight Whidbey Island-class and four Harpers Ferry-class dock landing ships.

Metcalf said the Flight IIs will be interchangeable with and operate in the same manner as Flight I ships and improve an amphibious ready group's (ARG's) communications, enhancing the ARG's ability to operate in a disaggregated manner, which is more typical of operations in recent years.

"They can do anything," Metcalf said of the San Antonio class, including "recovering spacecraft or put 800 Marines in your back yard."

The 11 commissioned ships of the San Antonio class have completed 21 deployments, he said.

USS Portland (LPD 27) is the next to deploy, departing in 2020. It will have a solid-state laser weapons system installed.

Metcalf stresses that the LPDs were not just troop carriers, but are combatants built to military specifications.

"They will have to fight to get to the fight," he said, speaking of the need to operate in a high-threat environment.

The Navy plans to procure 13 Flight II ships. Metcalf said the Navy has the option of a block but not yet the authority for one from the Congress.