

Navy Conducts Unmanned Logistics Prototype Trials Aboard T-EPF Apalachicola

WASHINGTON – The future expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Apalachicola (EPF 13) is performing a series of planned test events assessing autonomous capabilities integrated into the shipboard configuration, demonstrating that a large ship can become a self-driving platform, Team Ships Public Affairs said July 29.

Known as Unmanned Logistics Prototype trials, each test event increases the perception capabilities and complexity of behaviors demonstrated by the autonomous systems. Test evolutions to date include point-to-point autonomous navigation, vessel handling and transfer of vessel control between manned to unmanned modes.

“The autonomous capabilities being demonstrated by this prototype system represent a major technological advancement for the EPF platform, the Navy at large and our industry partners. EPF 13 will be the first fully operational U.S. naval ship to possess autonomous capability including the ability to operate autonomously in a commercial vessel traffic lane,” said Tim Roberts, Strategic and Theater Sealift program manager, Program Executive Office (PEO) Ships. “This testing is a game changer and highlights that there is potential to expand unmanned concepts into existing fleet assets.”

Collaboration for the test events include team members from PEO Ships, PEO Unmanned and Small Combatants, Naval Systems Engineering and Logistics Directorate – Surface Ship Design and System Engineering, Supervisor of Shipbuilding – Gulf Coast, Naval Surface Warfare Center support from Carderock,

Combatant Craft Division, Dahlgren and Philadelphia and the Navy's shipbuilding and industry partners, Austal USA, L3Harris and General Dynamics.

Future test events will add levels of difficulty and include night navigation, and differing weather and sea states. These trials will set crucial groundwork for autonomous vessel operations, to include vessel encounter and avoidance maneuvering and compliance with International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

EPFs are shallow draft, commercial-based, catamaran designed for rapid, intra-theater transport of personnel and equipment. The EPF's high speed, shallow draft, and ability to load/unload in austere ports enables maneuver force agility in achieving positional advantage over intermediate distances without reliance on shore-based infrastructure.

EPF 13 is scheduled to be delivered to the Navy later this year.