Navy launches Ice Exercise 2022 in the Arctic Ocean



Virginia-class attack submarine USS Illinois (SSN 786) surfaces in the Beaufort Sea, kicking off Ice Exercise (ICEX) 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Mike Demello*

U.S. NAVY ICE CAMP QUEENFISH – Commander, Submarine Forces officially kicked off Ice Exercise 2022 in the Arctic Ocean on Friday, March 4, after the building of Ice Camp Queenfish and arrival of two U.S. Navy fast attack submarines, Submarine Force Atlantic Public Affairs said March 6.

ICEX 2022 is a three-week exercise designed to research, test and evaluate operational capabilities in the Arctic region.

“The Arctic region can be unforgiving and challenging like no other place on Earth,” said Rear Adm. Richard Seif, commander

of the Navy's Undersea Warfighting Development Center in Groton, Connecticut, and the ranking officer of ICEX 2022. "It's also changing and becoming more active with maritime activity. ICEX 2022 provides the Navy an opportunity to increase capability and readiness in this unique environment, and to continue establishing best practices we can share with partners and allies who share the U.S.'s goal of a free and peaceful Arctic."

The Arctic is experiencing a trend of diminishing sea ice extent and thickness creating the likelihood of increased maritime activity in the region, including trans-oceanic shipping and resource extraction.

The Navy's Arctic Submarine Laboratory, based in San Diego, serves as the lead organization for coordinating, planning and executing the exercise involving representatives from four nations and more than 200 participants over the five weeks of operations.

In addition to the U.S. Navy, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel who are participating in the exercise, personnel from the Royal Canadian Air Force, Royal Canadian Navy and United Kingdom Royal Navy are participating.

U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Dave Swensen is leading a team of six from the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Center to assist in ICEX 2022.

"Any opportunities we can get to provide our personnel access to experience in extreme cold conditions will be force multipliers to our institution and ultimately to the Marine Corps," said Swensen, who added that five of the center's personnel taking part in ICEX are instructors at the Bridgeport, California, cold weather center for excellence. "We will come back among the most cold weather-experienced personnel at the base."

A temporary ice camp is being established on a sheet of ice in

the Arctic Ocean, known as an ice floe, to support testing submarine systems and other arctic research initiatives.

The camp, named Ice Camp Queenfish, will serve as a temporary command center for conducting operations and research in the Arctic region. The camp consists of shelters, a command center, and infrastructure to safely house and support more than 60 personnel at any one time.

“At Ice Camp Queenfish, our teams can test equipment in a very harsh and demanding environment,” said Howard Reese, director of the Arctic Submarine Laboratory. “It’s important that all the technology we’re testing can perform in all of the oceans of the world, including the Arctic. Here, we can learn what works well in the Arctic and what doesn’t work as well, and we can make changes and improvements.”

The camp gets its namesake from USS Queenfish (SSN 651), the first Sturgeon-class submarine to operate under ice and the fourth submarine to reach the North Pole when it surfaced there on Aug. 6, 1970.

Submarines have conducted under-ice operations in the Arctic regions in support of inter-fleet transit, training, cooperative allied engagements and operations for more than 60 years. USS Nautilus (SSN 571) made the first transit in 1958. USS Skate (SSN 578) was the first U.S. submarine to surface through arctic ice at the North Pole in March, 1959.

Since those events, the U.S. Submarine Force has completed 97 Ice Exercises – ICEX 2022 is the 98th – the last being conducted in 2020.