

Navy Surgeon General: Medical EPF Ship to Have Role in Distributed Maritime Operations



The joint high speed vessel USNS Spearhead (JHSV-1) departs Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia Beach, Va., Jan. 16, 2014. The flight II Spearhead-class EPF will be equipped with medical facilities. *U.S. NAVY*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The expeditionary fast transport ship (EPF) being built as a medical ship will have a role in distributed maritime operations (DMO) and could support expeditionary advance base operations (EABO), the Navy surgeon general said.

Rear Adm. Bruce L. Gillingham, speaking Aug. 19 to reporters of the Defense Writer's Group, said the Flight II Spearhead-class EPF will be equipped with medical facilities to support the fleet under the DMO concept.

Gillingham said the Military Sealift Command's two large hospital ships – USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy – would “not be able to get as close to the fight” and that the high-speed Spearhead class has the speed needed to provide medical care to the fleet and Marines at their bases.

The admiral said that Austal USA, builder of the Spearhead-class EPF, is building a Flight II version that will have “significant structural changes” for medical facilities, including an 18-bed intensive care unit, two operating rooms, and feeding and berthing for a medical team of about 100 personnel. Its flight deck would be capable of landing helicopters and V-22 tiltrotor aircraft.

“We’re excited to work the concept of operations using that [ship] and to work with the Marine Corps as they work on Force Design [2030] ... as they seek to be highly maneuverable, even more so than they are now, and to be able to provide medical care in that setting,” Gillingham said.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded Austal USA a \$261.8 million contract for two EPFs, 13 and 14, which could become operational in the Flight II configuration. Austal already has delivered 10 EPFs to the Military Sealift Command and is building four more, including hulls 13 and 14.

The EPF is an aluminum catamaran design with a large mission bay and habitability spaces that give it flexibility for a wide range of roles. The ship’s shallow draft of 13 feet gives it the ability to gain access to more ports, including degraded ports. The EPF’s speed of 40 knots gives it the ability to reach destinations faster, giving commanders the ability to respond faster to operational demands.