

Navy to Deploy Two Littoral Combat Ships This Year; East Coast LCSs to Deploy in 2020

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will restart overseas deployments of its littoral combat ships (LCSs) this year after a hiatus of more than a year, the Navy's surface warfare boss said. Two LCSs will deploy this year from San Diego, followed by two from the East Coast in fiscal 2020.

"It's happening," Vice Adm. Richard A. Brown, commander, Naval Surface Forces, and Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, told reporters in a Jan. 11 teleconference, noting that from then on "there will always be LCS forward-deployed."

Brown said that the Independence-variant LCSs USS Montgomery and USS Gabrielle Giffords will deploy this year. These deployments will mark the second and third for the Independence variant. He declined to narrow down the deployment windows for operations security reasons.

Brown said the first LCS deployments from the East Coast, departing from Naval Station Mayport, Florida, would be undertaken by the Freedom-variant LCS USS Detroit in 2020, followed by sister ship USS Little Rock.

For all of these deployments, the ships will carry the full Surface Warfare mission package, Brown said.

He said the naval component commanders of the regional combatant commands were asking for the LCSs to deploy.

The gap in LCS deployments after the deployments of USS Freedom, USS Fort Worth and USS Coronado was the result of the Navy taking time out to revamp its operational and crew concepts for the LCS. In September 2016, the Navy announced

several significant changes to the LCS program based on operational experience.

The original 3:2:1 crew concept – three crews, two ships, one deployed – was changed to a Blue/Gold concept similar to that used by the ballistic-missile submarine force, with two crews dedicated to each LCS. The mission package detachments are merging with the LCS crews. The ships are being organized in four-ship divisions specializing in a single warfare specialty, with three deployable ships and the fourth a dedicated training ship that will remain in local waters to train and certify the crews.

The first four LCSs will be dedicated to research, development, test and evaluation and, like the training ships, they will be single-crewed, but could be deployed as fleet assets if needed on a limited basis.

The Navy also decided to base the LCSs according to class, with the Independence variant based in San Diego and the Freedom variant in Mayport. The decision to base the Freedom variant on the East Coast was a matter of pier support. The Freedom class, due to its size, is a better fit for the port loading requirements of Mayport.