Surface Boss: Navy Considering Light Amphibious Warships for Junior Officer Command



The Cyclone-class coastal patrol ship USS Tornado (PC 14) conducts a man overboard drill Sept. 16, 2020. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Dan Serianni*

ARLINGTON, Va. – With the Navy planning on decommissioning its remaining Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships over the next two years, the opportunities for junior officers to command ships early in their careers are drying up. A new ship now being planned for the fleet may provide a solution to the problem.

Most Navy warships – destroyers, littoral combat ships (LCSs), amphibious transport dock ships and dock landing ships – are commanded by surface warfare officers with the rank of

commander. The forthcoming Constellation-class frigate likely will be the same. Cruisers are commanded by captains who previously have commanded a smaller ship.

In an earlier era, such as World War II, many small warships, such as destroyer escorts, were skippered by lieutenant commanders. Antelope-class patrol gunboats during the Vietnam War were commanded by lieutenants. Today the Coast Guard has many ocean-going cutters, such as Sentinel-class fast response cutters, that give lieutenants early command experience. Command at sea for a junior officer has been shown to produce a more mature, experienced mariner accustomed to facing hard decisions that require sound judgement.

Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, commander, Naval Surface Forces, was speaking July 22 to reporters at a media roundtable when asked about the diminishing opportunities for lieutenants and lieutenant commanders to gain experience in command of a ship.

“I think about that a lot,” Kitchener said. “I’m a big believer in early command opportunity if you’re truly trying to develop good COs [commanding officers] at the O-5, O-6 [commander, captain] level. It really gives them a broader understanding of the force.

“One of the things we’re looking at right now, tracking pretty closely, is the Marine Corps’ initiative for the LAW, the Light Amphibious Warship,” he said. “I see that as perfect opportunity for early command for our future officers. I think that’s a great mission for them. Right now, I think on that we’re on track.”

Kitchener said he has “looked a little bit at about LCS, but not where I want to talk about my thoughts on it, but I do think the LAW is something perfectly suited for [early command].”