

Unmanned Watercraft for Expeditionary Warfare Progressing Rapidly



Bruce Connor (left), chief mate of the expeditionary fast transport vessel USNS Spearhead, and General Dynamics marine operations engineer Dan McDonald prepare a Knifefish UUV for deployment. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Anderson W. Branch

ARLINGTON,

Va. – The development of unmanned watercraft for expeditionary warfare has been

progressing rapidly, said the program manager of U.S. Navy Unmanned Maritime Systems.

“We made a tremendous amount of progress in the expeditionary warfare area in 2019,” Capt. Pete Small, PMS 406, said Jan. 16 during a briefing at the Surface Navy Association symposium here. That progress included successful testing of three Mine Countermeasures USVs (MCM USV) on three different platforms.

The Navy is using Textron’s Common Unmanned Surface Vehicle for the MCM USV program, one of the mission modules for littoral combat ships. The long endurance, semi-autonomous, diesel-powered boat has been tested with Raytheon’s AQS-20 and Northrop Grumman’s AQS-24 mine-hunting sonars.

“We have three

vehicles operational in the water,” Small said. In 2019, all three were operated with three different payloads – a suite payload and the two different towed sonars. Testing was done in different locations on the East, West and Gulf coasts, sometimes simultaneously in multiple locations. “We have accrued just shy of 900 hours of on-water operational time deploying this payload in 2019,” Small said.

Additionally, PMS 406 conducted integration tests with the LCS and two different vessels of opportunity – a U.S. expeditionary sea base and a British amphibious platform.

Small said formal developmental testing and operational assessment of the suite variant of the MCM USV was completed in late November. “That was a major milestone for us, and we are rapidly nearing a milestone C decision and the award of low rate production,” Small said.

Progress also continued with the Knifefish Unmanned Undersea Vehicle (UUV), another counter-mine package for the LCS, completed formal testing and operational assessment in August. “We’ll continue low rate production of that throughout [fiscal 2020],” Small said, adding the Navy will continue additional development and testing of the General Dynamics-made, medium class UUV to demonstrate the full capability of the mine counter measures mission package.

PMS 406 – a unit of Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants, which oversees the littoral combat ship and

its mission modules and related systems – also develops unmanned maritime vehicles, both surface and undersea, for three different warfare domains: unmanned expeditionary, unmanned undersea and unmanned surface, “our most rapidly growing warfare domain,” Small said.