Lack of Well Deck Seen as a Wash for LHA USS America



PACIFIC OCEAN (Feb. 1, 2018) An MV-22 Osprey helicopter assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 161 (Reinforced) aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) lands on the flight deck.

ARLINGTON, Va.— The transfer of the new amphibious assault ship USS America to the Forward-Deployed Naval Force (FDNF) next fiscal year will bring a change in capabilities to the 7th Fleet's amphibious ready group, but the Marines that will go on patrol on America will be able to adjust to the changes and maintain a similar level of combat capability.

America (LHA 6) is scheduled to replace USS Wasp (LHD 1) as the "bog-deck" amphib deployed to Sasebo, Japan. The major difference in the two ships is that America lacks a well deck, a feature on all earlier LHAs and LHDs that can float landing craft and amphibious assault vehicles.

The America and its soon-to-be commissioned sister ship Tripoli were designed to be more aviation-centric. The trend was reversed with the third ship of the class, the future Bougainville, which will have a well deck.

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the 31st MEU, which deploys on the ships of the Sasebo-based amphibious ships, differs from other MEUs in that it does not include M1A1 tanks in its load-out.

"I do not possess tanks, because we don't have tanks on Okinawa," said Col. Robert Brodie, commander of the 31st MEU, speaking April 23 to the Potomac Institute in Arlington of the 31st MEU's patrol in the Western Pacific in early 2019.

With somewhat of a lighter load, the 31st MEU will have less

of a problem handling the unit’s equipment of the America-centric amphibious ready group (ARG).

Brodie said his staff already is looking at the optimum way to configure the MEU’s equipment load-out to best operate from the America. The ship’s lack of a well deck means that three fewer landing craft – LCACs or LCUs – would be carried by the ships of the ARG.

Brodie is optimistic that the increased aviation capacity of the America could make up for the loss of a well deck. The America would more easily accommodate 12 MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft rather than the 10 that the Wasp typically carried. The two additional Ospreys would add to the overall airlift capability that could make up for some of the loss of lift by landing craft, especially without the requirement to accommodate tanks.

The America’s increased aviation capacity also would enable the America to deploy with perhaps as many as eight F-35C Lightning II strike fighters instead of six as on the Wasp. The additional MV-22Bs also would make the eventual installation of an aerial refueling hose on one or more of the MV-22Bs a plus for the range and endurance of the F-35.

The air combat element of the 31st MEU also normally deploys with four CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters on board the Wasp, in addition to the three Navy MH-60S armed helicopters. The four AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters and three UH-1Y Venom utility helicopters are normally staged on the amphibious platform dock ship and dock landing ship of the ARG.