

Ship Clips - July 19th, 2011

A compilation of
articles concerning the Shipbuilding Industry

From the
Congressional Shipbuilding Caucus

Tuesday, July 19th, 2011

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Lawmakers Grill Navy over Maintenance
Funding Shortfall

Panel questions
budget priorities as readiness weakens service

As
the surface fleet's material readiness languishes for the third straight year,
ship repairs "came out short a few hundred million dollars," a Navy
logistics official said in testimony before Congress on July 12.

At that hearing,
data showed that the number of ships receiving a grade of "degraded"
during material inspections has doubled, from four in 2009 to eight in 2010.

Only
halfway into this calendar year, the fleet has seen two failing grades from the
Board of Inspection and Survey - the same number of failures the Navy had in
all of 2010.

Given these
results, lawmakers asked two Navy three-stars to explain why the service had
not fully funded ship maintenance in its 2012 budget request, which projected
significant gaps.

"When
you take that five-year stretch from 2007 to 2011 and we see the curve of
failures going up, not down, that has to be concerning," said Rep. Randy

Forbes, R-Va., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's readiness subcommittee, in a July 13 interview.

"As we put off our maintenance more and more, we're going to have more and more failures take place."

The House recommended the \$367 million maintenance shortfall be fully funded in the House defense appropriations bill. The bill has passed the chamber, but it must go through several more steps before becoming law.

Overall, data show that INSURV results are better than in 2008, when four ships failed, but this upswing is at least partially due to increased funding for pre-inspection preparations such as assistance work and training, Navy leaders have said.

The additional funding is unsustainable, leaders said. "What we're seeing is that we have steadily in many areas - not all areas - we've improved the performance and part of it is due, quite honestly, to how we're preparing for it," Rear Adm. James McManamon, deputy commander of surface warfare at Naval Sea Systems Command, said in a July 1 interview.

"Now that raises the next question: Can I afford to keep spiking, in a sense, for INSURV ships? And I think the answer is no." McManamon said additional funding for inspection preps could be needed for as long as the next three years. Over the past two years, as fleet officials were heralding a renewed focus on ship maintenance, the amount of money they requested for upkeep was dropping. As part of the fiscal 2012 budget request, the service asked for \$7.3 billion for ship maintenance, roughly \$100 million less than last year despite a rise in the operational pace. At that level, nearly 6 percent of scheduled maintenance would go unfunded.

At the subcommittee hearing, Forbes asked why the Navy would try to put off \$367 million in ship maintenance if it was still struggling with INSURV failures.

"I'm not happy about the \$367 million," said Vice Adm. William Burke, deputy chief of naval operations for fleet readiness and logistics. "However, it was a decision that was made on a bunch of other priorities and ship maintenance came out short a few hundred million dollars. The impact of that is

significant. The impact is that we will go without approximately 40 availabilities."

Despite

admitting that "there's not a good justification for these shortfalls," Burke continued to assert that the Navy was meeting the operational demands of the combatant commanders. Forbes and some other lawmakers weren't persuaded. In an interview, Forbes pointed to the rising number of INSURV failures in the past five years.

"How

in the world do you say, 'We've got 22 percent failures in our INSURV inspections but we're going to have a \$367 million short-fall in the maintenance we do?' The average person looking at those just says, 'These two just don't add up,'" he said.

INSURV

failures aren't the only problem, Forbes said. Parts are being transferred from ship to ship at an alarming rate to allow for deployments and to pass inspections - a statistic the Navy refers to as a "cannibalization rate." In the first quarter of fiscal 2011, according to data the Navy provided to Congress, each attack submarine had an average of slightly less than one "cannibalization incident" each quarter. On surface combatants, 0.31 incidents are happening each quarter; the maximum accepted level is 0.28.

Classification

The

INSURV totals presented at the hearing had not previously been released, partly because Adm. Jon Greenert - the vice chief of naval operations and the nominee to succeed CNO Adm. Gary Roughead - classified INSURV results in late 2008.

At

the time, his spokesman argued that these detailed reports on a ship's material condition could aid the enemy. While the reports can be requested by the public, they are almost completely blacked out, preventing an independent assessment of the fleet's readiness.

Forbes

stopped short of calling on all of the inspection reports to be unclassified, but he said he was working to see whether sections of the individual reports could be publicly released. The timing of the classification was questionable, he added.

"If you look at the time period-of when they classified them, it's kind of interesting. It's because there was this big jump in the percentage of failures that were taking place," Forbes said. "That's a concern for me."

Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., also contends that portions of the Navy's INSURV results should be publicly released.

"I know the Navy may look at it and say, 'Oh well, it represents a weakness if somehow we're showing the failure rates,'" Wittman said in a July 14 interview. But, he added, "If we don't know where the problems are, then there's no way we can anticipate what to do to fix them."

Wittman, who is co-chair of the Congressional Shipbuilding Caucus, continued: "In the general sense, they need to be putting this out there."

(NAVY TIMES 25
JUL 11) ... Sam Fellman

Electric
Boat Gets USS Hartford Back To Sea

Repairs to damaged
sub total \$120 million

GROTON

- Repairing a severely damaged 17-year-old submarine with the technology Electric Boat uses to build modern subs was like reconstructing a Ford Model T in a Lexus shop. The Navy contracted with EB for about \$120 million worth of repairs to the USS Hartford after the Los Angeles-class submarine collided with a Navy amphibious ship in the Strait of Hormuz in 2009.

The Navy wanted the submarine back at sea as soon as possible - ideally, in one year. The repair team at EB knew the Hartford (SSN 768) had rolled about 85 degrees and damaged its sail, hull and port bow plane. But the destruction turned out to be far worse than expected. The sail leaned 15 to 20 degrees to the starboard side. Seventy-five percent of it was torn off. It would have to be removed to patch the hull. There would be no saving the sub if the Hartford did not keep its shape when welders cut into the hull to remove the damaged section, or after they patched it.

And the team discovered after the submarine was taken out of the water that the bow plane had caved in to the ballast tank. The masts and antennas weren't working because hydraulic fluid had shot through the system after the collision and damaged many valves.

"In my 38 years here, we have never worked on something of this magnitude, repairwise," said Stanley J. Gwudz, the director of ship's management who likened the repairs to reconstructing a Model T. This type of repair is "about as complex as they come," said Rear Adm. David M. Duryea, deputy commander for undersea warfare.

Retirees Share Knowledge

Because EB and its relatively young work force are set up for building today's Virginia-class submarines- not for major repairs to the aging Los Angeles class - some former employees came out of retirement to share their knowledge.

The trick was figuring out how to combine today's technology with yesterday's hand-drawn designs, some of which didn't match up. Daniel Vieira, the ship's manager for the repair project, laughed when asked how such a feat was accomplished.

"I lived it, and I'm not sure," Vieira said. "It was through a lot of pain. You know, you depend on a lot of people with a lot of experience and training to come back to you and say, 'This is right. This isn't. We need to fix this.'"

The biggest problem was that the sail had crushed into the pressure hull. It had

been 20 years since anyone in the shipyard had performed a major cut into a submarine's hull, the pressure-tight shell of a submarine, while maintaining the circularity of the ship. "The pressure hull is sacred ground," Vieira said. "It keeps water out. Anytime you have anything that penetrates the pressure hull, it's a big deal."

The half-moon shaped patch to fix the hull measured more than 150 square feet.

"It's very easy to get warping or misalignment or change the geometry with all the welding, which would have significant effects," Vieira said. "The ship is shaped that way for a reason."

Welders and shipfitters at EB's Quonset Point facility built a new sail using the modular construction techniques developed for the Virginia class. Years ago they would have had to fix the hull, then build the sail piece by piece on the submarine. The repairs could have taken years if each step were done in sequence, instead of at the same time, Gwudz said.

Useful Lessons Learned

Few vendors still make parts for Los Angeles-class submarines. In the crash, the bow plane was forced back into its locking mechanism, caving the structure into the ballast tank. A 16-inch diameter shaft bent 4 inches, but a new shaft wasn't available. So EB engineers incorporated the 4-inch bend into the design. A new, fully functional bow plane was built around the bent shaft to dive the sub.

The damaged valves were replaced. Testing at sea in January showed the repairs to be successful.

Gwudz could only recall one other repair job at EB where the level of damage on a submarine came close to the severity of the Hartford's. In the early 1980s, he said, a Los Angeles-class submarine needed its masts fixed and a patch underneath. The graving dock was secured for this confidential job and Gwudz said he was never told how the submarine sustained its damage.

EB

can now use what it learned working on the Hartford to repair other Los Angeles-class submarines more effectively, Gwudz said. The USS Alexandria (SSN 757) is at EB for routine maintenance.

Instead of taking a ventilation valve apart to see which of the older parts are corroded, for example, Gwudz said they will know to get new flappers or linkages because these parts were corroded on the Hartford. That gives vendors more time to make the parts so they are ready when EB needs them.

Robert

Hamilton, an EB spokesman, said the Hartford repair job "used 50 Connecticut suppliers with a total spend of \$3.5 million." The project took more than one million man-hours and the efforts of 450 people at its peak. The \$120 million price tag is less than 5 percent of what it would have cost to replace the Hartford with a new Virginia-class submarine.

"Everybody

in the Navy had a lot of confidence in EB and the NAVSEA team to execute the repairs," Duryea said, referring to the Navy command responsible for overseeing the construction and maintenance of the Navy's ships.

"Certainly we knew it would be a challenge, but EB does a very good job at executing complex work. This was just another example of the fine work they were able to do. "We needed this capability out in the fleet," Duryea said. "Hartford has a lot of good life left in her, and we wanted to get her back to sea."

Hartford At Fault

EB

originally built the Hartford at a cost of about \$900 million. The submarine returned to the Naval Submarine Base in February, nearly two years after the March 2009 crash and 18 months after arriving at EB.

The submerged

submarine and the USS New Orleans (LPD 18), a San Diego-based amphibious ship, had both been heading into port when the collision occurred.

The

fuel tank ruptured on the New Orleans, creating a 16-by-18-foot hole and spilling about 25,000 gallons of diesel fuel. Two ballast tanks were damaged. Navy investigators concluded the crew of the Hartford was at fault. The sub's leadership was called "ineffective and

negligent" and sailors were accused of falling asleep on the job, spending too much time away from their stations and chatting informally while working.

Vieira could see a silver lining in the task of repairing the Hartford. He said the repairs were an opportunity for senior employees to impart their knowledge to the younger ones so these newer employees will be able to help with work on the Los Angeles class in the future. Duryea agreed that there were technical lessons learned but, he said, "my only hope is we don't have to do these types of repairs again."

(NEW LONDON DAY
17 JUL 11) ... Jennifer McDermott

Defense Department Official Says Cuts to Aircraft
Carriers, Subs Are On The Table

A top Defense Department official said Thursday that the Navy is considering delaying a future aircraft carrier and cancelling a new class of ballistic missile submarines, two crucial shipbuilding programs for the Newport News shipyard. U.S. Marine Corps Gen. James "Hoss" Cartwright, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at a Washington breakfast that the Defense Department is "looking at all the options," to slash its budget by at least \$400 billion over the next decade, according to two media reports.

Aviation Week reported that Cartwright acknowledged the Pentagon is considering deferring the purchase of Newport News-built aircraft carriers and could look to cancel a future carrier as part of a plan to reduce the size of the carrier fleet.

His comments Thursday marked the first time a senior military official publicly acknowledged the cuts are being considered. Sources told the Daily Press and other publications over the last week that the Navy is weighing a one- to two-year delay of the \$10.3 billion John F. Kennedy carrier, the second ship of the Gerald R. Ford class, amid growing budget pressure.

Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc., the parent company of the 19,000-worker Newport News shipyard, is the nation's lone builder of aircraft carriers. Under current Navy plans, it is scheduled to receive the contract to build the Kennedy, the second carrier in the Gerald R.

Ford class, in fiscal year 2013, which begins next July.

Another program the Newport News shipyard hopes to play a role in building, a replacement class of ballistic missile submarines, also is in peril, Cartwright said.

The Navy's current plans are to start buying those submarines, which will replace the aging Ohio class, in 2019 at an expected cost of between \$5 billion and \$7 billion. But as part of early budget discussions, the Navy is considering scrapping that program in favor of a modified version of Virginia class submarines, smaller boats that are built in a partnership between the Newport News shipyard and General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn.

"It's certainly something that's being considered," Cartwright said, according to Aviation Week, a New York-based trade publication. "Nothing is off the table." Lt. Col. Cliff W. Gilmore, a Cartwright spokesman, said the general told reporters that the military will have to make some difficult decisions about "where we need to put our limited funds and resources" in light of expected cuts to the budget.

"The general's comments were along the lines of, 'because the budget is tight, it requires us to look at all (programs),' " Gilmore said. "At this point in the discussion, everything is on the table." Capt. Cate Mueller, a Navy spokeswoman, said the service does not comment on internal budget deliberations. Delaying the Kennedy would give the Navy flexibility in the short-term but is projected to raise the overall cost of the carrier by hundreds of millions of dollars.

The Navy's budget decisions are far from final, sources said this week, and deferring the Kennedy purchase is one of several budget maneuvers the service is considering. Word that the Navy's budget-writing team is considering a delay in the carrier caused a stir this week among Virginia's congressional leaders, who vowed to fight any proposals to scale back production of aircraft carriers in Newport News.

The shipbuilding program employs several thousand workers and pumps millions of dollars into the Hampton Roads economy. Jerri Dickeski, a Huntington spokeswoman, has said the company prefers to keep carriers on a five-year schedule. "We believe this is the most cost-efficient way to build these testaments of national purpose," Dickeski said. "We also support the (Navy's) commitment to a stable shipbuilding plan."

(NEWPORT NEWS DAILY PRESS 14 JUL 11) ... Peter Frost

Virginia Politicians Vow to Fight Delay In Newport News-Built Aircraft Carrier

U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes asked two top-ranking Navy admirals about a rumor he'd heard: that the Navy was considering deferring the purchase of the Newport News-built John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier by two years. The answer he received in a subcommittee hearing Tuesday - a beat of silence followed by a deflection - left him and other members of Virginia's congressional delegation unsettled.

"Whenever you see two admirals who are silent on a question, normally that's indicative of the fact that they really need to think about how to respond," said Forbes, R-Chesapeake, who chairs the Readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. "You had two admirals there who should know about this, and they looked at us with that deer-in-the-headlights look. That should give us all cause for concern," Forbes said.

The two admirals, Vice Adm. Kevin McCoy, commander of Naval Sea Systems Command, the Navy's shipbuilding and engineering arm, and Vice Adm. William R. Burke, deputy Chief of Naval Operations, declined to answer Forbes' question. McCoy deferred a formal response to Sean J. Stackley, assistant Navy secretary for research, development and acquisition.

While the Navy goes through great pains to keep its annual budget deliberations private, Forbes said he and other members of Congress expected that if the carrier delay wasn't on the negotiating table, the admirals would have been quick to dismiss it.

Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc., the parent company of the 19,000-worker Newport News shipyard, is the nation's lone builder of aircraft carriers. Under current Navy plans, it is scheduled to receive the contract to build the Kennedy, the second carrier in the Gerald R. Ford class, next year.

But amid its annual budget talks for fiscal year 2013, the Navy is weighing an option to hold off on buying the \$10.3 billion Kennedy until 2015, a move that would save the sea service money

in the short run but is projected to raise the overall cost of the carrier by hundreds of millions of dollars, sources told the Daily Press and other publications within the last week.

The sources, who requested anonymity to discuss internal Navy talks, said the option of delaying a carrier is one of several budget maneuvers the service is considering. The Navy has said it does not comment on internal budget deliberations.

Forbes and other members of Virginia's congressional delegation vowed to fight delaying the carrier, a move they say would be "foolish," "absurd" and "short-sighted" and have wide-ranging implications for the Newport News shipyard, its suppliers and for national security.

Virginia's politicians may have an ally in newly confirmed Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. During Panetta's confirmation hearing before the Senate, Sen. Jim Webb, a Democrat, "asked for and received an assurance that the secretary is committed to the growth of the Navy to 313 ships," said his spokeswoman, Allison Jaslow. "This commitment obviously would assume a carrier force of 11 aircraft carriers." Nonetheless, Forbes' hearing and talks of delaying the Kennedy this week got the attention of lawmakers in Hampton Roads.

"An extension would end up costing (the Navy) more than it would save, which would be an absurd thing to do," said Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, a Newport News Democrat whose district includes the shipyard.

"We're going to end up having to save money throughout the federal government, and the Defense Department will not be exempt from budget cuts," Scott said. "But as you cut, you want to do so in such a way that will actually save you money."

Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Westmoreland, the co-chair of the Congressional Shipbuilding Caucus, said a carrier delay would irrevocably harm an already-fragile industrial base, including the Newport News shipyard, and raise concerns about national security.

Wittman said it's critical that the United States has 11 active aircraft carriers to ensure that any six of them are deployable at any time. At a time when the Defense Department is preparing to slash \$400 billion in spending over 10 years, "most of us understand that the Navy has to ask themselves these tough questions," Wittman said. "But carriers fall on the side of

necessary and carriers on five-year build cycles are necessary."

Any effort to delay the carrier or push production to a seven-year cycle from five years is likely to be met with fierce resistance by the Virginia delegation and members of the House Armed Services Committee, said Wittman and fellow Hampton Roads Republican Rep. Scott Rigell.

A delay, Rigell said, would be "completely unacceptable" and put the Navy in direct conflict with a law that requires the sea service to maintain a fleet of 11 carriers. If the idea gains traction, "it would be met with a coordinated, bipartisan and vigilant effort ... by a broad coalition of those of us who understand the importance, value and contribution aircraft carriers bring to national security," Rigell said.

It also raises questions about the Navy's continued commitment to spend more than \$500 million to upgrade Naval Station Mayport in Florida to be able to accommodate nuclear-powered aircraft carriers by 2019, Rigell and Scott said.

Today, Norfolk is the home port for five East Coast-based aircraft carriers. The Navy has argued that moving a carrier to Florida would help mitigate any damage from of a terrorist attack, natural disaster or catastrophic accident. Any discussion of delaying construction of a carrier is an indication that the planned improvements at Mayport "are unwise, unnecessary and unjustified," Rigell said.

Scott called the Mayport upgrade "a waste of money."

Sen. Mark Warner, a Democrat, said the government "should think very carefully about tinkering with the Navy shipbuilding plan, which is currently maximized for efficiency. Historically, any breaks in the production line end up costing the taxpayers more money in the end."

(NEWPORT NEWS DAILY PRESS 14 JUL 11) ... Peter Frost

The 600-ton bridge and command center of the dry cargo ship USNS Medgar Evers was added to the vessel on Wednesday night when workers at General Dynamics NASSCO used cranes to position the heaviest "grandblock" on the ship. The section, known as Grandblock 563, is 118 feet long and 78 feet wide. It contains living accommodations as well as the bridge.

The company, located just south of the Coronado Bridge, said the heavy lift was overseen by crane operator Brian Gordon and riggers Charlie Coulon and Caeleb Bingham. NASSCO is on schedule to complete primary construction of the ship by October, which the vessel will be launched into San Diego Bay.

Medgar Evers is the 13th of the Lewis-and-Clark class dry cargo ships that have been built at NASSCO. The company recently laid the keel of the Cesar Chavez, which will be the last ship of that line. Work is also underway on the first Mobile Landing Platform, a new type of cargo pre-positioning ship that's being built by NASSCO.

(SAN DEIGO UNION-TRIBUNE 14 JUL 11) ... Gary Robbins

Two Never-Finished Navy Ships Head To Scrap Heap

They are the two ships no one wanted, almost constantly embroiled in one dispute or another for the past 25 years. The two Navy behemoths have never gone on a mission, were never even completed, yet they cost taxpayers at least \$300 million. Now the vessels, the Benjamin Isherwood and the Henry Eckford, are destined to leave Virginia waters for good and be scrapped at a Texas salvage yard, with no money coming back to the U.S. Treasury.

The Isherwood, stretching more than 660 feet, began its final journey this week, unceremoniously towed Tuesday from its mooring spot in the James River Reserve Fleet, also known as the "ghost fleet," near Fort Eustis in Newport News. Its destination: International Shipbreaking Limited in Brownsville, Texas, just above the Mexico border. There, the vessel will be cut up, its innards removed and disposed of, and its steel and other metals sold as recycled products.

The Eckford, of equal size, is scheduled to follow next Tuesday, leaving behind fewer than 20 junk ships in the ghost fleet, the smallest number since its inception during World War I. Once the two Navy oilers have departed, "it will close one of the saddest chapters in American shipbuilding and for that matter, federal fiduciary folly," wrote Joseph Keefe, a global maritime commentator, this week on the website MaritimeProfessional.com.

In seeing the two ships headed for a scrap heap, the U.S. Maritime Administration, which oversees ghost fleets in Virginia, Texas and California, also will close one of its most contentious disposal contracts - one that spurred environmental protests on both sides of the Atlantic, caused lawsuits over American toxic dumping, and drew condemnation by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. In 2003, the Maritime Administration announced a \$17.8 million contract with Able UK, a shipyard in northeastern England, to dismantle 13 ghost ships from Virginia.

Able UK, which had never demolished a ship before and did not have permits to do so at the time, also was to receive the Isherwood and Eckford as perks to sweeten the deal. Only four ghost ships arrived at the yard in Hartlepool, off the North Sea, the rest blocked by legal orders and political maneuvering. There they sat for nearly seven years before finally being recycled in late 2010, according to company and government officials.

Able UK won title rights to the Isherwood and Eckford after completing the work and took ownership in June, said Kim Riddle, a spokeswoman for the Maritime Administration, a branch of the U.S. Transportation Department. The theory was that Able UK would finish construction of the two oilers - they were 95 percent and 84 percent complete at the time - and sell them for big dollars to a NATO ally or another friendly country.

But because the oilers were single-hulled ships, instead of the modern double-hulled standard, "we concluded that recycling was the best option," said Peter Stephenson, Able UK's executive chairman, in a statement released Thursday.

Neither Able UK nor International Shipbreaking would disclose the details of their scrapping contract, saying a confidentiality agreement had accompanied the deal. And since the contract did not involve the Maritime Administration, the agency declined to comment as well.

The government wound up paying Able UK \$10 million to scrap the four ghost ships from Virginia, said Riddle, an exorbitant amount for ship disposal these days, as the market for recycled steel has climbed amid its demand in growing economies such as China and India.

The Isherwood and Eckford were part of an 18-ship class known as the Henry J. Kaiser fleet of replenishment oilers, titans that carry oil for Navy vessels around the globe. They were the only two that went unfinished, and were part of a 1985 budget request from the Navy for three oilers for a combined \$567 million, according to records.

The two were built at the Pennsylvania Shipbuilding Co. in Philadelphia, which defaulted on its Navy contract in 1989. The ships were then sent to Florida to be finished. But disputes over costs and materials in Tampa led to the termination of that contract in 1993, according to records. The Navy thought about turning the Isherwood and Eckford into ammunition ships, but that proved too expensive. In 1997, three years after the ships had been mothballed in the James River ghost fleet, the Navy cut its ownership ties. Since then, the two star-crossed ships have sat idle in the middle of the James - until this week.

(NORFOLK VIRGINIAN-PILOT 15 JUL 11) ... Scott Harper

Electric Boat to Lay Off 104 In September

Employee Total Still Higher, As 260 Engineers Joined Staff

Electric Boat will lay off 104 production workers - carpenters, pipefitters, machinists and sheet metal workers - on Sept. 9 as work on the USS Mississippi wraps up and some repair work being done at the yard is finished. Workers were told about the layoffs on Monday.

Even after the layoffs, Electric Boat will still have more employees in southeast Connecticut than it did a year earlier, because 260 engineering jobs have been added in the past year. The layoffs affect production and production-support workers at the Groton shipyard. "We have to align our workforce with our work requirements," said Bob Nardone, vice president of human resources and administration.

With just one submarine being built every other year, fluctuation in the Groton shipyard's workforce has been common. Next year, for the first time in many years, both Groton and Newport News will be finishing a submarine, creating the need for more production workers in Rhode Island, where the bulk of the sub interiors is done. There have been 270 production workers added there. As of June 30, Electric Boat had a total of 11,250 employees, including 8,550 in Groton - slightly higher numbers than the company projected in January.

(HARTFORD COURANT 12 JUL 11) ... Mara Lee

Huntington-Ingalls Yard Gets New Amphib Order

Huntington-Ingalls Industries' shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss., got a boost July 13 when the U.S. Navy awarded a \$98.6 million advanced procurement contract to buy long-lead items for a new amphibious ship.

The yet-to-be named LPD 27 will become the 11th ship of the San Antonio LPD 17-class of amphibious transport docks.

Huntington-Ingalls has built all the ships in the class, starting with construction of the San Antonio at its Avondale yard in New Orleans. The larger Ingalls yard in Pascagoula also has built units of the class, and the company will shift all LPD construction to Ingalls with the completion of LPD 25 at Avondale, which will then close. Ingalls is working to finish construction on the San Diego (LPD 22), the sixth ship of the class, scheduled to be delivered later this year.

Construction of the 11th ship had been a point of contention between the Navy and the Marine Corps. Although the Corps contended it needs 11 LPDs to meet its deployment and lift commitments, the Navy, citing budget pressures, had planned to halt procurement at 10 ships. Congress, however, decreed otherwise, and the 11th was added. Full construction funding of the ship is included in the 2012 budget request. The ships are intended to have a service life of 40 years.

(DEFENSE NEWS 13 JUL 11) ... Christopher P. Cavas

3 Frigates, Amphib to Leave Fleet In 2012

Three frigates and an amphibious transport dock are slated for inactivation in fiscal 2012, according to a Navy message outlining when the four ships will leave the fleet. Frigates Boone, Stephen W. Groves and John L. Hall will be sold to foreign militaries when they are decommissioned, according to the NAVADMIN released last Friday. Boone and Stephen W. Groves are slated for inactivation on Feb. 24, 2012; John L. Hall will leave the fleet soon after, on March 9.

Amphibious transport dock Ponce will be decommissioned March 30, 2012, and kept in the Navy's out-of-commission reserve, according to the message. Boone, Stephen W. Groves and John L. Hall were commissioned in 1982 as part of the Oliver Hazard Perry class of guided missile frigates. Ponce, an Austin-class amphibious transport dock, was commissioned in 1971.

(NAVY TIMES 18 JUL 11) ... Jill Laster