

Ship Clips - February & March 2012

A compilation of articles
concerning the Shipbuilding Industry

From the Congressional
Shipbuilding Caucus

February 2012

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1. New Floating Base Ships Coming For U.S. Navy

(DEFENSE NEWS 27 JAN 12) ... Christopher P. Cavas

Decades after the idea was broached for a floating, mobile base to support operating forces in the Persian Gulf, the concept has suddenly shifted into high gear, and a sense of urgency is driving both new U.S. ship construction and conversion of an existing vessel.

A new Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB) is mentioned almost in passing within the Pentagon budget briefing document made public Jan. 26. Development funding will be provided, the document said, for a new AFSB "that can be dedicated to support missions in areas where ground-based access is not available, such as countermine operations."

Elsewhere, under "industrial base skills," the documents noted that, "for example, adding the afloat forward staging base addresses urgent operational shortfalls and will help sustain the shipbuilding industry in the near-term and mitigate the impact of reducing ship procurement in the" budget.

What is all this verbiage code for?

"This fulfills a long-standing requirement from U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), going back to the Tanker Wars of the late 1980s," said Capt. Chris Sims, a spokesman for U.S. Fleet Forces Command in Norfolk, Va.

Sims was referring specifically to a recent decision to modify the amphibious transport dock ship Ponce - which had been scheduled to be decommissioned March 30 - into an interim AFSB able to support minesweeping MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters.

The ship will be operated jointly by active-duty Navy officers and Sailors, and by government civilian mariners employed by Military Sealift Command (MSC) - a hybrid crew similar to those used on the Navy's two submarine tenders and the command ship Mount Whitney.

Beyond the conversion, though, the Navy now plans to build at least one, and possibly two, AFSBs.

U.S. Navy officials would not publicly confirm the new construction, but sources confirmed the service plans to modify the Mobile Landing Platform (MLP) design to take on the AFSB role.

Three MLPs have been funded for construction at the General Dynamics National Steel and Shipbuilding (NASSCO) shipyard in San Diego. The ships are large, 765-foot-long vessels able to float off small landing craft, tugs or barges.

For the AFSB role, a fourth MLP hull would be modified with several decks, including a hangar, topped by a large flight deck able to operate the heavy H-53s in the airborne mine countermeasures role.

But the AFSB will also be able to carry Marines, support patrol and special operations craft, and fuel and arm other helicopters.

The ship is expected to be requested in 2014.

Sources also said the Navy might be considering modifying the third MLP to the AFSB mission. Construction of that ship, funded in the 2012 defense bill, is being negotiated between NASSCO and the Navy.

Conversion of the Ponce, meanwhile, is proceeding with alacrity. MSC issued requests for proposal (RFPs) on Jan. 24 to upgrade and refit the ship. Bids are to be submitted by Feb. 3, with work to begin in mid-month. The RFPs state that sea trials are to be carried out in mid-April.

The work includes upgrading the ship's navigation systems, bringing habitability up to MSC standards and general refurbishment. No flight modifications are planned at this time, said MSC spokesman Tim Boulay.

Fleet Forces Command also has begun solicitations for 50 Navy personnel to help man the ship in its special mission role.

The Ponce had returned to Norfolk from its final cruise Dec. 2, and crewmembers had already begun the inactivation process when the order came down to keep the ship running.

Use of the ship, Sims said, was "seen as an opportunity to fulfill that longstanding CENTCOM request."

2. Railgun Tech Takes A Step Towards Warship Reality

(MSNBC 01 FEB 12) ... John Roach

A war-ready electromagnetic railgun took a step closer to reality this week when the U.S. Navy awarded a defense contractor \$10 million to develop a piece of the power system needed to hurl projectiles at speeds up to 5,000 miles per hour.

The contract is the latest indication that the military is serious about developing the futuristic technology that would, for example, allow warships to hit targets up to 220 miles away in less than six minutes.

"The new system will dramatically change how our Navy defends itself and engages enemies while at sea," Joe Bondi, vice president of advanced technology for Raytheon's Integrated Defense Systems, said in a news release.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded Raytheon the contract on Monday.

Unlike traditional guns that use explosives to fire a shot, railguns employ an electromagnetic current to accelerate a projectile between a pair of electrically charged rails and out of a barrel, the Office of Naval Research explains.

Thus in addition to being able to reach targets from far out at sea, use of railguns would reduce the amount of explosives needed aboard ships.

A Navy prototype made headlines in December 2010 when it fired a projectile packing 33 megajoules of energy - the same kinetic force a 33-ton semi has while traveling at 100 miles per hour.

According to the Office of Naval Research, this is about half the energy envisioned for deployment at sea to reach distant targets.

In other words, the Navy needs to be able to generate a ton of energy and store it in confined space for railgun technology to work as envisioned.

Raytheon is working on a piece of this puzzle, a so-called pulse forming network, that allows electricity generated by the ship to be stored over several seconds and then sent it to the railgun to generate electromagnetic force.

Other hurdles include development of a gun that can withstand the considerable wear and tear of repeated use as well as the securing the funding required for further development.

If these hurdles are cleared, the Office of Naval Research notes, the railgun will be a "true warfighter game changer."

"Wide area coverage, exceptionally quick response and very deep magazines will extend the reach and lethality of ships armed with this technology."

To learn more about how railguns work, check out this explainer on How Stuff Works.

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3. Russia To Build 6 Submarines Annually - Deputy PM

(RIA NOVOSTI 02 FEB 12)

SEVERODVINSK - Russia will start producing six submarines and one aircraft carrier annually starting in 2013, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said on Thursday.

"By 2013, production capacity [at Russian shipyards] will allow us to build six submarines and an aircraft carrier every year," Rogozin told reporters, adding that the number includes both nuclear and diesel-powered submarines.

As a result, the production output will surpass that of the Soviet era when Russia built an average of five submarines annually, he said.

Rogozin earlier said the production had been bogged down in

the past by a lack of financing, outdated equipment and a shortage of skilled labor.

Russia is planning to build eight Borey class strategic submarines and up to 10 Graney class attack subs by 2020.

Disposal of Russian
Third Generation Nuclear Subs Suspended

Russia has decided to suspend the planned disposal of third-generation strategic nuclear submarines currently in service with the Navy, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said on Thursday.

"The most successful projects will undergo two repairs instead of one. The subs' period of service will be extended to 30-35 years instead of the current 25," Rogozin told journalists.

He also said Akula (Typhoon) class submarines will be upgraded and their electronics and armaments replaced every seven years.

According to Rogozin, this will help gain time until all eight Borey class strategic submarines are deployed by 2020.

The deputy premier also said a naval vessel construction development program for the next 30 years is expected to be worked out soon.

4. Russian Navy 30-Year Development Plan To Be Ready By June

(RIA NOVOSTI 06 FEB 12)

Russia will develop a detailed 30-year plan of strengthening its naval forces by June 2012, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin

wrote in his twitter account.

"A detailed 30-year plan of strengthening its naval forces will be developed by June 2012. The decision has already been made," Rogozin wrote on Sunday.

The state military program for 2012-2020 has allocated 4.7 trillion rubles (\$155 billion). Last year, 85 billion rubles (\$2.8 billion) was allocated on the construction of nuclear submarines, frigates, ship repair and maintenance. This year it expected to spend more than 93 billion rubles (\$3 billion).

It is planned that in the future the submarine fleet will become the basis of Russia's naval force. Over the next few years it will receive two types of nuclear submarines and two types of diesel-electric submarines. This is primarily a Borey-class nuclear submarine, the carrier of the new Bulava intercontinental ballistic missiles. Eight of these submarines are planned to be built. Russia's newest nuclear-powered submarine, the Yury Dolgoruky, is already undergoing sea trials; three more are in various stages of their completion.

5. Your Turn: Why America Needs Its Shipyards, Portsmouth Included

(UNION LEADER (NEW HAMPSHIRE) 06 FEB 12) ... Raymond J. Brown

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard should not be on the Base Realignment and Closure list. I do not say this because the yard is important to the economy of New Hampshire, though it is. And not because the yard has a proud record of on-time delivery, below cost, though it does. Nor because the yard is a fine homeport to three medium-endurance U.S. Coast Guard cutters, though that is quite true.

No, my reasons are much more important than that. It is a matter of national security.

The United States is a maritime nation, utterly dependent upon the sea for our way of life. Yet we are, without a fight, surrendering our seapower to other countries. We are losing our capacity to build and repair

ships.

In 1955, America had 1,072 U.S. flag merchant ships. Today there are 93. In 1955, the U.S. flag fleet tonnage represented a quarter of the world's merchant ships. Today it is two percent. Our merchant fleet - its building, repairing, and operating - has been outsourced to other countries.

Our citizenry owns an acute case of sea-blindness. We are the richest have-not country in the world. More than 90 percent of the world's trade is by water. The cars we drive, the clothes we wear and the coffee we drink all come to us in ships.

The only ships of any size being built in the United States are for the Navy and Coast Guard. These service fleets also have similarly shrunk considerably since 1955. Oh, I know the argument that our own Navy is still bigger than the next 13 combined. However, that says more about the willingness of other countries to let America do all the heavy lifting when danger looms. And there is also the mistake of thinking - and the U.S. Navy can be guilty of this, too - that navies exist to fight other navies. No. Navies exist to keep the sea lines of communication open.

Some among us can remember when there were large naval shipyards in Boston and Brooklyn. These people may also remember when civilian shipyards in Quincy and Boston would regularly overhaul destroyers. Those days and those shipyards and skilled workers are gone. And the same elegy can apply to southeastern waters and the West Coast. Most of the yards are gone and the skilled hands are aging.

For that reason the United States should retain Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, a place where ships can still be built and overhauled. Such knowledge and skills are not the purchase of a day and are more easily kept than developed. And having them in abundance is just as much a matter of national security as a squadron of F-16s or a Navy SEAL team.

America desperately needs all of its shipyards, including Portsmouth.

Raymond J. Brown is a retired U.S. Coast Guard captain from Londonderry.

6. Admiral Signals Navy Desire To Sustain Attack Submarine Production Level

(PROVIDENCE JOURNAL 07 MAR 12) ... John E. Mulligan

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Navy's top brass signaled support on Wednesday for efforts to avoid the planned slowdown of attack submarine production two years from now.

Under questioning by Rhode Island Democrat Sen. Jack Reed, the chief of Naval operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert, said the Navy is "looking for any fiscal means" to avoid cutting the production rate of Virginia-class subs from two vessels in fiscal year 2013 to a single vessel in fiscal year 2014.

Greenert's statement, echoed in prepared testimony by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, could be a significant boost for Electric Boat, the lead contractor of the Virginia class. The shipbuilder is a lynchpin of Southeastern New England's economy.

President Obama recently proposed a one-year submarine production rate cut.

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7. Congresswoman Wants Va.-Class Funding Restored

(DEFENSE DAILY 08 MAR 12) ... Mike McCarthy

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) said yesterday she will strive

to restore funding for the procurement of a Virginia -class (SSN 774) attack submarine that the Navy has delayed.

The Navy pushed the start of construction on one of the subs back from fiscal 2014 to 2018 when it rolled out its five-year procurement plan last month, but has not ruled out looking for ways to restore the funds.

The move comes as the service for the first time in more than 20 years got two of the ships under construction in the same year during fiscal 2011. As it currently stands, the Navy has only one sub on the books for 2014.

DeLauro, whose state is the home of sub builder General Dynamics Electric Boat, said delaying one of the vessels has the potential to weaken the industrial base and she will work to get the funding back into the budget.

"We will fight," DeLauro, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, told a gathering on Capitol Hill hosted by the Submarine Industrial Base Council.

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus told the House Armed Services Committee in February that the decision to delay construction on one sub was "purely" financial as the Pentagon tries to cope with a projected reduction of \$487 billion in defense funds over the next decade (Defense Daily, Feb. 17, 2012). Mabus also said, however, that the Navy would look for ways to get the funding for 2014.

"We are exploring ways that we can creatively pull that ship back. We cannot now because of budget constraints," Mabus said.

8. Submarine Contractors Lead Lobbying March Amid U.S. Defense Cuts

(BLOOMBERG NEWS 07 MAR 12) ... Roxana Tiron

The makers of submarines and the parts that go into them are bringing 300 executives and engineers to Washington to lobby Congress for money to develop components for new boats.

The defense lobbying season begins in earnest today, as the submarine contractors visit Capitol Hill and the aerospace industry presents a report citing its contributions to the economy. General Dynamics Corp. and its suppliers are preparing a congressional visit this month to seek backing for upgrading the Abrams battle tank, and Lockheed Martin Corp. is readying a fight against congressional cuts in a missile defense program.

The customary push by defense contractors to boost spending on weapons or to shield them from budget cuts comes this year amid increasing pressure to reduce the U.S. deficit, forecast by the Treasury Department at \$1.33 trillion. President Barack Obama's budget proposal released last month doesn't spare defense programs from spending cuts.

"Congress will certainly make adjustments to the president's defense funding request," Jeff Green, the president of J.A. Green & Company, a Washington-based lobbying and strategy firm, said in an e-mail. "The difference this year is those changes will come within a more constrained budget."

The Obama administration has proposed \$525.4 billion in military spending for fiscal 2013, \$45 billion less than projected a year ago, and lawmakers have deadlocked so far on efforts to avert an additional \$500 billion in automatic defense cuts over the next decade.

'Little Wiggle Room'

"There is very little wiggle room," Representative Duncan Hunter, a California Republican and member of the House Armed Services Committee, said in an interview.

That isn't deterring members of the Submarine Industrial Base Council who are seeking \$150 million for development of components for a new class of ballistic-missile submarines. While the Navy has requested \$565 million for research and development of the new submarine, the industry groups want added funds for components that would otherwise be delayed.

The group represents submarine builders General Dynamics of

Falls Church, Virginia, and Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc. of Newport News, Virginia, and about 5,000 other contractors, according to its website.

The submarine lobby also will press lawmakers to back the Pentagon's request for about \$100 million so that Virginia-class attack submarines can carry more Tomahawk cruise missiles made by Raytheon Co. of Waltham, Massachusetts, as well as missiles developed in the future.

"We really want to get to Congress and make certain they understand the significance of the strategic deterrence" provided by the new submarine, said Dan DePompei, the council's co-chairman and the Sudbury, Massachusetts-based product development manager for Dresser-Rand Group Inc.

General Dynamics plans to bring about 200 suppliers for its Abrams tanks to Capitol Hill at the end of this month, as it does annually. They will push to override the Army's plan to save money by suspending upgrades of Abrams tanks that would convert them to the latest M1A2 model. The Army wants to stop that work at a Lima, Ohio-based tank plant from 2013 to 2015.

General Dynamics "will ask for only an additional \$181 million, or 33 tanks," to fill the production gap and complement international orders, such as the Namer infantry fighting vehicle for the Israeli Army, according to Kendell Pease, General Dynamics' vice president of communications and government relations.

Aerospace Report

The Aerospace Industries Association, representing companies such as Lockheed Martin, Boeing Co. and Northrop Grumman Corp., will make its case for defense funding by releasing a study it commissioned from Deloitte LLP.

The report highlights the contribution that the aerospace and defense industry brings to employment, revenue and the gross domestic product. AIA said it plans to distribute the study to labor organizations, lawmakers and voters in all 50 states.

Marion Blakey, president of the trade group, has called the Obama administration's defense budget a "direct hit" on American defense and aerospace workers.

Instead of lobbying for more money than requested, Lockheed Martin is seeking to protect the Pentagon's proposal to provide \$401 million as a final year of funding for a missile defense program that the Bethesda, Maryland-based company is developing with Italy and Germany.

Lawmakers led by Senator Mark Begich, an Alaska Democrat, want to terminate all funding for the Medium Extended Air Defense System, or Meads.

The \$4.2 billion development program is managed from Orlando, Florida, by Meads International Inc., a joint venture of Lockheed, Lfk-Lenkflugkoerpersysteme GmbH of Germany and MBDA of Italy. MBDA is jointly owned by BAE Systems Plc, European Aeronautic Defence and Space Co. and Finmeccanica SpA.

Lockheed will cite its successful first test flight to make the case for funding, Marty Coyne, director of business development for Meads International, said in an interview.

Lawmakers on congressional armed services committees say the industry groups gearing up to lobby them shouldn't expect much give in the defense budget.

Republican Representatives Howard P. "Buck" McKeon of California, who heads the House Armed Services Committee, and Todd Akin of Missouri, a senior member of the panel, are pressing the House Budget Committee to increase the Pentagon budget over Obama's request.

Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, an Ohio Republican, said Feb. 29 that he was concerned about "arbitrary and deep cuts" to the defense budget and may have to win support for more money from his panel members.

'More Anti-Defense'

"The budget committee has a lot of people who are not strong on defense, so as a committee it is a little more anti- defense than pro-defense," Akin, also a member of the budget committee, said in an

interview.

Nor are lawmakers making progress in averting the automatic defense cuts that would begin in January because a congressional supercommittee failed to meet deficit-reduction goals, according to Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"It will happen, I predict, after the election," Levin, a Michigan Democrat who calls for added revenue as part of any solution, said in an interview.

Republicans McKeon and Hunter have sponsored legislation to avert automatic cuts in both defense and non-defense spending next year by trimming government payrolls through attrition.

House Speaker John Boehner, an Ohio Republican, may insist on finding ways to reduce the federal deficit by \$1.2 trillion to avoid all of the automatic cuts over a decade, rather than rely on short-term plans, according to Hunter.

"The speaker has said that he'll let things play out," Hunter said in an e-mail. "Any effort to protect the defense budget from even deeper cuts deserves attention, but there's an uphill fight with the president and Senate leaders closing the door to workable alternatives."

9. Shipbuilding Slide

Panetta lays out five-year defense budget cut details

(SEAPOWERS MAGAZINE MARCH 2012) ... Richard R. Burgess

Some U.S. Navy and Marine Corps acquisition programs will be affected by slowdowns in procurement during the next five years and the fleet and the Corps will be downsized, but budget plans reflect the standing of the services in the new defense strategy rolled out earlier in January by President

Barack Obama.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta put forth his budget priorities and offered some detail of the spending cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011 in advance of the Feb. 13 roll-out of details of the fiscal 2013 budget request.

The 2013 Defense Department budget proposes \$525.4 billion in spending, plus \$88.5 billion in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) spending. The portion of the base budget for the Department of the Navy (DoN) is \$155.9 billion, \$900 million less than appropriated for 2012. The DoN's OCO request is \$14.2 billion, compared with \$15.7 billion allocated for 2012.

The Navy will be reduced by 6,200 Sailors over the next five years to a level of 319,500 personnel, according to budget documents.

In a briefing to reporters Jan. 26 at the Pentagon, Panetta described some of the program terminations, cuts and delays that are designed to meet the target of \$259 billion in defense spending reductions required in the next five years, the first installment of the \$487 billion in reductions required over the next decade.

The current force level of 11 aircraft carriers and 10 carrier air wings will be sustained under the plan, Panetta said, noting that the Navy must "retain the most flexible, versatile and technologically advanced platforms needed for the future."

No cuts would be made in the current level of nine large-deck amphibious assault ships, the type that launched strikes last year against Libya by AV-8B Harrier short-takeoff/vertical-landing aircraft. However, the start of the third America-class amphibious assault ship, LHA 8, would be delayed one year. Two dock landing ships would be retired early and their planned replacement design, LSD(X), delayed to beyond the five-year Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP).

According to the "Defense Budget Priorities and Choices January 2012" document that was released at Panetta's briefing, the next-generation ballistic-missile submarine, the Ohio Replacement SSBN, will be delayed two years "without undermining our partnership with the [United Kingdom]. While this delay will create challenges in maintaining current at-sea presence requirements in the 2030s, we believe the risk can be managed."

In other delays, the procurement of one Virginia-class attack submarine (SSN), two Littoral Combat Ships (LCSs) and eight Joint High Speed Vessels (JHSV) will slide to beyond the FYDP.

The slide of the Virginia SSN could complicate the Navy's hard-won cost-reduction achievement that enabled the annual production rate of the subs to increase to two. Recognizing the importance of maintaining critical maritime access in vital regions of the world, Panetta said the Navy "will invest in a design that will allow new Virginia-class submarines to be modified to carry more cruise missiles and develop an undersea conventional prompt-strike option."

No details of how the Virginia SSN would be modified were given, but it could include additional hull sections featuring the new Virginia Payload Tube designed for the Block III version of the SSN.

Panetta did not say whether the slide of two LCSs and eight JHSVs was a delay or a cut in the procurement goal. The Navy has procured, or has under contract, a total of 24 LCSs of a planned buy of 55 ships. Ten planned JHSVs are under construction or contract options.

The largest cut in terms of existing ships involves seven Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers - six of which lack a ballistic missile defense (BMD) capability - that will be retired early. The seventh possesses BMD capability but is in need of costly hull repairs. The retirements will leave the Navy with 15 cruisers and set back its efforts to achieve a 313-ship fleet and sustain a surface warfare cruiser and destroyer force.

"I am deeply concerned by the cuts announced by the secretary of Defense," Rep. Todd Akin, chairman of the House Armed Services seapower and projection forces subcommittee, said in a Jan. 26 release. "Only a few weeks ago, the president announced a 'pivot' to Asia, with a focus on Navy and Air Force power. However, today the secretary announced that he is cutting at least 12 new Navy ships over the next five years and retiring at least nine ships earlier than planned. It is stunning that the president would announce a strategy and then cut the Navy that will be called on to execute this strategy."

"I am also concerned by the announced delays to the Ohio-class replacement program," Akin said. "Our nuclear missile submarines are a vital piece of our nuclear deterrence, and I am concerned that this delay will put our ability to deter at risk."

A yet unspecified number of combat logistics and fleet

support ships would be cut under the proposal. These ships are operated by the Military Sealift Command.

Panetta said the Defense Department would protect the ongoing procurement of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer and its participation in the Phased Adaptive Approach to BMD for Europe.

Special operations forces and sea-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, such as those of the Fire Scout unmanned aerial system (UAS), would be protected from cuts. Although the Air Force's Block 30 version of the Global Hawk UAS will be terminated, the cancellation would enable the Defense Department to better sustain other Global Hawk programs, such as the Navy's MQ-4C Broad-Area Maritime Surveillance (BAMS) system.

Panetta did not address naval aviation programs for the most part, the exceptions being the F-35 Lightning II and BAMS.

All three versions of the F-35 would be continued, but procurement "would be slowed to complete more testing and make developmental changes to minimize concurrency issues before buying in significant quantities," Panetta said.

He took the Marine Corps' F-35B short-takeoff/vertical-landing version off "probation" last month.

The Joint Air-Ground Missile, currently under competition between Lockheed Martin and a Raytheon-Boeing team as a replacement for the Hellfire, Maverick and Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided missiles, will be substantially reduced, with "limited funding sustained to enable lower-cost alternatives such as Hellfire," the defense budget document said.

The active-duty Marine Corps would be reduced from 202,000 to 182,100, a somewhat smaller force than the 186,800 recommended by the service's force structure review conducted in late 2010. Marine Reserve forces would be protected from cuts.

Over the next five years, the Marine Corps "would eliminate one infantry regiment headquarters, five infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, four tactical air squadrons and one combat logistics battalion," the budget documents said.

Panetta said the Corps would be a "middleweight expeditionary force with reinvigorated amphibious capabilities."

"We have acknowledged the changing nature of the battlefield by increasing our contribution to special operations and cyber warfare, and have lightened the Marine air-ground-logistics task forces by reducing the number of heavy armor and artillery units, and through streamlining our organizational hierarchy," Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James F. Amos said in a Jan. 30 release.

"With a force structure of 182,100, our reshaped Marine Corps is able to accomplish the missions of the new Defense Strategic Guidance while keeping faith with our Marines, Sailors and their families," he said. "I am confident that we will be able to maintain our legendary high standards of training, education, leadership and discipline while supporting joint force capabilities across the full spectrum of operations."

Lt. Gen. Dennis J. Hejlik, commanding general of Marine Forces Command, told reporters at a Jan. 31 Defense Writers Group breakfast in Washington that the lower number of Marines probably will mean cutting one more infantry battalion and reducing the light armored reconnaissance units. Marine Special Operations Forces also will not get all of the additional personnel and capabilities that had been planned, he said.

Hejlik and Adm. John C. Harvey Jr., commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, acknowledged at the breakfast that the early retirement of two dock landing ships will reduce the amphibious force further below the required force level of 33 amphibious warfare ships. However, they noted that today's "gators" are more capable, with Hejlik citing the ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles and the MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft that are operating from the ships.

The proposed reductions threaten the Navy's long-held goal of a 313-ship, but details await the release of the 2013 budget. Harvey said that whatever the force level is, he will ensure every deploying ship is fully manned, equipped and trained.

Harvey noted that Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert, the chief of naval operations, has declared there will be "no hollow flags" in the Navy, despite the budget cuts.

During a Feb. 4 all-hands session with Sailors and Marines aboard USS Wasp off the coast of North Carolina, Greenert did say the active fleet should be about the same size as today's 285-ship force at the end of the FYDP in 2017, but the makeup will be different.

Greenert noted that while retired ships would be gone, ships removed from the future construction plans are not an immediate loss.

"We have a lot of ships in the ship construction plan and they will be delivered over time. So the fleet will look about the same in 2017, in actual numbers, as today," he said.

The Defense Department will fund a new afloat forward base that can support missions where "ground-based access is not available," Panetta said.

Harvey said the amphibious transport dock ship USS Ponce, once scheduled for decommissioning in March, will be retained in service and used as a support ship for mine countermeasure ships and coastal patrol ships in the Persian Gulf. Ponce is expected to be ready for deployment in June and fill a long-standing requirement from Marine Corps Gen. James N. Mattis, commander, U.S. Central Command, Harvey said.

Ponce, which participated in operations against Libya in 2011, will be the Afloat Forward Staging Base (Interim), Harvey said. One of the three Montford Point-class mobile landing platform ships being built by General Dynamics NASSCO will be modified as a replacement for Ponce.

Harvey acknowledged that the modifications to Ponce would allow it to support special operations forces and conduct other support missions. The budget also will support basing LCSs in Singapore and patrol craft in Bahrain.

Panetta said Obama will request that Congress authorize two new rounds of the Base Realignment and Closure process - one in 2013 and one in 2015 - to identify further cuts.

Up to five new submarines are scheduled to be based at Pearl Harbor, offsetting an expected decline in surface ships

(HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER 03 MAR 12) ... William Cole

Navy plans over the next two years call for an increase in the number of submarines based at Pearl Harbor or coming for shipyard work, with up to five more subs being added to Hawaii's 19-boat fleet, U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye's office said.

Among the additions planned are two more Virginia-class attack submarines - one in fiscal year 2013 and another in 2014, Inouye's office said.

Over the next two years, Pearl Harbor's surface fleet total will dip to nine from 11 ships, but the additional submarine presence would make up for it, with 30 ships and subs combined, growing to 31 next year and 33 the year after, the Hawaii Democrat's office said.

The Navy gave assurances that there will be no negative effects on the shipyard workload over the next 10 years, Inouye's staff said.

Each ship and submarine home-port change means millions of dollars to the local economy in salaries, spending and repair work. Robert Lillis, president of the International Association of Machinists Local 1998, which represents mechanics in Hawaii's private ship repair industry, said, "Submarine work is good work. It's the kind of jobs you want - well-paid, highly technical jobs."

But he's also concerned about a projected reduction in the number of surface ships at Pearl Harbor.

About 90 percent of the work done at the shipyard here is on submarines. The Navy yard is the largest industrial employer in the state, with a combined civilian and military workforce of more than 4,900 and an economic impact of \$907 million a year.

Private contractor BAE Systems Hawaii Shipyards performs surface ship jobs for the Navy at Drydock 4 using a workforce here of about 650.

The ship-basing plan discussed by Inouye's office "is good for the Navy yard, but it's not good for the private sector because they don't do submarine work," Lillis said.

Two more 377-foot Virginia-class submarines, at a cost of more than \$2 billion apiece, would be added to the three already here: the USS Hawaii, USS Texas and USS North Carolina.

The additions would further build up in Hawaii what is already the greatest concentration of Navy submarines in the Pacific. The Navy said no submarine retirements are planned out of Pearl Harbor over the next two fiscal years.

"What the submarines (provide) is a forward-deployed presence that's not visible, and it's part of our air-sea battle strategy, which is about having an invisible force that's capable of moving forward close to targets in the theater and not being necessarily susceptible to (military threats from) China," said Brad Glosserman, executive director of the Pacific Forum Center for Strategic and International Studies in Honolulu.

The submarines make port calls, which makes their presence known. However, Glosserman said allies in Asia and the Pacific would prefer an even more visible U.S. military presence as a sign of commitment to the region.

The Virginia-class submarines, the Navy's first major combat ship designed for a post-Cold War environment, have six side-mounted sonar arrays, plus arrays in the bow and sail, improving the ability to operate in the littorals, or coastal waters.

Sub commanders say the big question used to be how fast and deep a submarine could go, but what's most important now is how slow and shallow they can go in the littorals, where foreign diesel electric subs operate.

Inouye's office said it was not sure which two new Virginia-class subs would be added at Pearl Harbor.

The Navy plan for Hawaii calls for the retirement of the cruiser Port Royal and an unidentified frigate in 2013, and the addition of one Virginia-class submarine and two other subs - one from Groton, Conn., and the other from Guam, the senator's office said.

Groton has 16 submarines that are a combination of older Los Angeles-class and newer Virginia-class attack submarines, while Guam will soon have three attack subs.

Fiscal year 2014 would bring a new destroyer, the Michael Murphy, named after a Pearl Harbor-based SEAL and Medal of Honor recipient who was killed in Afghanistan in 2005; the retirement of the cruiser Chosin; and arrival of two subs: one Virginia-class and one unidentified from Groton, according to Inouye's office.