Admiral: Navy Needs Steady Course on Unmanned Underwater Vehicles

Sailors assigned to Coastal Riverine Squadron 3 and the expeditionary mine countermeasure company of Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit 5 retrieve a MK 18 Mod 2 unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) during a transit through the Northern Mariana Islands in this August 2020 photo. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cole C. Pielop

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is pushing hard to field more and different types of operational unmanned undersea vehicles (UUVs) but needs a steady-growth approach to match technology with testing and training.

The UUV progress is "very promising and we just need to hold the course but not go so fast that we're buying systems that aren't ready and aren't tested," said Rear Adm. William Houston, director of Undersea Warfare in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV), speaking Nov. 18 in a webinar for the annual symposium of the Naval Submarine League.

Houston said the Navy has progressed from a UUV detachment to full UUV squadron that is fully manned, with "four times the manning of a typical submarine squadron" with detachments on each coast.

"We have at Port Hueneme [California] a test facility so we are fully moving forward on the testing and innovation," Houston said. "One thing we're working with industry is we want to get the prototypes tested and let those smart Sailors say what works and what doesn't work and move on from there. Our concern right now is we are going so fast that we want to go into production right away. We have to … get the

requirements right. If you put on too many requirements, we will delay the testing [by] Sailors. We're working through that. We've got great support from OPNAV."

Addressing UUV operations with submarines, Houston said that working with smaller UUVs has had "great success. [Submarine Force Pacific] is really leading the way with the UUV [squadron] out there. They've done a lot of significant testing based on where they're at and we've had some very promising results, both with ROVs [Remotely Operated Vehicles] and UUVs. We're at the point now where we've gone over some of the launch and recovery issues on the smaller-size [UUVs].

Houston said he also is "a big fan of ROVs. … So, we are putting additional emphasis on ROV while supporting the UUV portfolio that we have."

He said the development of UUV technology and operations is going in "fits and starts, and it's tough technology, but we are partnered with the best in industry and we're leveraging every source that we can."