Admiral: Submarine-Launched UAS Proving ‘Awesome Capability’

The Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Annapolis (SSN 760), which has demonstrated a submarine-launched unmanned aerial system. U.S. Navy / Petty Officer Virginia Schaefer
ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has developed and demonstrated a submarine-launched unmanned aerial system (SLUAS) for beyond line-of-sight targeting solutions and deployed it to the fleet in September 2020, the Navy’s submarine procurement admiral said.

Rear Adm. Dave Goggins, program executive officer for Submarines, speaking Nov. 18 in a webinar for the annual symposium of the Naval Submarine League, said the SLUAS was “a pretty awesome capability to provide to the fleet.”

Goggins said in a PowerPoint briefing that mid-tier acquisition authorities approved in March 2019 were used to begin the project in May 2019. Three demonstrations were conducted in 2019 and 2020. Initial operational capability was achieved in September.

Only eight months after the project was started, the Navy conducted an at-sea demonstration of the SLUAS from the Los Angeles-class SSN USS Annapolis, launching them “from periscope depth, control them out to tactically significant ranges – well beyond the line of sight,” Goggins said. “By doing so she was able to target and conduct a rapid simulated torpedo attack against a participating surface ship, in case the USS Charleston, pretty much at near-maximum effective range of that torpedo, by flying that UAV to obtain a fire-point solution after gaining that initial sonar gain.”

Another demonstration was conducted against a surface ship and a land site. So far, 21 SLUAS UAVs have been employed in demonstrations. The Defense Innovation Unit, which partnered with non-traditional industry companies to reduce cost and enhance capability, completed final flyoffs in July.

“I have five SLUAS shipsets in the fleet today and we will continue to deliver this capability,” Goggins said. “We’re really working on the evolution of that capability going forward.”