

Marine Heading Navy's Expeditionary Warfare Unit Wants to Keep Amphibs Mobile and Enemies Guessing



Jarred Kinder, an engineer at Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division, discusses mine countermeasures technology with Maj. Gen Tracy W. King, director of expeditionary warfare (OPNAV N95) during a familiarization tour Jan. 22. U.S. Navy / Eddie Green

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps general who heads the U.S. Navy's expeditionary warfare directorate says his top priority is the acquisition of the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) for future operations by a highly mobile and distributed deterrent force.

The LAW is designed to complement and fill a gap in capability between the Navy's large, multi-purpose amphibious warships and shorter range landing craft, Maj. Gen. Tracy King said Jan. 12 at the Surface Navy Association's virtual symposium.

King said the LAW will be a force multiplier allowing naval forces to maintain a persistent but mobile presence to deter adversaries. "We're going to be able to stay there. Think of a lily pad," he added.

LAW is being designed as an affordable, low signature, high endurance, shore-to-shore vessel that can run up on the beach, "capable of operating independently, or in collaboration with other service warships and platforms and naval task forces," the general said.

He added that LAW was leveraging commercial support vessel design elements. The new amphib would resemble a 21st century

version of the World War II Landing Ship Medium (LSM) landing craft. "Think 300-to-400 feet long, about 2,000 tons, long-range, endurance, with a mission bay full of whoop ass," King said.

LAW is not an auxiliary, connector or forcible entry platform, said King. "It is a combatant that will enable persistent presence and enhanced tactical ability in the pursuit of sea denial," he said, adding "We're going to capitalize on the benefits of mass without the risk of concentration."

On a related issue, arming large amphibious warships with anti-ship missiles to be fired by embarked Marines, King said "Do we need to put fixed launchers that look like something on an LCS? No, I don't think so." But he didn't see why the containerized weapons systems traveling with the Marines couldn't be made available to the ship's captain. "To me, that's what the future looks like. If we proliferate the battlefield and the battlespace with these systems, then we keep the enemy guessing as to who's got what."

The concept of a light amphibious warship has been gaining ground since Gen. David H. Berger, the commandant of the Marine Corps, said the Navy needed to broaden its family of amphibious warfare ships. A more distributed, survivable force was needed to operate in a future high-intensity conflict with a peer competitor, Berger maintained.

"It's no secret the next fight is going to have a distinct maritime flavor," King said during a joint appearance at the Surface Navy event with Rear Adm. Paul, Schlise, the director of the Navy's surface warfare division.

Schlise said his top priority was completing the first Flight III Arleigh-Burke class guided missile destroyer, DDG-125, the USS Jack Lucas. The 75th ship in the Arleigh Burke line is "really the first ship of the future surface architecture," Schlise said. The ship is 44% complete and on track to be

commissioned in 2023. DDG-125 will serve as a bridging platform to a future large surface combatant, DDGX, the admiral said.