Moton Sets Fiscal 2021 Priorities for Navy's Unmanned and Small Combatants

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Navy's program executive officer for unmanned and small combatants (PEO USC) has set an ambitious plan to push development of the systems in his portfolio on the eve of fiscal 2021.

Rear Adm. Casey Moton, speaking Sept. 30 at a Special Topics Breakfast webinar sponsored by the Navy League of the United States, said his PEO is excited to be overseeing the introduction of five new classes of warships over the next few years: the FFG(X) New Guided-Missile Frigate, the Large Unmanned Surface Vessel (LSV), Medium Unmanned Surface Vessel (MUSV), Orca Extra-Large Diameter Unmanned Underwater Vehicle (XLUUV) and Snakehead Large-Diameter Unmanned Surface Vehicle (LDUUV).

Moton set six major program priorities of advancing current systems and introducing new systems.

Continue steady execution of littoral combat ship (LCS) building. This includes starting construction of the last two LCSs, laying keels for three LCSs, launching and christening of three ships, and commissioning four ships. Five additional ships will transition from post-delivery phase into sustainment.

"I will continue to expect improvement in cost and schedule," he said.

Field the LCS Antisubmarine Warfare (ASW) Mission Package. The variable-depth sonar (VDS) had been deployed on an LCS in 2020 and is in testing, which is expected to be completed on the

Freedom-variant LCS, allowing achievement of initial operational capability in 2021 and the beginning of testing on the Independence-variant LCS.

“The [VDS] is detecting and tracking submarines now, and its critical offensive ASW capability will be ready to field on LCS, ” Moton said. “Our work on this resolution is critical because FFG(X) will operate this same VDS as part of its multi-mission capability.”

Complete Operational Test on Mine-Countermeasures (MCM) Systems and demonstrate them together on the LCS. Individual systems are being tested operationally first before the full package. The Airborne Mine Neutralization System and the Airborne Laser Mine-Detection System are fielded in the fleet. The Block 1 Knifefish UUV, the Unmanned Influence Sweep System and the Mine-Hunting USV will be tested in 2021. These ASW Mission Package systems also can be deployed on other vessels of opportunity.

“The package-level test is important as a demonstration of the system-level test that we’re doing now on and off LCS where we show that we can find and kill mines reliably,” he said. “FY ’20 was a big year, but FY ’21 is a critical year for us.”

To prove LCS reliability and maintainability. Moton the four production LCSs that deployed in fiscal 2020 “have been successful and accomplishing their missions in support of our fleets and combatant commands, but the reliability must improve. … Our focus in reliability is in key ship systems such as propulsion and controls, deck and handling systems and radars.”

Moton said a cross-functional LCS Strike Team has been formed to us a metrics-based approach “focused on availability drivers to generate and execute action plans … and on maintainability. … We want to ensure the Navy has the ability to better organically support the ships, including

improvements in Navy ability to troubleshoot, to source spare parts and to perform appropriate levels of maintenance ourselves."

Complete frigate detail design and prepare for production. "Fincantieri is well in progress on material procurement and they are executing their staffing plans. … Our team is preparing to conduct a thorough baseline review with the prime contractor to ensure we have a good baseline to track cost and schedule," Moton said.

Execute our unmanned systems prototyping and acquisition plans. "In the USV arena we are executing a robust prototyping plan using our sea-based prototypes in combination with land-based development and testing," he said. "By the end of FY '21, we will have four USV prototypes on the West Coast – two Overlord and two Sea Hunter-types."

Moton said the two current Overlord USVs will be moved to the West Coast "and execute a busy year of testing which includes autonomous [increasing longer] transits and development vignettes."

The Overlord USVs "will go through a full year of testing and experimentation, including government-furnished C4I payloads; combat system payloads; hull, mechanical and electrical upgrades, and with more complex autonomous behaviors."

Moton said that testing with the Sea Hunter "has been and will be critical. Out FY '21 plans include the use of Sea Hunter in multiple fleet exercises, tactical training events."

He said the Sea Hunter and Overlord USVs will be used to exercise manned ship control over multiple USVs, test command and control, perform as part of surface action groups, and train Navy Sailors on these platforms."

He also said the "Aegis Combat System is being adapted to make LUSV and MUSV part of our netted fleet."