

Navy Planning Major Combat System Upgrades to Littoral Combat Ships



An MH-60S Sea Hawk assigned to the “Wildcards” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 23 picks up pallets of food from Chilean Navy replenishment oiler CNS Almirante Montt (A0 52) to deliver to the Independence-class littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10) during a vertical replenishment Nov. 25, 2020. U.S. Marine Corps / Cpl. Camila Melendez

ARLINGTON, Va. – While grappling with reliability and maintainability of its littoral combat ships (LCSs), the Navy this year is planning major upgrades to the ships’ combat systems in 2023.

Rear Adm. Casey Moton, program executive officer for Unmanned and Small Combatants, speaking Jan. 15 at a webinar in the Surface Navy Association virtual symposium, said the LCSs “right now are starting to get Over-the-Horizon [for the RGM-184 Naval Strike Weapon) but starting in [fiscal 2023] they will get a more comprehensive update to improve their lethality and survivability. Design efforts are proceeding in earnest this year along with PEO IWS [Integrated Warfare Systems].”

The admiral said the current main focus of the LCS program is improving the reliability and maintainability of the ships.

“The bottom line is that the availability of the ships to the fleet commanders has not been what it needs to be in reliability areas such as propulsion, cranes, radars and some other areas,” Moton said. “We set up a strike team that is a cross-functional mix of our shipbuilders and sustainers and they are working very hard going after specific problems, an effort first looks at reliability to makes sure that we have

all the feedback from our recent deployments in terms of what systems need to be reworked.”

The admiral said the program also is “working hard to reduce the amount of time once a system does go down how long it’s going to take to get that system up.”

He said the team is “working with industry how to get the original equipment manufacturers out there where we need to get the repairs. The other aspect is to improve the Navy’s self-sufficiency.”

A specific focus of the strike team is the Freedom-class LCS’s combining gear, which is being looked at as a material issue.

“We’re very close to wrapping up a root-cause assessment,” he said. “Clearly, coming through that is going to be critical.”

Moton said the LCSs are proceeding well through trials.

Fabrication has begun on all but two LCSs, both Independence-class ships being built at Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama.