

Navy to Modify CVN 79 with F-35C Capability



An illustration of the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) is the second ship in the Gerald R. Ford class, the Navy's newest class of nuclear aircraft carriers. The ship's first steel was cut in Dec. 2010, and delivery to the Navy is scheduled no later than 2022. U.S. Navy / Newport News Shipbuilding

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy on Nov. 2 announced F-35C modifications to the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) under a contract structure now in place to deliver the second USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) aircraft carrier, employing a single-phase acquisition strategy, instead of two-phase, as originally planned.

“Shifting to single phase and incorporating the F-35C modifications will enable the delivery of a more capable and lethal carrier,” said James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition. “Initiating this work now will build on the lessons learned from USS Gerald R. Ford to maintain the optimal construction timeline for the shipyard and to avoid inefficiencies.

“From the shipbuilder's and Navy's perspective, this is the most efficient and effective way to get this capability quickest into the hands of our warfighters,” Geurts added.

In early February, Geurts approved a request by the program executive officer for aircraft carriers, Rear Adm. James P. Downey, for a single-phase delivery strategy that would deliver CVN 79 from the current construction period with its warfare system and F-35C capability.

When future USS John F. Kennedy entered construction in June 2015 at Huntington-Ingalls Industries–Newport News

Shipbuilding (HII-NNS) the Navy pursued the two-phase delivery approach to align construction with development of the Enterprise Air Surveillance Radar (EASR) suite. The EASR is replacing the dual-band radar deployed on the lead ship of the class, USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78).

Progress on the ship's warfighting system supports the single-phase contract – as well as a path to fleet operations that meets warfighting requirements outlined in the National Defense Strategy.

“Everyone, from shipyard workers to the design engineers to the crew, is looking forward to fully incorporating the new warfare system and the F-35C modifications,” said Capt. Philip E. Malone, program manager for the John F. Kennedy. “The U.S. Navy and the shipbuilder have made a commitment to deliver JFK in 2024, and the team is delivering on that promise every day.”

Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) awarded a modification to the construction contract for the second ship in the Ford class of aircraft carriers to HII-NNS Nov. 2. The award delivers the CVN 79 from the current construction period with its warfare system installed and incorporates F-35C Joint Strike Fighter modifications.

This contract modification supports legislative requirements for CVN 79 to be capable of deploying with the F-35C Lightning II strike fighter before the ship completes its post-shakedown availability. Congress had mandated the change in Section 124 of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-92).

USS John F. Kennedy was christened and launched last December and is completing system construction, outfitting, and testing pierside in Newport News.