

Official: Marines on Amphibs Need to Help Navy in Future Fight

QUANTICO, Va. – The return of the Marine Corps to the concept of the Fleet Marine Force means that the Marines must be active in defense of amphibious forces for amphibious missions to be successful, a Marine Corps official said.

Col. Kurt Schiller, director of Air Combat Element/Maritime Expeditionary Warfare Division, Combat Capabilities Directorate, speaking last week at the Modern Day Marine expo at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, said that “Marines cannot just be passengers” on amphibious or prepositioning ships ... “but need to help with fleet defense.”

“We need better self-defense capability on these L-class [amphibious warfare] ships,” he said.

Schiller discussed several trends that he has noted in the current and future amphibious platforms, some of which are problems being remedied and some which need addressing in an era of great power competition.

He sees a rise in force protection risks because of an adversary’s more long-range precision munitions and more ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) capabilities, including unmanned aerial vehicles.

Second, insufficient platform availability limits the number of amphibious ships that can deploy on short notice. “We just don’t have enough of them and can’t keep them afloat as much as we’d like,” he said.

Third, he noted insufficient capacity in the digital domain

and the ability of adversaries “to take out our command and control systems.”

Fourth, Schiller noted “insufficient planning and coordination spaces on the ships. There’s not enough space on the ships for all of the things we want to do.”

Fifth, he said that amphibious warfare ships need the C5I [command, control, communications, computers and combat] systems that enable them to operate independently from an amphibious ready group.

Sixth, amphibious warfare ships likely will need to handle greater capacity with regards to Marine Corps equipment, like the F-35 strike fighter, MV-22 Osprey aircraft and the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, all of which are heavier than their predecessors.

“All the Marine [Corps] systems are getting heavier,” Schiller said.

He also noted a decreased readiness and capacity of old landing craft. The Navy is in the process of procuring new LCAC 100-class ship-to-shore connectors and new utility landing craft.