



VP ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

AN ASSOCIATION OF VETERANS WHO SERVED WITH THE NAVAL AIR RESERVE PATROL SQUADRONS BASED AT NAS SQUANTUM MA, NAS SOUTH WEYMOUTH MA, AND NAS BRUNSWICK ME.

NOTE, CURRENT AND FORMER MEMBERS OF ANY U.S. NAVY PATROL SQUADRON ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US!

ISSUE 99

[HTTP://WWW.VPASSOCIATION.ORG](http://www.vpassociation.org)

MAR 2025

Welcome to another edition of the VP Association newsletter. Please direct all VP Association-related inquiries or correspondence to Marc Frattasio, PO Box 30, Pembroke MA 02339, 781-294-4491, marc_frattasio@yahoo.com.

RECCO:



ABOVE: SP-2E Neptune "Seven Zulu Two Zero Six" assigned to NAS South Weymouth's reserve aircraft pool about 1965. This aircraft is parked on the West Mat at the western end of LTA Hangar One. Got something similar to share? If so, contact Marc Frattasio at marc_frattasio@yahoo.com.

FINAL FLIGHTS

We lost Guy Mockler recently. He was an FE in VP-92 during the squadron's final years who was known as the "Gypsy Flight Engineer".

REGARDING THE COST OF PRINTING AND MAILING NEWSLETTERS...

If you have an e-mail address and get your newsletter in the mail please contact George Driscoll at gnddriscoll@gmail.com ASAP so we can send it to you via e-mail. Remember, we do not charge dues and operate on a shoestring thanks to volunteer labor, memorabilia sales, and donations. If you have an e-mail address and get a paper newsletter it would be better for us to send it via e-mail.

LOST CONTACT:

Be sure to inform George Driscoll at gnddriscoll@gmail.com about home or e-mail address changes.

SEAN COFFEY WRAPS UP GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE U. S. NAVY ASSIGNMENT:



John Patrick "Sean" Coffey, who was a P-3 Orion tactical coordinator in the VP-MAU and a commanding officer of VP-92, recently wrapped up his latest adventure as the 24th General Counsel of the U. S. Navy. If you look carefully at the photo presented above, which shows Sean in his office at the Pentagon in Washington D.C., you'll notice two souvenirs of his time with VP-92. One is obvious; the other is not so obvious. I'm sure that I speak for everybody who served with Sean when

I say that we are all very proud of him and wish him well in his future endeavors, both political and otherwise.

SHEA NAVAL AVIATION MUSEUM REOPENING SOON:



Al Firnrohr and Bob Mandeville, who were both AWs in VP-92, are shown here posing with a late model all-plastic urinal from a P-3C Orion at the new venue for the Shea Naval Aviation Museum at the Union Point real estate development on the site of old NAS South Weymouth. The museum, which has been closed since June 2017, is expected to have a grand reopening on June 14th. We'll have more to report about this in the next issue of the VP Association newsletter.

VP-MAU AND VP-92 BALL CAPS AND PENS:

We still have a few (very few) VP-MAU and VP-92 command ball caps and pens leftover from the recent NAS Brunswick base reunion. If you would like a cap and pen, you can have a set (while the supply lasts) in return for a \$30 donation to the Brunswick Naval Aviation Museum. Contact your newsletter editor at marc_frattasio@yahoo.com for details.



VQ-1 RETIRES ITS LAST AIRCRAFT AND PREPARES FOR DISESTABLISHMENT:



Fleet air reconnaissance squadron VQ-1, known as the “World Watchers”, recently retired its last two aircraft. On February 12th the squadron’s last EP-3E Aries, BuNo 159893, was sent on a one way flight to the military aircraft storage and disposal site at Davis Monthan AFB near Tucson, AZ. On February 20th the squadron’s last P-3C Orion, BuNo 161588, went to the bone yard. Both aircraft were retired in ceremonies conducted at Hangar 6 at NAS Whidbey Island, WA. VQ-1 itself will be disestablished on March 28th. The squadron, which used a few P-3Cs for pilot proficiency training, was one of the last U. S. Navy Orion operators. Going forward, there will only be two U. S. Navy P-3 Orion operators left, VXS-1 at NAS Patuxent River, MD and VX-30 at NAS Point Mugu, CA. Both commands are supposed to operate a handful of P-3s through at least 2030, but that could change.

CHINESE FIGHTER HARASSED AUSTRALIAN SURVEILLANCE AIRCRAFT (USNI News 2/13):



A People’s Liberation Army Air Force J-16 fighter released flares 30 meters away in front of a Royal Australian Air Force P-8A Poseidon on patrol in the South China Sea on Tuesday prompting the Australian government to express its concern to China on such actions. “The PLA-AF aircraft

released flares in close proximity to the RAAF P-8A aircraft. This was an unsafe and unprofessional maneuver that posed a risk to the aircraft and personnel,” reads a Thursday statement from the Australia Defense Department. “Australia expects all countries, including China, to operate their militaries in a safe and professional manner.”

Australia’s longest-running surveillance operation in the region has been Operation Gateway, which began in 1981 with RAAF P-3C Orion MPAs staging out of Royal Malaysian Air Force Butterworth Air Base. The purpose was to conduct surveillance operations on Russian ships during the Cold War and evolved into maritime surveillance patrols in the North Indian Ocean and South China Sea. The missions are flown now by RAAF P-8As following the retirement of the P-3.

In May, a PLAAF fighter aircraft dropped flares in front of a Royal Australian Navy MH-60R helicopter over the Yellow Sea. In 2022, a PLAAF J-16 carried out unsafe maneuvers and released chaff in front of an RAAF P-8A over the South China Sea. Australia protested both incidents. Neither incident caused damage or injury to ADF personnel and assets.

Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles provided more details on Tuesday’s incident in a Thursday interview with Australian television channel Sky News Australia. The P-8A was challenged in international airspace by two PLAAF J-16 fighters and there were a number of interactions between the P-8A and the J-16 fighters. “What’s important, though, is that the proximity of the J-16 was so close that there’s no way you could have been able to ensure that the flares did not hit the P-8. Now, as it turned out, they didn’t. But had any of those flares hit the P-8, that would have definitely had the potential for significant damage to that aircraft,” Marles said.

As a result, the Australian government declared the action unsafe and made representations about its concerns to the Chinese government both on Wednesday and Thursday in Canberra and Beijing. “Clearly our defense forces are going to interact with each other. We know that, but what’s really important is that when they do, they do so in a manner which is safe and professional and this wasn’t,” he said.

Neither Marles nor the defense release provided the exact location of the incident, but China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in its daily press conference on Thursday, said the intercept took place around the Paracel Islands. “The Australian military airplane deliberately intruded into China’s airspace over Xisha Qundao (Paracel Islands) without China’s permission. Such move violated China’s sovereignty and undermined China’s national security,” said Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Guo Jiakun, according to a transcript. “China has lodged serious protests with Australia and urged it to stop infringing on China’s sovereignty and making provocations and stop disrupting peace and stability in the South China Sea.”

Meanwhile, Australian naval and air units are monitoring a PLAN task group operating in the waters north of Australia, according to a Thursday release. The release stated that the PLAN task group consisted of cruiser CNS Zunyi (107), frigate CNS Hengyang (568) and fleet oiler CNS Weishanhu (887), and that it travelled through Southeast Asia before entering Australia’s maritime approaches, with Hengyang transiting the waters to Australia’s north. “Defense will continue to monitor the activities of the task group in Australia’s maritime approaches with a combination of capabilities, including air and maritime assets,” reads the release.

During his interview with Sky News Australia, Marles said the PLAN task group had come to the Indonesian archipelago and Hengyang transited the Torres Strait on Tuesday and has now rendezvoused with Weishanhu off the north east coast of Australia, but within the Australian exclusive economic zone (EEZ), while Zunyi was further north and outside the zone. He said frigate HMAS

Arunta (FFH151) was shadowing Hengyang and that an RAAF P-8A had already conducted a reconnaissance flight, while other P-8s and RAN ships stationed along the east coast of Australia were on standby. “We’ll continue to monitor their activities, which is very much within our rights in a manner of course, which is safe and professional,” Marles said.

USNI News article by Dzirhan Mahadzir

AIRBUS A321 AIRLINERS TO BECOME “FLYING FRIGATES” (The War Zone 2/5):



Airbus Defense and Space has begun a risk-assessment study for France’s future maritime patrol aircraft (MPA), to be based on an Airbus A321 airliner platform. Billed as a “flying frigate” by the company, the new MPA is intended to replace the French Navy’s Dassault Atlantique 2 fleet but emerges at a time when NATO nations are increasingly adopting the in-production Boeing P-8 Poseidon for their maritime patrol requirements.

Airbus yesterday announced a contract for further risk-reduction studies of the new maritime patrol aircraft. The contract was awarded by the Direction Générale de l’Armement (DGA), France’s defense procurement agency, with Airbus Defense and Space as prime contractor, in partnership with European defense corporation Thales. The contract runs for two years and follows a previous architecture and feasibility study launched at the end of 2022.

The latest contract is intended to prepare for the full-scale development of a new MPA that could start at the end of 2026, followed by the production launch. It will involve the first wind tunnel tests as well as work out technical specifications, so the various onboard systems can be chosen. It will also look at the economic and industrial conditions involved in the program.

Significantly, the latest study specifies a maritime patrol variant of the A321XLR airliner, known as the A321 MPA. The earlier study had looked at building an MPA version of either an unspecified version of the A320 family or the Dassault Falcon 10X business jet. While Airbus had considered the shorter

A320neo as a potential platform for a new MPA, the longer fuselage of the A321 means that it can accommodate additional fuel and a larger payload bay, as well as having an increased capacity for sensors and other mission systems. The basic A321XLR airliner has a range of 4,700 nautical miles (around 5,400 miles).

“The A321 MPA has all the assets to become a true flying frigate capable of responding to the wide range of missions entrusted to the French maritime patrol,” said Jean-Brice Dumont, executive vice president, Head of Air Power at Airbus Defense and Space, in a company statement. “Airbus offers a sovereign solution that provides the autonomy, availability, and reliability required to contribute to the oceanic component of the nuclear deterrence.” Interestingly, Dumont referred specifically to one of the current Atlantique 2’s missions, namely protecting the French Navy’s nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) fleet as it heads out on patrol, or returns to its base, as a cornerstone of France’s strategic deterrent. Other missions outlined for the A321 MPA at this stage include anti-submarine and anti-ship warfare, “from low to high intensity,” as well as intelligence gathering.

The turboprop-powered Atlantique 2 in service today was originally developed with anti-submarine warfare as its primary mission, but subsequently increasingly took on an anti-surface warfare role against enemy warships. More recently, it’s been mainly used for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and even strike missions overland. Indeed, embracing operations overland, including taking part in counter-insurgency campaigns in the Middle East and in West Africa, has been the most remarkable change in the Atlantique 2’s mission profile. At this stage, however, the A321 MPA is being developed primarily for the overwater role, reflecting the return to prominence of anti-submarine warfare, as well as maritime patrol more generally, especially to counter Russian activities, conventional or otherwise.

The mission equipment for the A321 MPA will be provided, to a significant degree, by Thales, and will have an active electronically scanned array (AESA) search radar and acoustic system, including passive and active sonobuoys, for anti-submarine warfare. Like the Atlantique 2, it will also have a magnetic anomaly detector for acquiring submerged submarines. It will be fitted with self-protection equipment and satellite communications and will almost certainly also feature electronic support measures (ESM) to intercept radio-frequency transmissions. Triangular-shaped fairings scabbed on the side of the A321 MPA in the artist’s rendering at the top of this story may well contain ESM. The same rendering of the A321 MPA also shows a sensor turret below the forward fuselage. After various upgrades, the Atlantique 2 has two separate sensor turrets: a forward-looking infrared (FLIR) camera under the nose and an MX-20 turret that contains four different cameras and is primarily employed during overland missions, including for ISR.

“The aircraft’s large cargo bay and the open architecture of its mission system give it a great capacity to evolve throughout its lifecycle to meet the emergence of new threats,” Airbus says of the A321 MPA. The weapons for the A321 MPA will include anti-submarine torpedoes as well as anti-ship missiles, some of which will be carried in the bay behind the wing, although wing pylons will likely also be provided. In particular, the aircraft is expected to be armed with the new anti-ship missile that’s being developed under the Future Cruise/Anti-Ship Weapon (FC/ASW) program, which is run jointly by France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. FC/ASW plans to field two different missiles: a low-observable cruise missile and a highly maneuverable supersonic missile. While the former will replace the Storm Shadow/SCALP air-launched cruise missiles, the latter will be the successor to the Exocet and Harpoon anti-ship missiles and will arm the A321 MPA.

The Anti-Ship Weapon component of FC/ASW is expected to be a ramjet-powered missile, which will be much faster and more agile than previous-generation Western air-launched anti-ship missiles. Although being optimized to engage heavily defended naval targets, it’s also expected to have a

secondary defense-suppression capability and there have even been indications it could have an air-to-air role for use against high-value airborne assets (HVAAs) at long ranges. At the same time, there may be potential for the A321 MPA to be armed with the new land-attack missile, too. The potential of aircraft in this class to provide useful additional long-range strike capacity, especially in the context of adversaries' anti-access capabilities, is something TWZ has considered in the past.

Notably, Airbus also points to the A321 MPA having a "high-maneuverability capability, including at low altitude." This seems to point to traditional concerns around using jet-powered aircraft for the MPA mission, rather than their slower- and lower-flying turboprop brethren, which are more efficient in this regime. The same issue applies to the P-8, which was also planned to prosecute underwater targets from high altitude. Previously, the P-8 had to drop down to release a standard Mk 54 torpedo, but it has now added the High-Altitude Anti-Submarine Warfare Weapon Capability (HAAWC) folding-wing kit to the same weapon, meaning it can also launch them from higher levels. It's not clear if a similar solution will be developed for the A321 MPA.

Current plans call for the MPA to replace the French Navy's fleet of aging Atlantique 2s sometime in the 2030s or 2040s. Currently, the French Navy has 18 Atlantique 2s upgraded to the latest Standard 6 configuration and, in the past, the service has said it will retain these until 2035. They are stationed at Lann-Bihoué naval air base in northern France.

As for the A321, this has, so far, seen limited uptake for special-mission military applications. At one time, the A321 was envisaged as the platform for NATO's Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system, which provides the alliance with reconnaissance capabilities, including synthetic aperture radar. However, this capability was eventually fielded on NATO's fleet of five RQ-4D Phoenix un-crewed aerial vehicles, specialized versions of the Global Hawk. Since then, India has selected the A321 as the platform for its future airborne early warning and control aircraft, the Netra Mk 2. Originally, it appeared that A320s would be chosen for this program, but New Delhi eventually settled on the stretched fuselage, longer-range A321, buying six former Air India airframes for conversion.

Returning to the MPA mission, the A321 MPA continues the French tradition of locally developing aircraft to meet this requirement. Ultimately, France pursued the Atlantique 2 alone and the aircraft failed to secure any export orders. Should full-scale development and production of the A321 MPA follow as planned, the aircraft will enter a very competitive marketplace in which the U.S.-made P-8 Poseidon appears to have already secured most of the obvious orders.

In terms of NATO forces alone, the P-8 has been ordered by Canada, Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom, and close ally Australia has been operating the Poseidon for years now. The fact that the German Navy opted for the U.S. product is a particular blow for France, which had previously been working with Germany on a joint program to develop a new MPA — the Maritime Airborne Warfare System (MAWS). Only yesterday, the German Ministry of Defense published photos of its first P-8 taking shape with Boeing in Seattle. The P-8 has also been ordered by India, New Zealand, and South Korea further reducing the potential MPA market share for the A321 MPA, which looks like it will offer a very similar set of capabilities.

Perhaps France might have better luck offering the A321 MPA to potential customers in the Middle East, where it has traditionally had a strong footprint. Meanwhile, there is a growing demand for maritime surveillance in the Asia Pacific region, particularly around the South China Sea. This strategically important waterway links the Indian and Pacific oceans and China claims large swathes of it, leading to frequent tensions and standoffs. Here, Chinese submarine activity is a particular concern. While the A320 family has been an undoubted success as an airliner, it remains to be seen whether the A321 MPA will achieve positive results. However, unless France also decides to buy the

P-8 — which seems politically highly unlikely — there are few other obvious options to replace its hard-worked Atlantique 2 fleet.

The War Zone article by Thomas Newdick

US STEPS UP INTELLIGENCE FLIGHTS FOR BORDER MISSION (Air and Space Forces 2/4):

The U.S. military is carrying out intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions along the southern border and off the coast of Mexico using U.S. Air Force RC-135 Rivet Joint and U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon aircraft as part of the Pentagon's effort to secure the southern border at the direction of President Donald Trump.

A U.S. Air Force RC-135 Rivet Joint, a signals intelligence aircraft, flew from its home base of Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., to conduct missions off the coast around Mexico's Baja Peninsula on Feb. 3 and Feb. 4, flight tracking data shows. A U.S. official told Air & Space Forces Magazine the U.S. was using the RC-135 to conduct ISR flights off the coast of Mexico. Flight tracking data shows the aircraft, tail number 64-14845, appears to have stayed in international airspace when near Mexico.

The U.S. has also conducted multiple missions with U.S. Navy P-8 maritime patrol aircraft over the last several days, flying missions along the border out of Florida, California, and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. A U.S. official said the P-8s were capturing imagery of the border. The Department of Defense confirmed the missions and released photos of the P-8 operations.

When the Pentagon first announced the border moves on Jan. 22, a senior military official suggested that high-end intelligence-gathering aircraft could enter the mix. "There could be some additional airborne intelligence surveillance support assets that would move down to the border to increase situational awareness," the official told reporters at the time. "Tactical UAS" could be used to "provide localized intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance in their particular area" and Army MQ-1 and Air Force MQ-9 drones could be deployed too. "You have manned platforms that could fly in support as well," the senior military official said.

While not commenting on the flights, U.S. Northern Command said on Feb. 4 that 140 U.S. military intelligence personnel had been assigned to the command as part of the southern border mission along with 500 Soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division. Overall, over 2,000 additional troops have now been ordered to support border security efforts by the Pentagon.

"These intelligence personnel will provide full motion video analysis, counter network analysis, and Spanish language translation to the U.S. Border Patrol Office of Intelligence," NORTHCOM said in a news release. The command has stood up the "Joint Intelligence Task Force-Southern Border to integrate and deconflict intelligence planning and threat analysis," NORTHCOM added in its statement.

Also on Feb. 4, a U.S. Air Force C-17 Globemaster III carried the first flight of migrants to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, from Biggs Army Airfield in El Paso, Texas. The plane was carrying roughly a dozen people who will be held at the prison that has been used to hold terrorism suspects, a U.S. official said. Trump issued an executive order on Jan. 29 directing the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security to "expand the Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay to full capacity." Air Force C-17s have carried out numerous deportation flights to foreign countries since the Pentagon began its border security operations at the direction of Trump on Jan. 22.

More than 150 Marines have been sent to Guantanamo Bay as of Feb. 3, according to U.S. Southern Command. More Marines are expected to arrive soon. The troops are preparing tents to hold roughly 1,000 migrants, a U.S. official told Air & Space Forces Magazine. "There's a lot of space to accommodate a lot of people," Trump said on Feb. 4. "So we're going to use it."

Air and Space Forces article by Chris Gordon

NAVY P-8As CONDUCTING ISR MISSIONS ON SOUTHERN BORDER (USNI News 2/3):

Patrol and Reconnaissance wings 10 and 11 are conducting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions on the southern border, a Navy official confirmed to USNI News on Monday. The two air wings, based out of Whidbey Island, Wash., and Jacksonville, Fla., are conducting P-8 flights, Lt. David Glaser, a Navy spokesman, told USNI News. Right now, the squadrons involved are VP-45 and VP-46, but they will likely rotate, Glaser said.

The air wings did not need to be relocated, Glaser said. Navy photos posted to DVIDS show the crew of VP-45 conducting a P-8 flight mission on Jan. 30. Glaser referred further questions to U.S. Northern Command. NORTHCOM and U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. Fourth Fleet did not immediately respond to inquiries from USNI News.

The flights come after the presidential executive order that directs Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem to expand the Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, in order to have more detention space for "high-priority criminal aliens unlawfully present in the United States, according to the Jan. 28 order. "This memorandum is issued in order to halt the border invasion, dismantle criminal cartels, and restore national sovereignty," reads the executive order.

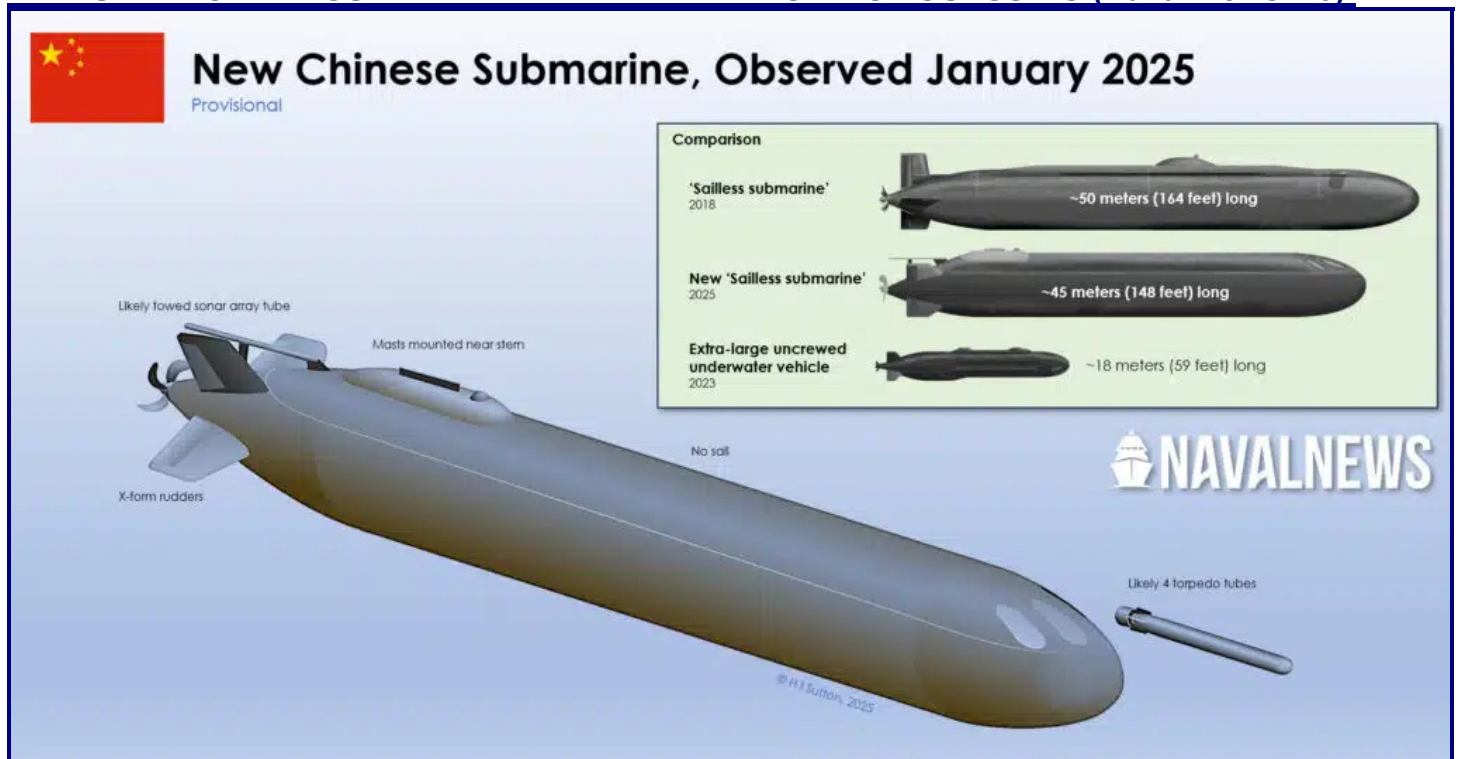
More than 300 service members arrived at Guantanamo Bay over the weekend to support the operation to hold immigrants lacking permanent legal status, according to a release from U.S. Southern Command. "The number of service members will continue to fluctuate as additional forces are tasked to deploy and will be scaled based on the requirements of the Department of Homeland Security, which is the lead federal agency," reads a statement from SOUTHCOM. Although the release did not specify units, the service members U.S. Army South and Marines with 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment and 2nd Marine Division.

The Coast Guard, which is under DHS, has also conducted several border missions since President Donald Trump took office on Jan. 20. The Coast Guard has conducted multiple flights between California and Texas in response to Trump's executive orders on migration. "Through these ongoing operations, the Coast Guard is detecting, deterring and interdicting aliens, drug smugglers and individuals intent on terrorism or other hostile activity before they reach our border. The Coast Guard continues to surge assets and personnel from across the nation to enhance presence in key areas and secure U.S. borders and maritime approaches," reads a Coast Guard release.

The service has also put out a number of releases about interdictions and repatriations of people attempting to come into the United States illegally. Of note, Coast Guard interdictions, including those off of Point Loma, Calif., were occurring prior to Trump's inauguration.

USNI News article by Heather Mongilio

NEW UNREPORTED SUBMARINE IN CHINA LEAVES WEST GUESSING (Naval News 2/3):



China's incredible naval expansion and modernization continues. The latest surprise is yet another new and unexplained submarine. The boat, whose designation is unknown, has a distinctive ultra-modern layout.

Along with the rapid building of invasion barges at Guangzhou Shipyard in southern China, a submarine has entered the scene. The shipyard is not known for submarine construction but the presence of the boat is revealed in satellite imagery. The new boat was noticed in a floating dock by defense watcher MT Anderson. Naval News is able to confirm that this is a new and previously unreported design.

China has, once again, surprised analysts by building a submarine in secret. Western submarines are reported in media years before they are even laid down. While there are always secrets surrounding their design and capabilities, their existence cannot be kept secret. China however has a track record of building submarines in almost complete secrecy. This isn't the first, and Naval News is often the first place you can read about these submarines. They typically do not feature in the official submarine force estimates shared by the U.S. Government.

The submarine is distinct from the recently revealed Type-041 nuclear-battery design, which was launched at Wuchang Shipyard near Wuhan. This design is smaller and likely has a different propulsion type (not nuclear assisted), and mission. It is also different from the 'Olympic' submarine revealed by Naval News in February 2022.

Preliminary estimates suggest that the new submarine is around 45 meters (148 feet) long and 5 meters (15 feet) across. The most notable features are the large X-form rudders at the stern, and the apparent absence of a sail. Sails are a standard feature but designers have sought ways to eliminate them to create a more streamlined boat. China is so far the only country to have built a sail-less submarine, with one launched at the Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai in 2019.

The previous sail-less submarine appears to have been purely experimental. It did not appear to have any torpedo tubes or sonar, required features for a war fighting boat. At first glance it appears conceivable that the new sail-less submarine is a rebuild of the first. They are similar in size and form. The original boat is accounted for however, so we are confident that this latest boat is a new build design.

The X-form rudders are also novel for Chinese submarines although they are becoming increasingly common and reflect a wider trend in submarine design. The new boat has the outward appearance of an un-crewed vessel. We expect these types to omit the sail, since there is no crew to need an access tower high above the waterline for use at sea. China, and indeed other leading navies, have active programs to build extra-large un-crewed submarines. And China's program is the largest and most extensive with at least 5 types in the water.

But if this is the case, and it is an XLUUV (extra-large un-crewed underwater vehicle), then it is the largest in the world. And not by a small margin; it is around 6-8 times larger than the U.S. Navy's Orca XLUUV. That China has built the world's largest XLUUV is not inconceivable. It has already built the largest combat un-crewed surface vessel (USV) and seems willing to push boundaries. But if so, the question becomes why it is so large. There is no need for crew accommodation so even the largest XLUUVs need not be the same size as a traditional submarine. So it seems more likely that this is a crewed boat.

The role of the new submarine remains unclear. It is smaller than regular diesel-electric submarines, but may be particularly suitable for operations in shallow water. At the same time, it does appear to have torpedo tubes, and possibly a towed sonar array. These features suggest that it could be used to attack ships or submarines. An alternative explanation is that it is designed for special forces missions, or seabed warfare. Time may tell.

Naval News article by H. I. Sutton

RUSSIA'S NAVAL BASE PROBLEMS COULD BE BIG BLOW TO SUBS (Business Insider 1/7):

Strategic Russian naval bases have been upended by conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, creating headaches for the Kremlin's navy, including its submarine force. Moscow no longer appears to have any attack submarines in the Mediterranean Sea after NATO forces spotted its last known submarine leaving the region last week.

Portugal's military said that it observed a Russian Kilo-class submarine moving through the country's continental exclusive economic zone near northern Spain on Friday. NATO Maritime Command later identified the vessel as the Novorossiysk. The Novorossiysk was spotted several weeks earlier at Tartus, a naval base in Syria that Russia had used for years. The future of Moscow's military footprint at the facility — and in the country in general — was, however, thrown into uncertainty after the shocking collapse of the Assad regime last month.

There are indications that Russia is drawing down forces at its bases in Syria. Losing Tartus for good would be a significant blow to Moscow's navy — including its capable submarine force — which relies on the warm-water port to project power across the region and beyond. Early December satellite imagery showed the Novorossiysk docked in Tartus, but by the middle of the month, it was gone, along with the rest of the Russian warships that had been there. Some of the Russian naval vessels have been spotted in recent weeks loitering off the Syrian coast, but the whereabouts of this submarine were less certain.

Should Syria's new leadership decide Russia can no longer station its forces at Tartus, it would mark another setback for Moscow's navy, which has suffered a string of stunning losses in the nearby Black Sea since the start of the full-scale Ukraine war nearly three years ago. Ukrainian forces have used missiles and naval drones to damage or destroy dozens of Russian naval vessels, including one of six improved Kilo-class submarines Moscow's Black Sea Fleet operates, during the conflict.

These attacks have forced Moscow to withdraw the Black Sea Fleet from its long-held headquarters in Sevastopol, a major city in the southwestern corner of the occupied Crimean peninsula, across the region to the port of Novorossiysk along western Russia's coast. If Russia is unable to move back into Sevastopol, that creates complications. For Russia, losing the ability to keep submarines at Sevastopol and Tartus is less than ideal.

Bryan Clark, a former US Navy officer and defense analyst at the Hudson Institute, said that the remainder of the Kilo-class vessels are based in St. Petersburg, where there is a large naval facility and dry docks for maintenance. "The Russians are now having to redeploy their submarine force back up to the north" instead of relying on warm-water ports that "you could get in and out of them year-round," Clark told Business Insider. "St. Petersburg, you can't get in and out of year-round." Recent developments also seriously undermine Russia's military influence in the Mediterranean and southern Europe, Clark said.

The Novorossiysk is a newer improved Kilo sub. Submarines of this class are diesel-electric vessels and formidable long-range strike platforms that can attack ships and land targets, deploy for weeks on end, and stay relatively undetected. They are effectively Russia's most capable non-nuclear subs and can carry Kalibr missiles.

Russia has kept a Kilo-class vessel in the region for years. The boat's departure from the region, though Russia could ultimately opt to move another sub into the area later, may signal a broader decline in Russian naval might in the Mediterranean. In four years, Russia appears to have gone "from being a pretty big player in the Med — in terms of naval forces — to now being a nonexistent player," Clark said. Russia's basing challenges could ultimately hinder its ability to project power. The uncertainty with Tartus and nearby Hmeimim Air Base — underscores a broader issue for the Russian military.

Satellite imagery captured on Monday by Maxar Technologies, a commercial imaging company, shows no obvious signs of any major Russian naval vessels at Tartus, as has been the case for weeks. Ukraine's military intelligence agency has said Russia is withdrawing from the base. Whether Moscow is able to negotiate an arrangement with the new Syrian leadership to stay in the country or is forced to relocate to a new hub in North Africa to sustain its operations remains to be seen.

Business Insider article by Jake Epstein

RUSSIAN SUBMARINES FLEE THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Newsweek 1/6):

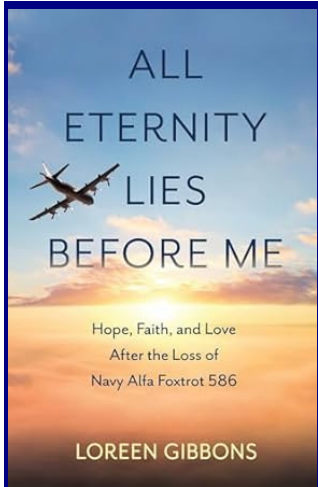
Russia reportedly no longer has a submarine based in the Mediterranean Sea, after the Novorossiysk vessel was observed withdrawing into the Atlantic Ocean. NATO said that the Portuguese Navy had observed the vessel, which had been based in Russia's naval base in Syria, passing waters near Portugal. Naval News reported that the move signaled there were now "no Russian submarines in the Mediterranean." Newsweek has contacted the Russian defense ministry for comment by email.

Russia, which is continuing its invasion of Ukraine, now has no known submarines in the Mediterranean, a strategically important waterway. Syria's port city of Tartus gave Russia a naval base in the Mediterranean for more than five decades but the downfall of Bashar al-Assad to rebels led by the group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has upended the future of its military in the region.

Moscow has been trying to hang onto its military assets in Syria but since Assad's overthrow, Russian assets have departed, weakening Russia's presence in the region. Open source intelligence X account OSINT technical was among outlets reporting on Sunday that the Russian Kilo-class submarine Novorossiysk (B-61) had left the Mediterranean, after retreating from Syria. "The withdrawal leaves Russia with no permanent sub based in the Mediterranean," it said, next to an image of the vessel through the sight of the Portuguese frigate NRP Álvares Cabral.

Newsweek article by Brendan Cole

RECOMMENDED READING:



Here's a new book, published in January, about the infamous VP-9 P-3 Orion ditching incident that happened in the Bering Sea on October 26, 1978. The author of the book is the widow of aircraft's patrol plane commander, and she provides a very different perspective on the event than the usual memoir from a military member. The book is 312 pages long and a very interesting read. You can purchase this book through Amazon or any other decent bookseller. The ISBN is 978-1647428204.

ON THE INTERNET:

A reminder that there are active groups on Facebook associated with NAS South Weymouth, NAS Brunswick, VP-92, and VP-MAU. Check them out at www.facebook.com.

PARTING SHOTS:



ABOVE: Sean O'Neill, James Cunningham, and VP-92 CPOs at NAS South Weymouth circa 1995.



ABOVE: Sean O'Neill and James Cunningham cutting a change of command cake at NAS South Weymouth in June 1995. **BELOW:** Re-enactors portraying Concord Minutemen participating in the VP-92 change of command ceremony held in NAS South Weymouth's Hangar One in June 1995.





ABOVE: Naval Air Reserve Lockheed SP-2E Neptune crew members posed at NAS South Weymouth during the early-to-mid 1960s. Have something similar to share? Contact Marc Frattasio at marc_frattasio@yahoo.com.



Until Next Time, Lose Not Thy Speed In Flight Lest The Earth Rise Up And Smite Thee – “Frat”.

