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CSBA Study Argues Fleet Capabilities, Not Size Should Drive Navy Decisions

By Sharon Weinberger

As the Navy considers the size of its future fleet, the capabilities and not the absolute number of ships should be the primary criteria, an analyst from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) says.

“Even though we’re getting smaller, the capabilities are expanding,” Robert Work, a CSBA analyst said yesterday at a briefing on Capitol Hill. The Navy currently has a requirement for a 375-ships, although the current fleet stands at just 295 ships.

CSBA is currently working on a study that will be released early next year and briefed to congressional staff members. That study is aimed, in part, to parallel similar efforts being undertaken by the Pentagon’s Office of Force Transformation and the Department of the Navy.

Congress is gearing up for what is likely to be a contentious debate over the Navy’s FY ’06 budget request, which is expected to include significant cuts to the shipbuilding budget. The Navy early next year is supposed to submit a budget that would include funding to construct just four new vessels: a Virginia-class (SSN-774) submarine, a San Antonio-class (LPD-17) amphibious ship, a T-AKE cargo ship and a DD(X) destroyer.

That news sparked an outcry in September from lawmakers representing shipbuilding states and concerns that the cuts could undermine the

U.S. industrial base and future naval capabilities.

But Work argued that the final number of ships needs to be determined by capabilities, and the metrics now used to “count” ships are misleading. Work called counting ships an “arcane science,” because the counting rules change from time to time.

For example, current counting rules used to tally fleet size don’t include the U.S. Coast Guard’s fleet or unmanned underwater vehicles. “If a single mine warfare ship was employing three to five unmanned, drones, how do you count that?” Work asked.

The Navy needs to stop focusing on the number of ships and look rather at the effectiveness of the total force. “From our perspective, we’ve concluded that focusing on the number of ships is exactly wrong,” Work said. “It sends you down the wrong direction and sends you down a rabbit hole you can never get out of because the fleet is so much powerful than it’s ever been.

Another problem with measuring the size of the current Navy is that no nation approaches the United States in capabilities, Work argued. “We don’t really have a naval threat to judge ourselves against,” he said.

Moreover, today’s Navy, even as the absolute number of ships declines, has increased in capabilities. “It is the most capable Navy we’ve put to sea, bar none,” he said.

Commanders Turn Focus To Stopping Terror By Sea

By Tom Roeder

Commanders say one worrisome potential threat from terrorists would be tougher to stop than South American cocaine shipments, which have given military leaders and police headaches for decades.

Protecting American shores from terrorist-run ships quickly is becoming a top priority for leaders at U.S. Northern Command in Colorado Springs.

The problem, however, remains more vast and troublesome than the airborne security lapses revealed after the Sept. 11 attacks, which led America to begin serious work on homeland defense.

The reason so many leaders are afraid of the water is easy to understand. The United States and Canada have a combined 247,000 miles of coast and lack the personnel to cover that much territory.

Efforts to close the coastline to drugs have stopped a lot of cocaine, heroin and marijuana. Significant quantities of the drugs still reach North American shores, though.

One terrorist boat armed with a chemical or biological weapon could spark a national tragedy, several officials said during a three-day conference on terrorism and homeland security in Colorado Springs last week.

"The old drug paradigm doesn't work with weapons of mass destruction," said U.S. Coast Guard Rear Adm. Brian Peterman, whose job includes intercepting shipments of South American cocaine.

Airborne radar and other surveillance systems were perfected during the Cold War to ward off Soviet bombers. The same kind of effort wasn't dedicated to seaborne threats.

Without specific intelligence, differentiating between a terrorist craft and other boats would be extremely difficult, several Navy and Coast Guard sources said.

A large ship in the wrong hands poses an obvious danger.

"The natural gas tanker is always the biggest scenario," said Jeff High, who is overseeing a Coast Guard program to improve sea surveillance.

Large ships are required to carry transponders that record position via satellite, similar to the method used to track planes.

Pleasure craft, generally boats less than 50 feet in length that are tough to spot on radar, could bring havoc to the nation's port cities if they carried germ or chemical weapons.

Canadian Forces Rear Adm. James Fraser, who moved from guarding the west coast of Canada to a job at Northern Command in Colorado Springs, said the problem is larger than one of technology.

"This has to start with intelligence that starts long before the threat gets to you," he said.

That intelligence could range from nonspecific threats against a particular area or region to a tip from a foreign port about terrorists loading weapons on a boat. The key is putting bits of intelligence information together.

The Canadian and American governments are expected to reach an agreement next year that includes a deal for cooperative sea-surveillance in an existing air defense treaty.

Troops in Colorado Springs probably will be responsible for monitoring the sea routes to North America.

A system that can track all maritime traffic, however, "will take a while to develop," Fraser said.

The plan is to combine the intelligence of a number of agencies and resources to get a better picture of what's at sea.

Peterman said such a system essentially would allow the Coast Guard and other services to identify the good guys immediately so they know which ships to monitor.

John Pike, executive director of the defense think tank Global Security.org, said it's time the government started worrying about sea-borne threats.

"I think they are slowly awakening from their slumber," he said.

Fraser and Peterman said the good news is that the decades long fight against drugs taught both nations big lessons in maritime security.

Stopping terrorists, though, will be tougher.

"We have to be right every time, but they only have to be right once," High said.

U.S. Slowly Shifts Its War Approach

By Megan Scully, Laura M. Colarusso, and Christopher P. Cavas

The U.S. military is gradually moving from the industrial to the information age, turning its forces into highly technical units that can electronically monitor the battlefield and communicate with ease across service lines. The shift is changing the way warfare is waged, and helping the military adapt to battlefields that are no longer geographically defined.

In the last several years, the services have added joint and integration requirements to their information technology plans. They also are relying heavily on off-the-shelf technologies to update platforms and systems. Some improvements have been conceived and executed in a matter of months, defying traditionally slow development and acquisition cycles.

Air Force

The Air Force is intent on building better networks, say officials at the service's Command and Control and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Center.

"Today's systems only connect a limited number of users at a time," said Col. Roger Gant, director of intelligence for the center. "That's an expensive proposition, and it's not efficient."

Troops obtain digital data via point-to-point connections between users and databases linked by separate communication lines.

The Air Force wants to move to a Web-based system, allowing every airman in the kill chain to get whatever information he or she needs. This will be accomplished, in part, through the service's Distributed Common Ground System (DCGS).

DCGS links the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance ground sites that process data from platforms such as imagery satellites, the U-2 spy plane and Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicle. The system also will be able to tie in Army, Navy and Marine Corps sensors. Calls to the Air Force for more information on the system were not returned.

A model for this type of distributed operations is Langley Air Force Base, Va., where analysts scoured Predator unmanned

aerial vehicle data for targets during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Beyond DCGS is the massive Global Information Grid (GIG), which envisions a seamless, secure and joint network. Much of the GIG is in place, but it needs to work more efficiently so troops can react faster to elusive targets.

"It just takes us longer than what we would like," Murray said.

Eventually, everyone from A-10 pilots to Predator controllers will be able to pull information from Constellation Net, the Air Force's piece of the grid, said Col. Charlie Murray, the center's director of communications and information.

Rich White, technical adviser for the center's operations director, said the service's goal is to be network-centric by 2012. Among the hurdles: managing the flow of massive amounts of data and ensuring its fidelity, White said. Officials at the center are developing methods for creating a pedigree for the information so users can see where the data came from and who created it.

The Air Force will have to deal with cultural changes as well, Gant said. "Net-centric operations is all about thinking in a radically different way," he said. "Doctrine training, organization and other aspects of the military craft will be totally transformed from the way we do business now."

Army

In January, the U.S. Army set out to build a network that would connect combat and support troops. Less than a year later, the system is about to hit the field.

Developed by the Army and industry, LandWarNet is basically a large federation of networks connecting soldiers to logistics, command and control, and intelligence information. It is the Army's contribution to the GIG. Because it is considered an overarching concept rather than a specific program, there is currently no price tag.

Containing mostly off-the-shelf software, LandWarNet programs will interface with joint networks and be compatible with systems now in the field.

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“If we put this interface [in the field] and it didn’t interoperate with legacy networks, joint networks, essentially we would have broken something,” said Terry Edwards, director of the Army’s architecture integration cell.

The Army plans to equip each of its divisions with LandWarNet capabilities when they convert into modular, brigade-based forces over the next several years. Earlier this year, the three-brigade 3rd Infantry Division was the first division to transform its units into four modular brigades. Troops tested and were trained on LandWarNet during exercises at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif. Pieces of LandWarNet, including the Joint Network Node, will head to Iraq later this year.

Over time, the Army plans to improve the network, adding an on-the-move capability and improving the quality of the network’s applications, Edwards said.

Making it all work is tougher than rocket science, Maj. Gen. Conrad Ponder, the chief integration officer in the Army’s information office, said Sept. 28 at an Institute for Defense and Government Advancement conference in Washington. “The scope is large,” Ponder said. “To make it all fit, work together, is a hard thing.”

LandWarNet is a precursor to the Army’s Warrior Information Network-Tactical (WIN-T), an improved network that will not be ready until later this decade. WIN-T is being developed under a joint effort by General Dynamics and Lockheed Martin. It is valued at \$7 billion through 2018 and total lifecycle costs through 2030 could run as high as \$10 billion.

Navy

A vision from a net-centric Navy: An F/A-18 Hornet pilot is loitering over a battlefield when a data link lights up. The image of a tank appears, along with a complete attack plan: course and altitude of approach, weapons

settings, target coordinates, even a suggested way home after the strike. Perhaps most vital, a map glows with the locations of nearby friendly forces.

The information has flowed into the cockpit from another Hornet, which is fresh from a reconnaissance run using an Advanced Targeting Forward-Looking Infrared Receiver pod, or ATFLIR. The ATFLIR data went to the attack aircraft and to other command-and-control centers dialing in to the data link. Back on the Hornet’s carrier, and on the ground as well, commanders know where their forces are, how their attacks are going, and who can be brought in to finish the job if necessary.

New sensors like ATFLIR are revolutionizing the warplane’s role in the joint fight, said Capt. Jeff Penfield, deputy program manager for F/A-18 system development at Patuxent River, Md.

“If we were to do that today without those sensors,” Penfield said, “we would have to do a talk-on — describe the target verbally.”

The ATFLIR is now flying on Hornets aboard the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy in the Arabian Gulf. Three early versions of the ATFLIR were used during the Iraq War, and 62 have been delivered to the Navy. Full-rate production is to begin in February and, eventually, 574 systems will be delivered. The pod also can be used on board Air Force F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon fighters.

It can “detect and recognize targets at about three to five times the range of [other] systems that are fielded today,” said Dave Gould, director of business development for the ATFLIR at Raytheon’s Space and Airborne Systems unit, El Segundo, Calif., which builds the system.

Raytheon is working under a \$298 million contract awarded in December for 88 full-rate production units.

Submarine Ops Seen Changing Under 'Law Of The Sea' Treaty

By Lisa Troshinsky

The U.S. Navy might have trouble performing some important missions if the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and President Bush pass "The Law of the Sea" treaty," according to Frank Gaffney, president of the Center for Security Policy.

"Under the treaty it would be impermissible to collect intelligence in territorial waters, which is something we do all the time," he said. "Also under the treaty, submarines are supposed to transit territorial waters on the surface displaying the flag, which is not the way we operate submarines."

The international treaty, among other things, formalizes the ground rules for passage through territorial waters. It has been around since the 1980s, and although the United States observes it, the country hasn't officially adopted it.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved the treaty in February,

and it likely will reach the Senate floor next year. Both President Bush and Democratic presidential nominee Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) support the doctrine, Gaffney told The DAILY.

The Navy endorses adoption of the treaty because safeguarding freedom of navigation has always been its responsibility. The Navy displays the U.S. flag using noncombatant ships that can't defend themselves, and often doesn't have enough ships to safeguard freedom of navigation. Not having to do that is attractive, Gaffney said.

According to Doug Bandow, senior fellow at the CATO Institute, who also opposes the treaty, freedom of navigation for the U.S. military "isn't being threatened now. The Russian navy is rusting in port, China has yet to develop a blue water capability, and no country is impeding U.S. transit, commercial or military."

USS Virginia Is First Of New Submarine Class Designed For Different Type Of Mission

By Mike Gooding

The nation's newest weapon in the war on terror is named for the Old Dominion. It's the Navy's newest class of fast-attack sub, USS Virginia.

Navy leaders say the sub will do great things, but it comes with a substantial price tag of \$2.2 billion per sub, and USS Virginia is coming in over budget, and is being delivered late.

Still, Navy leaders say, it's worth the cost, and the wait.

USS Virginia and her sister subs to follow are smarter and stealthier than their Los Angeles-class predecessors, and built for a different kind of warfare.

"The big fight with the Soviet Union in the deep Atlantic, we wanted to know how fast a submarine could go and how deep she could go, because that's how you fought in the big ocean," said the sub's commander Capt. D.J. Kern. "But the Virginia is a different kind of sub. We were designed to fight in coastal waters."

TM2 Mark Villarreal agreed. "This is most definitely the future of submarine warfare."

MM1 Nicholas Abate, another crewman aboard Virginia, said the new sub is designed for a new mission. "This is the first class of ship designed after the Cold War, we're no longer designed for Cold War ops, we're designed for shallow water ops."

And the reviews from her crew are outstanding. "It's the best submarine I've ever seen, ever served on, the technology's overwhelming. It's just great," said Senior Chief Michael Bass.

But one thing it's not is cheap. At \$64.7 billion for 30 subs, the Virginia class is called by the Government Accounting Office the Navy's "largest and most expensive shipbuilding program." A June, 2003 report concludes that, to date, the program's cost estimates have "not proven to be realistic."

Case in point: USS Virginia, coming in at least \$42 million over budget, and delivered to the Navy four months late.

"The Virginia class has been going up, and the fact is we've had some surprises lately in the cost that we didn't expect," said Navy Secretary Gordon England.

When asked why America needs these two billion dollar subs, Vice Admiral Chuck Munns of Submarine Forces Atlantic said it's because the world is a dangerous place. "We are here for many reasons and have been for a long time. I see the world as an uncertain and an unpredictable world. Our strength is to go places with a small platform with very professional people and do things that can be done when others don't know that you're there." Munns said the Virginia class subs "absolutely" provide a good value for the taxpayer, despite the seemingly high price tag.

USS Virginia was constructed under a unique partnership between Electric Boat Corporation in Groton, Connecticut, and Northrop Grumman Newport News Shipbuilding here in Hampton Roads.

The second sub in the class, the Texas, was just christened by First Lady Laura Bush earlier this year in Newport News. The Navy reports that the Texas is \$141 million over budget.

Navy Makes A Clothes Call

By Jack Dorsey

NORFOLK — Repeated applause greeted the Navy’s new line of proposed uniform changes Monday as sailors got a peek at a more durable, less expensive and possibly more attractive set of digs.

The new line of utility uniforms – intended for all ranks, from recruit to admiral – was unveiled to crew members of the amphibious assault ship Iwo Jima, 60 of whom will test the clothing this winter.

If accepted by the fleet, the new look could mean the Navy will scrap its current set of work uniforms for one that resembles the camouflage-style of the Army and Marine Corps.

The changes being considered are the result of years of frustration sailors have experienced with their current gear, said Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Terry D. Scott. A survey sent to 40,000 sailors last year resulted in 5,500 pages of recommendations asking for changes.

“You told us we’ve got too many uniforms, you don’t have enough storage space,” said Scott, who came down from the Pentagon for Monday’s unveiling. “And you also said the uniforms you’ve got are not always practical, they are too hard to maintain, they don’t last long enough, and they cost too much to take care of.”

The uniform change would eliminate a half-dozen uniforms, including the wash khaki, coveralls, woodland green, aviation green, winter working blue and tropical working uniforms.

The Navy will hold on to its traditional service dress blue uniform, vowing never to give up what has been a widely recognized trademark for the U.S. Navy during its 229

years, Scott said. But it might consider changes to the summer whites that sailors have a difficult time keeping clean in a shipboard environment.

Summer whites are unpopular, Scott said, because sailors complained that they “can’t get from berthing to the quarter deck without screwing them up.”

Each point Scott made was met with cheers and applause from the Iwo Jima’s crew of several hundred, assembled in the hangar deck.

Scott paraded out four sailors modeling varieties of the new uniform: two woodland patterns, one with dominant blue colors, the other with dominant

gray; and two with a digital pattern – one dominant blue, the other gray.

The uniforms had several variations:

differing fabric weight; some had internal knee and elbow pads; reinforced heavy wear areas; adjustable waist bands; zippers versus button fly. They also varied in the type of boot – one had a sure-to-be-popular “no shine” style – in addition to different types of hats, pockets, logos, collars.

Officers and chiefs will have gold insignia; silver for enlisted.

Scott promised a matching rainproof parka would be available as well, capable of protecting a sailor to 60 degrees below zero. More applause.

“It’s a great idea. I love it,” Petty Officer 2nd Class Juney Vasquez, wearing the traditional blue denim trouser and shirt utility uniform, said of the designs. “I spend a lot of time pressing this in the morning and then it gets dirty so fast because it’s a light blue color.”

Petty Officer 2nd Class Angie Candamil agreed, complaining that she must maintain five



Applause aboard the Iwo Jima at Norfolk Naval Station greeted the unveiling of the proposed changes to Navy uniforms on Monday. The changes, which will be tested this winter, would eliminate a half-dozen uniforms.

Photo by Mort Fryman

work uniforms in order to always have one available, pressed and ready to wear.

“I’ll be working on the ship and then have to stand watch,” she said, “meaning I usually have to go back and get a brand new pair.”

While Scott joked that the camouflage design was never intended to hide a sailor on a Navy gray ship, it will help hide a smudge of paint or stain. It also hides traditional wear areas on the elbows, knees and seat, he said.

“I like the fact they are going camouflage,” said Petty Officer 1st Class Rayfield Golden, a storekeeper on the Iwo Jima. “I just think it looks better. The style is more military.”

Command Master Chief James Cox, the senior enlisted member on the Iwo Jima, has selected the 60 crew members who will test the uniforms. They will represent just about every rate aboard, except for some of the engineers who must continue to wear fire retardant uniforms.

Similar tests will take place at 20 other sites around the world. Locally, they will include 60 crew members each on the carrier Theodore Roosevelt and destroyer McFaul, the Afloat

Training Group, Amphibious Construction Battalion Two and Naval Coastal Warfare Squadron 25.

How would you rate the Navy's new line of utility uniforms?

Great - I'm ready to wear 'em

■ 22.55%

Good - They're pretty snazzy

■ 11.76%

OK - They'll do

■ 12.25%

Yuck - Back to the designer

■ 46.08%

No opinion

■ 7.35%

Total: 204 votes

2 Shipbuilders Get Big Breaks In New Tax Bill

By Edmund L. Andrews

WASHINGTON - A little-noticed provision in the sweeping corporate tax bill that passed Congress last week would reduce taxes at two major military contractors by nearly \$500 million over the next 10 years.

The provision, which primarily benefits General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman, would allow shipbuilders to postpone their taxes for years on profits from building ships and submarines for the Navy.

The new provision would benefit a handful of major shipyards, all owned by one of the two military conglomerates. They include the Bath Iron Works in Maine acquired by General Dynamics in 1995 and the company's Electric Boat division in Groton, Conn., as well as the Northrop-owned Newport News shipyard in Virginia.

The new tax break would reverse a rule that Congress imposed as part of the sweeping tax overhaul of 1986, when lawmakers in both parties were incensed that major military companies often paid no income taxes despite earning billions of dollars providing major weapons systems to the military.

Under the bill, Navy shipbuilders would be allowed to once again defer paying most federal income taxes on a project until the contract was completed. Because it takes about five years to build an aircraft carrier and three years to build a destroyer, the shipyards would be able to delay their tax bills for years, allowing more opportunity to offset taxes against future losses.

The measure's primary sponsor was Senator Olympia J. Snowe, Republican of Maine, who said she was determined to protect Bath Iron Works, one of her state's largest employers.

"This provision takes dramatic steps to remedy the inequity of how naval shipbuilders pay their taxes," Ms. Snowe said in a statement last week, just after House and Senate negotiators agreed to include the provision in a broader bill that would shower \$140 billion in tax cuts across almost every segment of industry.

But critics said the provision would not create jobs, the stated intention of the tax bill, because employment at naval shipyards is

determined almost entirely by federal spending on ships and submarines rather than by tax incentives.

"We're not going to buy any more war boats if we give them a tax incentive," said Robert S. McIntyre, director of Citizens for Tax Justice, a liberal research group here that has long scrutinized corporate tax practices. "We're going to buy more boats if the government decides we need more boats."

The shipbuilders' tax cut was typical of the furious scramble by lawmakers to include special provisions for their constituents in the bill. The final bill, which President Bush is expected to sign soon, includes tax breaks for oil companies, corn farmers, wine distributors and dozens of other highly specific industries.

General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman, which will also benefit from many of the new bill's general tax cuts, are heavy contributors to political campaigns. Since January 2003, General Dynamics' employees and political action committees have contributed \$1.3 million, about 64 percent to Republicans. Northrop contributed \$1.24 million, about 58 percent to Republicans.

Senator Snowe was among dozens of lawmakers whose support was needed to win final passage. She was also part of a bipartisan group that tried to tie a \$10 billion buyout program for tobacco farmers, which is also part of the bill, to a new requirement that would allow the Food and Drug Administration to regulate cigarettes and other tobacco products.

House Republicans rejected that provision, but Ms. Snowe voted for the overall bill in part because it included the shipbuilding tax break that she had proposed.

She was hardly alone. Senator John Breaux, Democrat of Louisiana, opposed many parts of the overall bill but supported the shipbuilding tax break and numerous other tax cuts for oil companies that are big employers in his state.

Few if any lawmakers publicly objected to the shipbuilding provision, which was tiny in comparison with sweeping tax cuts, worth \$42 billion over 10 years, on foreign profits of American multinationals.

The House and Senate passed the overall

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bill by overwhelming majorities.

Under current law, shipbuilders have to pay income taxes on long-term Navy contracts based on the percentage of work they have finished. When that requirement was imposed in 1986, lawmakers were furious that top military contractors were deferring almost all of their taxes, even though they were getting progress payments throughout the term of their contracts. According to Mr. McIntyre, the top 12 Pentagon suppliers paid an effective tax rate of only 6.3 percent in the early 1980's, and some companies often paid none.

General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman have both enjoyed big jumps in sales and profits from their shipbuilding divisions, which are dominated by Navy contracts, but tax payments at both companies during the same period declined.

At General Dynamics, which makes the Arleigh Burke class of Navy destroyers and Seawolf-class nuclear submarines, its marine division generated \$2.5 billion in sales in the first six months of 2004, up 20 percent from the first half of 2003. Earnings in the marine business increased 39 percent, to \$179 million, in the first six months of this year, compared with the first half of 2003.

Despite rising profits in all its divisions, General Dynamics' overall tax payments declined sharply in the first six months of this year, to \$78 million from \$119 million in the first half of 2003.

At Northrop Grumman, which produces aircraft carriers and a new generation of destroyers, profits in the shipbuilding division nearly doubled, to \$186 million, in the first half of 2004 from \$98 million in the first half of 2003. Northrop's overall tax payments fell to \$291 million in the first half of 2004 from \$112 million in the first half of 2003.

Cynthia Brown, president of the American Shipbuilding Association, said the new measure was necessary because shipbuilders often lose money early in a multiyear contract.

"A naval ship takes us anywhere from three and one half years to seven years to build, and an aircraft carrier can take as long as eight years," Ms. Brown said. Even though the government makes periodic "progress payments" as the work is completed, she said, those payments often fall short of costs in the beginning because the heaviest costs are at the start of a contract.

"This is not a tax cut," she said. "This is a cash-flow issue."

Helo Self-Protection

Navy Opts For Several EW Enhancements To Strengthen Its Combat Fleet

By Robert Wall

The U.S. Navy is on the way to becoming a major player in directed infrared countermeasures for helicopters and, later, fighters, expanding on its aggressive program of upgrading Marine Corps helicopters headed to Iraq.

The Navy had planned to begin development in 2006 of a podded tactical directed infrared countermeasures (Tadircm) system for fighters. However, with recognition that helicopters face the most immediate threat, the Navy has reordered its priority and plans to launch into an enhanced helicopter protection effort in 2006, with the Tadircm initiative to follow around 2008, says Navy Capt. Dwight L. Cousins, program manager for Navy and Marine Corps aircraft EW systems.

The Navy intends to take advantage of the U.S. Army's work on directed infrared countermeasures (Dircm) technology by becoming involved in the Advanced Threat Infrared Countermeasures (Atircm) project. The exact details of how the cooperation would work are still being negotiated, but Navy officials are keen to take advantage of the Army's expertise in this area, which includes several years of often difficult development. One of the discussion points is how quickly the Navy could receive its equipment.

However, the Navy is doing more than simply buying the BAE Systems' Atircm system that the Army has paid to develop. The former is eyeing several technology enhancements to the baseline system. To meet Navy and Marine Corps requirements, the system would be fitted with two-color infrared missile warning sensors using staring focal plane arrays, rather than the Army's ultraviolet-based Common Missile Warning System. Moreover, the Navy wants a multi-band laser, a smaller pointer and tracker, and an upgraded processor to support the two-color IR sensors, Cousins says. The Navy interest is driven, in part, by differences in infrared signature of its helicopters.

Congress has provided the Navy near-term funding, about \$26 million, for research on the newer missile warning equipment. It is supposed to achieve greater detection ranges with low false alarm rates. BAE Systems and Northrop Grumman have devised systems that are now under evaluation. One will be selected for flight-testing in a pod. An early operational assessment could come as early as late 2006.

The sequence of which helicopters will be upgraded first--assault helos like the AH-1 or assault support helos like the CH-53--also is still under review.

The Navy hopes that its work on helicopters will pay dividends when it comes to fighters and specifically Tadircm. Originally, service officials estimated it would take three years to field a basic Tadircm system. That time line is still likely, although the experience on helicopters might allow the Navy to compress the development time somewhat, Cousins suggested.

The fighter pod would entail more than merely repacking the helicopter hardware. For instance, a change in the laser is seen as likely. Tadircm is expected to be bid separately from the helicopter initiative.

The Dircm work essentially represents the second step to a massive Navy and industry effort to equip Marine Corps helicopters now in Iraq with a survivability suite comprising Alliant Techsystems AAR-47(V) combined missile and laser-warning equipment, Northrop Grumman APR-39 radar-warning receivers, and ALE-43 dispensers built by BAE Systems and Symetrics. The effort is continuing as helicopters are sent to the Middle East to replace ones already there. Cousins noted that the undertaking has required extraordinary effort, including running a second shift at Alliant Techsystems for the AAR-47. Flare manufacturer Alloy Surfaces has also added a second production line to satisfy operational demands.

Beyond immediate combat needs, Navy officials are mulling whether to expand fielding

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and upgrade the Raytheon ALR-67(V)3 radar-warning receiver being installed on F/A-18E/Fs. The device is more sensitive, more accurate, and can better distinguish threats than the ALR-67(V)2s flying on older F/A-18s, says Capt. Jeffrey Penfield, program manager for F/A-18s. However, despite interest, there are currently no funds to upgrade the rest of the fleet.

Moreover, the Navy has identified a digitally cued receiver upgrade to the analog ALR-67(V)3 as an attractive undertaking. The effort would further boost sensitivity and allow radar warning receivers on different aircraft to compare information to more precisely determine the location of an emitter, notes Peggy Heffner, who is in charge of the ALR-67(V)3. Fleet users have been briefed on the proposal, but so far it hasn't become a high priority. Heffner notes that upgrade costs are still being identified. The U.S. Air Force is already pursuing a path to field digital radar warners that can share information to precisely locate a radar.

For older F/A-18s, Navy officials also are watching a Royal Australian Air Force effort to add the Saab BOL chaff/flare dispenser to its F/A-18s using a conformal system attached to the SUU-63 weapons pylon. U.S. Navy engineers for themselves are trying to assess if there are any technical reasons that would rule out BOL use on F/A-18s. The Navy bought an earlier version of the dispenser for its F-14 and lauded the performance. The F/A-18 BOL also features a new countermeasures controller.

Other activities in the radar protection realm include the Navy's recent completion of a flight test series of BAE Systems' ALE-55 fiber-optic towed decoy, which Cousins said performed better than expected. Developers are still trying to improve signal continuity along the fiber-optic tow-line, but believe they can meet the Fiscal 2006 fielding schedule.

Additionally, though, the Navy continues to fund a fall-back system, Raytheon's FO-50, a

fiber-optic derivative of the ALE-50. The service plans to decide next year whether to focus its spending on one system, or continue funding both. The F/A-18E/F is the Navy's primary target.

The Air Force also was going to upgrade B-1Bs, but killed the program. The reduction in production numbers threatened to boost the towed decoy's price, but Cousins says both BAE Systems and Raytheon were able to respond to ensure they continue to meet the decoy's cost target. USAF officials say they have scrapped plans to buy either the ALE-55 or the FO-50 for the F-15 fleet.

Separately, the Navy has shifted its acquisition approach on the F/A-18E/F's integrated defensive electronic countermeasures (Idecm) program. Rather than having prime contractor BAE Systems purchase the ITT-built ALQ-214 jammer subsystem, the Navy is buying it directly for installation by Boeing. Cousins says ITT's production quality was high enough that the verification work by BAE Systems wasn't deemed necessary. By purchasing the item directly the Navy saves money by not having to pay BAE Systems, which was effectively relegated to a middleman role. ALQ-214 jammers are now being installed on F/A-18E/Fs for operational use.

The Navy also is starting to direct its sights on how to best upgrade its older fighters, which aren't scheduled for Idecm. One alternative being examined is an advanced technology demonstration of a digital end-to-end EW suite. It would include one black box handling different functions--such as jamming--acting as a controller for the ALE-47 countermeasures dispenser as well as for a Dircm system. Funding hasn't been secured, but there is a growing recognition that older F/A-18s, for instance, will remain in Navy inventory for some time and require an electronic warfare enhancement to remain survivable after 2010.

Aimpoint Adjustment

Pentagon Identifies Need For Better Targeting, Battle Damage Assessment And Weapons Reliability

By Robert Wall

U.S. military officials are confronting shortcomings in their precision strike capabilities, which could trigger wide-ranging changes in areas from targeting weapons to assessing their effectiveness to the stockpiling of key components.

The activities are emerging from observations made during recent military conflicts and reviews of development programs.

One issue generating concern is that the U.S. military's highly touted precision weapons developments aren't delivering the results they should. In particular, Pentagon civilians monitoring weapons developments have detected a disturbing trend: The operational suitability of weapons is slipping. The shortcoming has occurred even as developers are meeting their operational effectiveness targets, notes Clay Davis, a senior staff specialist for air-to-ground weapons in the Pentagon's acquisition office.

One problem is that program managers are rewarded for meeting performance, cost and schedule targets. However, when it comes to issues of operational suitability, such as quality and reliability, those incentives don't exist, Davis says. Weapons have also suffered from problems with mission planning tools, which have made them more cumbersome to use than they should be.

Reliability is at least partly seen as heightening U.S. Navy interest in pulling out of the U.S. Air Force-led Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (Jassm) program. The Navy, which has long been on the fence when it comes to Jassm, was to start buying the cruise missile later this decade. The decision to end its involvement isn't final, and Pentagon officials are reluctant to let the Navy take that step, which would scuttle yet another joint weapons program. Air Force officials also are crying foul, warning that such a move would increase their costs, according to officials.

Another weapons issue for senior Pentagon leaders is whether they should prepare better for

surge production of weapons. Specifically, the acquisition and industrial policy offices are debating whether to buy long-lead items that could take up to a year to build and keep them in inventory, Davis says. The Pentagon in recent years has had to boost production rates for Boeing's Joint Direct Attack Munition and Raytheon's Tomahawk cruise missile to ward off inventory shortages.

Military officials are also dealing with shortcomings in the battle damage assessment (BDA) process--a long-standing deficiency the military has complained about. Lt. Gen. William Wallace, commanding general of the U.S. Army's Combined Arms Center and V Corps commander, last year pointed out that during the conflict in Iraq BDA lagged 24-48 hr., in one case contributing to a delay in the Army's push through the Karbala gap. Estimates put Iraqi Republican Guard strength at the time at 70-75%, when in reality the Medina division had become ineffective.

Part of the problem is that BDA is too dependent on imagery, according to military and intelligence officials. The process doesn't adequately focus on the secondary effects of a strike that aren't always visible and too narrowly scrutinizes the physical damage, they note. Wallace added that given the effectiveness of the U.S. military, perhaps "we can sometimes afford to err on the side of being more aggressive in our assessment" of the wider impact a raid had.

There are also shortcomings at the front end of a weapons attack, the targeting. Currently, 29 different organizations are involved in collecting relevant data. While the information is good, it isn't well organized, notes USAF Col. Dave Minster, deputy director for targets at the Joint Staff. A proposal is now being put forward to identify lead agencies for different aspects of targeting, although the plan hasn't received community-wide endorsement.

Targeting procedures may also have to be improved, Minster suggested. For instance, in the Iraq war, planners shifted responsibility for

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targeting air defenses from the organization usually responsible to a group that was seen as having closer personal ties to operational planners, which, Davis indicated, was not a good way to operate. Wallace added that having strike planning take place at multiple locations near-simultaneously can also lead to fissures in operations.

But more substantively, the Joint Staff wants to devise a targeting information portal that would allow users to more rapidly access the latest information.

Another issue weapons developers are realizing is that existing communications infrastructure, particularly beyond visual range, was designed for voice traffic, not to support the emerging class of digital, networked weapons, notes Keith Sanders, the Navy's deputy program executive officer for weapons. Limits on the communications systems could become a particular bottleneck as the military wants to simultaneously have in the air hundreds of weapons such as the inflight reprogrammable Tactical Tomahawk. Sanders doesn't view the problem as insurmountable, although he argues

it will require careful mission planning to sequence weapons.

Commanders may also be unwilling to change a weapons plan inflight if they have less than 50% certainty the communications are reliable. Those operational issues will require much attention, Sanders argues.

Developers are also grappling with the fact that the Pentagon has told the Navy and Air Force to stop buying cluster submunitions. The Navy this year will buy its last Joint Standoff Weapons with cluster submunitions, the JSOW-A, following the Air Force which did so last year. But the Air Force still has to decide what to do with the Wind Corrected Munitions Dispenser-Extended Range. The Pentagon will let USAF complete its development, but the service likely will not be allowed to field the munition given a moratorium on its use.

At the technology level, the Pentagon also faces some key weapons-related choices. One would be whether to try to boost the industrial base for fuzes. Davis notes that too many don't work as advertised. There is also a shortage of reliable supply for thermal batteries, he adds.

Fight For Marine One Contract Grows Intense

By Sydney J. Freedberg Jr.

Defense contracts are always political. But competing companies usually leave negative advertising to the politicians. Not so in the fight to replace Marine One, the presidential helicopter.

The two companies bidding for the contract -- Connecticut-based Sikorsky Aircraft and an international team led by U.S. aerospace giant Lockheed Martin -- are putting up dueling media events, heavy advertising, lots of flag-waving.

There have even been anonymous attacks on each aircraft's record. Said aviation analyst Richard Aboulafia, from the Fairfax, Va.-based Teal Group: "It's starting to look like the actual presidential campaign."

By defense standards, the contract is not huge -- a squadron of 23 Marine Corps helicopters to be delivered over six years at an estimated price of \$1.6 billion, compared with more than \$4 billion to be spent in 2005 alone on 24 F-22 stealth fighters for the Air Force. But the prestige stakes are high. "There are few images that capture the U.S. presidency like that of Marine One landing on the White House lawn," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., whose district would build Sikorsky's S-92 aircraft. "It sends one hell of a signal to business in this country [if] the presidential helicopter is going to be made by the British and Italians."

A Lockheed win, however, "could mean as many as 750 jobs in Owego" in upstate New York, said Rep. Maurice Hinchey, D-N.Y., who has rallied all but two members of the New York delegation in support of Lockheed's bid. Hinchey emphasizes that the Lockheed "US101" -- a variant of the European "EH101" design -- would largely be built in his district and in Texas, albeit using a significant number of imported parts.

As the battle escalates, Washington insiders have been treated to full-color, full-page advertisements from both companies (including in this magazine). Sikorsky's ads tout their "All-American" aircraft; the Lockheed-led team counters with the slogan "Built by Americans" -- although the logo of Italian-owned partner AgustaWestland remains at the bottom of the

page. Lockheed timed a pre-emptive press event for the day before reporters got to fly in a prototype Sikorsky aircraft. National Journal has received anonymous mail and e-mail citing past problems with each machine.

"I've never seen anything like this," said Loren Thompson, an analyst with the Arlington, Va.-based Lexington Institute who has done consulting work for companies on both sides. And more is at stake than just prestige and profits. "There's a possibility that someday, somebody's going to shoot a missile at this helicopter," Thompson said, "or that it may have to serve as an airborne command post in a genuine emergency."

While the 1970s-vintage Sikorsky VH-3 helicopters that now transport the president were targeted for replacement years ago, said aviation analyst David Harvey of Shephard Press, "it really came into focus after 9/11. It's not just a shuttle anymore." The crucial demand is for more advanced electronics -- for communications and self-defense -- than the aging VH-3s can handle. And both competitors have good credentials here: Lockheed Martin is a "systems integrator" -- the contractor that makes all the systems work together -- on a range of complex programs from spy satellites to strike fighters; Sikorsky has partnered with L-3 Communications, which works on the E-4B, the nation's flying command post in the event of nuclear war. Although details are classified, both helicopters could probably carry similar electronics.

But the helicopters themselves embody opposite approaches to transporting the president. "These are in different classes," said Teal analyst Aboulafia. "You'd never think they would compete with each other."

The Lockheed/AgustaWestland 101, originally developed in the 1980s to fly off British Royal Navy ships in the harsh environment of the North Atlantic, is a much bigger helicopter with endurance, cargo capacity, and cost to match. The Sikorsky S-92, developed in the 1990s as a commercial transport, is smaller and cheaper, yet is more advanced. Comparing currently available models -- which may differ

MORE

significantly from the top-secret presidential variants -- the Lockheed aircraft is about 20 percent heavier than the Sikorsky; has about 15 percent more cabin space for the president, aides, and special equipment; flies about 50 percent farther without refueling; and costs, very roughly, 50 percent more. The Lockheed also has three engines to the Sikorsky's two, requiring much more maintenance and fuel, but also providing an extra margin of safety if an engine fails.

The Lockheed/AgustaWestland 101 has more history than the Sikorsky S-92. Cost overruns, delivery delays, and technical flaws -- including four crashes -- marred its introduction in Britain and Canada. But over time, it has established a reputation for robustness, with the Canadian "Cormorant" version flying long-range search-and-rescue missions through icy Arctic weather, and the British "Merlin" shrugging off gunfire in Bosnia.

Sikorsky's S-92, by contrast, has no such record, good or bad: So far, only prototypes have been flying. But Sikorsky insists that a slew of sophisticated technologies will keep the S-92 free of the usual teething troubles of new aircraft. It carries its fuel in breakaway tanks along the sides -- not beneath the passengers' feet as in the 101 -- to prevent deadly fires in a crash. It has been tested to more-rigorous Federal Aviation Administration standards against everything from engine explosions to collisions with birds. And key moving parts are designed to be "flaw tolerant," able to keep working safely until cracks grow so large and obvious that inspecting mechanics will see the problem. These innovations won the S-92 the aviation industry's Collier Trophy and a higher level of FAA safety certification than any other helicopter in the world -- including the Lockheed/AgustaWestland 101. But just how these advances will work out in practice is unproven: Sikorsky just delivered the first operational S-92 in September.

That delivery, to Petroleum Helicopters, a company that shuttles oil workers to offshore rigs in the Gulf of Mexico, fits Sikorsky's original business plan for the S-92. But overall, Sikorsky has reversed that strategy. Originally aimed at the commercial market, the S-92 now stakes its survival on government purchases. Twenty-eight have just been ordered by the

Canadian military (which, notably, bought the S-92 instead of the 101, albeit in a competition that prioritized price over performance), and hopes are pinned on the Marine One contract plus a future Air Force buy for new search-and-rescue helicopters. Another irony is that the aircraft advertised by Sikorsky as All-American is currently built with parts and partners from Spain, Brazil, Japan, Taiwan, and China -- in keeping with the well-established offshore outsourcing strategy of Sikorsky's parent company, multinational United Technologies Corp. For the presidential variant, Sikorsky is replacing its foreign subcontractors with American ones.

Replacing so many overseas suppliers is "a management challenge," acknowledged Nick Lappos, Sikorsky's S-92 program manager, but the offshore partners were producing simpler sheet-metal components that are "relatively straightforward to replace." By contrast, the heart of the helicopter, the complex transmission and rotor system, was always going to be made by Sikorsky in America -- whereas the transmissions and rotors on the Lockheed US101 will be made in Britain and Italy by AgustaWestland.

By Lockheed's own estimates, as much as 35 percent of the 101, by value, will be made abroad. The company insists, however, that going international gives it an advantage. AgustaWestland's Anglo-Italian engineers, for example, can build a sophisticated "variable-chord rotor" that lifts weight more efficiently, said Lockheed Vice President Rick Kirkland: "That's an innovation that doesn't exist here in the U.S."

That's also jobs that won't exist here in the U.S., fumes DeLauro: "We need to protect our manufacturing base here at home." The Marine One winner will receive millions in development dollars to improve its product and manufacturing techniques.

But jobs aside, "our focus on the All-American aspect isn't jingoistic," said Sikorsky Vice President Joseph Haddock. "We don't know how to build the aircraft with foreign parts and still maintain security." Under current regulations, every worker who builds or maintains a presidential transport, from limousines to helicopters to Air Force One, must have a clearance known as "Yankee White." To

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get that clearance, said Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., "you have to be an American citizen" - - which would seem to rule out any foreign-made components.

Lockheed officials insist they have worked this out with the government and will comply with all regulations (although, in a classic Catch-22, they cannot reveal what security measures they would take). Shays is not so sure: He has already commissioned a Government Accountability Office report on the clearance question and plans to hold hearings as well. But given the congressional calendar, neither the report nor the hearings will happen until next year -- after the government has already awarded the Marine One contract in December.

"The fierceness is on autopilot," said Aboulafia. In fact, he said, three key factors that had hyped the competition have all vanished. Both competitors had seen a Marine One win as a leg up on the huge contract for 150 to 200 Air Force search-and-rescue helicopters -- but the presidential requirements are different enough

that the link to the later, more lucrative contract is in doubt. Sikorsky, starved for firm orders for the S-92, felt it had to win Marine One -- but the recent Canadian purchase guarantees the S-92's survival.

And Lockheed, deeply committed to foreign partnerships, had seen the 101 as a test case for international ventures against the "buy-American" crowd in Congress -- but this summer, the Pentagon awarded Lockheed a contract to build a new reconnaissance aircraft, using 57 converted transport jets designed and partially built by Embraer, a Brazilian firm. "Not even Britain!" exclaimed Aboulafia. "Brazil! You can't imagine a bigger stick in the eye to the buy-American crowd." By contrast, an Anglo-Italian design seems almost homegrown.

So the corporate priorities that made Marine One so important have already been met elsewhere. What remains is bragging rights, venom -- and, by the way, the safety of the president.

Groundwork Laid For Developing El Toro

By Daniel Yi

The city of Irvine has approved general guidelines of a redevelopment zone for the closed El Toro Marine base that could provide as much as \$978 million to turn it into a complex of parks, homes and businesses.

The money will come from borrowing against tax increments over the next 30 to 45 years that Irvine officials expect the 3,700-acre facility to generate once it is redeveloped and property values rise.

By establishing a redevelopment zone, the city is assured of a funding source should it need more money for preparing the parkland or cleaning contaminated portions of the base, said Tina Christiansen, Irvine's director of community development.

Last week, the Irvine City Council, acting as the redevelopment agency, approved the guidelines in designating most of the base a redevelopment area.

The plan is now open to public review and comment. The council will vote on the plan in December.

The Orange County Great Park is Irvine's vision for the decommissioned base, once the center of a decade-long political debate over whether to turn it into a commercial airport.

Irvine, which annexed the land last year, hopes to turn the base into 3,625 homes, 3 million square feet of commercial and industrial space and 2,800 acres of parks and public facilities. Land for a separate 1,000-acre open space to the north of the base has already been set aside by federal authorities.

The Navy is expected to auction the base in January, selling the land in four parcels.

Developers who buy the lots will be required to sign an agreement with Irvine if they

want to take advantage of full development rights on the land.

The agreements call for the developers to pay \$200 million to \$260 million to the city for infrastructure costs such as roads and utility lines. The eventual homeowners and other property owners in Great Park also will be assessed to fund \$210 million in bonds for public facilities on the parkland.

But that may not be enough to ensure the redevelopment of the base, Christiansen said. The redevelopment zone opens another source of funds for the project, she said.

"There are no guarantees what the costs of infrastructure will be," Christiansen said. The borrowed money could also pay for environmental cleanup of the base, she said, if the Navy is slow to complete the work. About a quarter of the base is polluted or needs to be studied for possible contamination.

The Navy is required by federal law to clean up the land before handing it over for civilian use, but some observers have questioned whether there would be enough money for the task.

The redevelopment zone would allow Irvine to tap a portion of the expected increases in tax revenues as the value of the properties increase.

The redevelopment agency then would borrow against that money to issue bonds.

According to the city's plan, the redevelopment agency would be able to borrow a maximum of \$2 billion over the life of the redevelopment zone, up to 45 years.

Some local real estate analysts have estimated the base land to be worth from \$800 million to \$1.2 billion.

Danger From Depleted Uranium Is Found Low In Pentagon Study

By Matthew L. Wald

WASHINGTON - A Pentagon-sponsored study of weapons made from depleted uranium, a substance whose use has attracted environmental protests around the world, has concluded that it is neither toxic enough nor radioactive enough to be a health threat to soldiers in the doses they are likely to receive.

In a five-year, \$6 million study, researchers fired depleted uranium projectiles into Bradley fighting vehicles and Abrams tanks, in a steel chamber at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, and measured the levels of uranium in the air and how quickly the particles settled.

The conclusion, said Dr. Michael E. Kilpatrick, deputy director of the Deployment Health Support Directorate of the Defense Department, is that "this is a lethal but safe weapons system."

The new study did not seek to measure how depleted uranium traveled through the environment or its potential for entering drinking water or crops.

But it did measure how quickly uranium that is inhaled was passed through the body. Lt. Col. Mark A. Melanson, the program manager for health physics at the Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, said that the aerosolized particles of depleted uranium were "moderately soluble," and that inhaled particles would dissolve in lung fluids and eventually pass through the kidneys and enter the urine, with half the uranium being excreted

in 10 to 100 days. Uranium that is eaten would pass through far faster and with little absorption, Colonel Melanson said.

He said the long-term risks were tiny compared with the risk of being killed outright by the weapon.

The study, conducted by contractors led by the Battelle Memorial Institute, is scheduled to be released Tuesday. Dr. Kilpatrick said the test results and the findings would be publicly posted for peer review.

But opponents of using depleted uranium, who have not yet seen the study, were skeptical of the findings.

"We do know that depleted uranium is radioactive and toxic," said Tara Thornton, of the Military Toxics Project, a nonprofit group in Lewiston, Me., which seeks to clean up military pollution. "Studies have shown health impacts on rats and other things." Depleted uranium is a byproduct of nuclear weapons production. It is almost entirely a form called Uranium 238, which is left after the more valuable Uranium 235, the kind useful in bombs and reactors, has been removed. Depleted uranium is 1.7 times more dense than lead and penetrates armor easily.

The United States military has never confronted an opponent that used depleted uranium. Most exposure to American military personnel has been a result of fire from their own forces.

Survivors' Benefits Increase

By Tom Philpott

Military survivor benefits for 270,000 elderly recipients, and the future value of the Survivor Benefit Plan for all beneficiaries, will begin to rise next October when the first of four special pay hikes takes effect.

When the last one occurs, in April 2008, SBP annuities for older beneficiaries will have returned to a level that effectively eliminates a long-standing reduction in benefits at age 62.

Phase-out of the SBP offset, cleverly dubbed the widow's tax by change advocates, is the crown jewel among personnel initiatives that Congress passed this month in the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act.

Also set to see pay gains are military retirees with 20 or more years of service and a disability rating of 100-percent for service-connected injuries or illnesses. Effective Jan. 1, 2005, their military retired pay will be fully restored — no longer reduced, dollar-for-dollar, by their VA disability compensation. For this group alone among seriously disabled retirees, the law accelerates the 10-year phased end to the ban on concurrent receipt of military retirement and disability pay.

And for the first time, TRICARE Standard benefits will be made available to some drilling reservists and National Guard members. But the Reserve TRICARE plan is far more restrictive than the one embraced last summer by 70 percent of the Senate.

Indeed, none of the three major personnel initiatives negotiated in a House-Senate conference committee, before Congress

adjourned for fall elections, is as inclusive as proponents had hoped.

- On SBP — Senate negotiators accepted the House's shortened phase-out schedule for the age 62 offset. It will disappear in 3y' years rather than 10. But the House accepted the Senate's higher buy-in formula if current retirees seek to enroll in an improved SBP.Ê

The House proposed only a modest late enrollment penalty, no more than 4.5 percent of covered retired pay. Instead, interested retirees will have to pay all missed premiums plus interest back to the date they had declined enrollment.

- On Accelerated Concurrent Receipt — Congressional staff members said this change likely will affect 15,000 retirees with 100 percent disability ratings, half the original 30,000 estimate. Left behind could be retirees with disability ratings below 100 percent who receive compensation at the 100 percent level because their disabilities make them unemployable.

- On Reserve TRICARE — This first-time opening of TRICARE Standard to certain drilling reservists is far less ambitious than the \$5.6 billion amendment (over five years) that Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) pushed through the Senate last summer. Graham-Daschle sought to open TRICARE to any drilling reservist or family member willing to pay monthly premiums, set at 28 percent of the cost of care. The government would pay the remaining 72 percent.

Troops Face Difficulties Voting

By Patrick Kerkstra

BAGHDAD, Iraq - U.S. service members based in Iraq and across the globe can't be confident that their votes will be counted in this year's presidential election, analysts and military advocates said this week.

Those warnings came despite a stepped-up Pentagon campaign - developed in response to the 2000 election, when as many as 30 percent of service members stationed overseas were unable to vote - to encourage troops to register and vote early.

Observers praised the military's efforts but said a cumbersome voting process, a confusing patchwork of state laws and likely ballot challenges almost certainly would disenfranchise some military voters.

"They've made three steps forward in terms of their effort and attention to the problem but two steps backward as a practical matter," said Peter Feaver, a political science professor at Duke University in Durham, N.C., who closely follows military voting.

Anecdotal accounts from soldiers stationed in Iraq confirmed that at least some troops here who applied to their local elections boards for absentee ballots months ago still haven't received them.

"I sent my application in June and I never got anything back," said 1st Cavalry Sgt. Jim Villareal from Orange County, Calif.

But unlike past elections in which Villareal and others like him probably would've been disenfranchised, the military has distributed tens of thousands of federal write-in ballots this year. The replacement ballots allow soldiers who haven't received local ballots to vote on candidates for federal office, though they don't permit voting on state and local issues.

"It's a pretty poor substitute for a regular ballot, but it beats nothing," said Sam Wright, who heads the Military Voting Rights Project.

More than the military, states and local jurisdictions are to blame for not getting their ballots to overseas soldiers. Late primary elections and legal challenges - many of them involving Ralph Nader's bid to get on ballots - have delayed printing and mailing absentee ballots in many jurisdictions.

There've been isolated reports of shortages of the federal replacement ballots, but Wright said they appeared to be reaching most soldiers who needed them.

"We have seen some improvement. Just how much is impossible to say. At this point everyone has their fingers crossed," said Derek Stewart, who in 2001 wrote a highly critical assessment of the military's overseas voting program for the Government Accountability Office.

Given the likelihood of a close presidential election, a few thousand more votes from service members stationed overseas could swing the results in battleground states such as Florida, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Just 537 votes divided President Bush and Al Gore in Florida in 2000, a spread easily covered by military ballots.

Military voters have tended in past elections to vote Republican, and a recent Annenberg election survey of 655 active-duty soldiers and their family members found that they were likely to back Bush in large numbers again this year.

"The Democrats broke something of a taboo in 2000 when they started to challenge military ballots on technical grounds," Feaver said. "You would expect the Democrats to be just as exacting this time around as Republicans will be about votes coming from perceived Democratic areas."

Overseas military ballots are particularly susceptible to challenge, experts said, because they frequently arrive past deadlines and without postmarks.

The Pentagon had planned to roll out a \$22 million electronic solution to the problem this election. But security experts said the votes - which would've been transmitted over the Internet - wouldn't be secure, and the system was scrapped. The hodgepodge of voting and ballot-application methods that took its place is so confusing that the Defense Department issued a 379-page guide to help service members figure out how to vote.

The military has deluged service members with reminders to vote early. Banners and signs seem to fly from every base in Iraq, and

MORE

"remember to vote" commercials air frequently on the Armed Forces television network.

The Pentagon campaign and the crucial role of the Iraq war in the election have combined to make the election a passionate subject of debate in mess halls and barracks across Iraq.

"We should stay here until the job is done, and I can't trust (Sen. John) Kerry to do that," said Baghdad-based 1st Cavalry Spc. Thuan Tran, from Palmdale, Calif., who said he'd never felt so passionately about an election before.

At Camp Bucca, the American-run prison on the Kuwaiti border 300 miles south of

Baghdad, the sand-dusted and sunburned soldiers consider themselves experts on the biggest foreign-policy question shaping the election.

"A lot of soldiers feel President Bush isn't fulfilling what he said he'd do," said Spc. Ricardo Hart, 35, of the 321st Signal Co. out of Reno, Nev. "But I tell them, this is war, this is still a conflict. Nothing is black and white. So, we're all voting - just maybe not for the same person."

Slain Navy Sailor Spent His Last Hours Recruiting

Stabbing Outside Festival Occurred On A Light Day With Fewer Guards

By Peggy O'Hare

It was a rare weekend home for Spring resident Brandon Wayne Smith, who had been granted a brief but precious few days off from the U.S. Navy.

To celebrate, the 23-year-old sailor accompanied family and friends Saturday to the Texas Renaissance Festival 50 miles northwest of Houston, but the trip ended in disaster. Coming to the aid of his 21-year-old sister, Kristin, during a fight, Brandon Smith died when he was stabbed 19 times, mostly in the back.

Always eager to recruit for the military life, Smith had spent his last hours promoting the Navy to the man accused of killing him. He gave Smith his name and phone number, and when Smith died, that number was still in his pocket, family members said.

"He was a 24-hour-a-day recruiter," said family friend Betsy Barricklow. "This was a young man who, I think, was going to be in the military until retirement."

On Monday, Brent William Noland, 19, of Montgomery remained in the Grimes County Jail in lieu of \$75,000 bail, charged with murder. Smith's stabbing death, which happened in the festival parking lot in Todd Mission, was the first violent crime of its kind in the event's 30-year history, festival officials said.

Grimes County Sheriff Don Sowell said the festival's security director told him two of the 15 or so officers standing guard at the event were

sent home early that day. "I think they do that when attendance gets low," Sowell said.

The two "rovers" released early were assigned to patrol the festival's interior grounds, not the parking lot, said festival spokeswoman Melba Tucker.

Security is usually overbooked in case the event draws larger-than-usual crowds, but if attendance numbers are down — which was the case Saturday — some officers can be turned loose, Tucker said.

"They just weren't needed, the (attendance) numbers just weren't there," she said, noting that Astros fever has dampened the festival's turnout this year.

George Coulam, owner of the Texas Renaissance Festival, said security provisions Saturday were adequate.

"We have been operating for 30 years and never had a problem," Coulam said. "The sheriff's happy with us. We run a good show. ... It was a tragic mistake that happened out there. You can't blame that on our security — we had plenty of security out there."

The trouble happened around nightfall Saturday just 30 minutes after Smith's mother and stepfather had departed the festival grounds. As many revelers were heading to their cars, seven people began arguing with Smith, his sister and others.

During the scuffle, two men got on top of Smith, who was stabbed and kicked. Smith died later at Conroe Regional Medical Center.



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Ernest Borgnine Makes Chief

By PRNewswire

WASHINGTON -- Academy Award winning actor Ernest Borgnine obtained a lifelong dream of advancement to chief petty officer in Washington, D.C. this weekend.

The actor who played Lt. Cmdr. Quniton McHale in the 1960s television show, "McHale's Navy," not only played a sailor on TV, he served in the U.S. Navy for 10 years.

Borgnine enlisted in the Navy in 1935 serving on destroyers and submarine chasers. He served his commitment until 1941, but after just three months of being a civilian again, Pearl Harbor was hit by the Japanese and Borgnine returned to active duty. Borgnine went to sea with the Navy -- helping to guard the U.S. Atlantic Coastline during the height of World War II. He rose to the rank of gunner's mate 1st Class. He left the Navy after the war in 1945, but he says he never forgot what he learned.

"Of all of my successes in life, including all that I've earned in acting, being in the Navy is my greatest achievement," Borgnine told an audience at the U.S. Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, Oct. 17.

"The camaraderie and the work ethic is something that I always remembered ... and it's what got me through things the rest of my life."

Borgnine was presented with a chief's pin, hat and given the title, "honorary chief petty officer" from the highest ranking enlisted man in the U.S. Navy -- Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Terry D. Scott.

Scott does not give out such honorary titles very often, but he said because of Borgnine's Navy service, and his support of the Navy and its families, Borgnine deserves this special advancement.

At 87, Borgnine is still very busy. While in Washington he spoke at the National Press Club, served as master of ceremonies for the United States Navy Band's annual Navy Birthday Concert and he attended a viewing of his latest film, "A Trail to Hope Rose," which is a Hallmark Original movie -- a western -- that aired July 3.

He's about to begin shooting in Florida for an upcoming film. He is also the voice of the character, "Mermaid Man," on the Nickelodeon show, "SpongeBob SquarePants."