

Amphibious Ships

Discussion

Naval expeditionary forces with embarked Marines provide forward presence and flexible crisis response forces for employment in support of foreign policy objectives. These forces provide the most formidable amphibious forcible entry capability in the world. The development and maintenance of this capability is the statutory responsibility of the Marine Corps as directed by Congress in Title X. Amphibious lift requirements support the national military strategy and are tailored to meet real world day-to-day commitments as well as to satisfy combat surge requirements.

Big deck amphibious ships are the centerpiece of the Navy-Marine Corps amphibious forces and are essential to maintaining amphibious lift and power projection capabilities. Currently 11 big deck ships are in the inventory. The twelfth big deck, LHD-7, is under construction and will be commissioned in FY2001. An LHD-8 transition ship and a follow on LHA replacement ship (LHX) will better serve and meet the Marine Corps' lift and future warfighting requirements than the TARAWA class ships.



The warfighting and forward presence requirement, the capability the Marine Corps strives to provide to our nation, remains at 3.0 MEB equivalents and equates to 14 three-ship Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs) and 2 additional LPD 17s. The requirement for an amphibious force structure which supports sealift for 3.0 MEB equivalents, as originally stated in the Department of the Navy Lift Study, the Mobility Requirements Study, and later in the Quadrennial Defense Review, remains a priority requirement. This need has been validated by the Secretary of Defense's Global Naval Force Presence Policy (GNFPP) and reinforced by reoccurring requests from combatant commanders for MEU(SOC)/ARG forces.

Fiscal constraints, however, have limited the amphibious lift to a programmatic goal of 2.5 MEB equivalents. Achieving this fiscally constrained 2.5 MEB equivalents of sealift will occur in FY08 upon delivery of the twelfth and final LPD-17 class ship. In the meantime, maintaining LKAs and LSTs in the Naval and Ready Reserve Force is alleviating current Navy shortfalls in vehicle lift capabilities. The shortfall in active amphibious shipping remains an area of concern. Accordingly, the LPD-17 program is essential to providing an air-capable, LCAC-capable, wet-well ship that is optimized to meet our surge lift requirements.

Marine Corps Position

The LHA class of ships will approach the end of their service life beginning in 2011. In replacing the LHAs, an LHD-8 transition ship and follow on LHA Replacement (LHX) will meet the Marine Corps lift and future warfighting requirements.