

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH REAR ADMIRAL GARY BLORE,
ASSISTANT COMMANDANT FOR ACQUISITION, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD TIME: 1:30 P.M.
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SEAMAN WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public
Affairs): Okay. And if everybody's ready we'll go ahead and get started now.
I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for
Thursday, April 1st -- or, I'm sorry, Thursday, April 2nd, 2009. My name is MC3
William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and I
will be moderating the call today.

Note to the bloggers on the line today, please remember to clearly
state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question; respect
our guest's time, keeping your questions succinct.

And today our guest is U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Gary T. Blore,
assistant commandant for Acquisition. And Rear Admiral Blore, if you're ready
with an opening statement, we can go ahead with that now.

ADM. BLORE: Okay. Thank you very much. SEAMAN SELBY: Yes, sir.

ADM. BLORE: And thanks again for the Department of Defense and United
States Navy for setting this up for us.

This is Gary Blore, and I am the assistant commandant for Acquisition
here in the Coast Guard. We had a hearing before our House authorizing
subcommittee earlier last week, and I just want to hit a couple of the things
that I spoke about there. And of course I'd be happy to answer any questions
for those of you who are familiar with the testimony that took place there.

But we have a lot of projects that are either progressing or coming to
fruition over the last six, seven, eight months. All of our eight C-130Js for
their mission systems -- all six -- have been contracted for, and we should have
the last one of those done by the summer after this one coming up, so the summer
of 2010. We've taken delivery of our seventh HC-144 Ocean Sentry in Seville,
Spain, and number eight's about a month behind it, and then number seven and
eight will fly across the Atlantic to the United States in May or early June.

On the H-65 helicopter, which is the smaller of our two helicopters
-- we have about 33 of them now that are capable of being armed, a program that
we're introducing to all 102 helicopters. And we'll be doing that at a rate of
about 22 per year. So we have 33 done now and about 22 more per year will be
capable of being armed.

And again, if you have specific questions on any of that, in a few minutes, I'll be happy to answer them.

And as importantly, we're starting the second phase of our upgrades to the H-65 fleet, which is the MH-65B, which has an in-flight navigation system and introduces a lot of avionics that are upgraded that are also compatible with what's being used in the United States Navy right now.

On the larger helicopter, we've done our first two prototypes of the MH-60T, which, again, is very similar to a Department of Defense model, so we can use Department of Defense for the logistics to maintain that. It has a new glass cockpit.

The first National Security Cutter, *Bertholf*, just went through kind of its final acceptance trials en route from weapons testing back into Alameda. It still has some import work that needs to be done, the primary focus of that being instrumented TEMPEST testing, which will take place for about three weeks this month.

The second NSC, the *Waesche*, has now lit off her three main diesel generators, so they got fuel on board. And she's starting to fire up her electrical grid with the main propulsion system -- should be lit off in the May timeframe, which would be another major milestone for her. She's about 80 percent complete.

And of course, we have a contract in place for number three, the *Stratton*. And the long-lead materials have already been procured for number four, the *Hamilton*.

We just delivered our eighth Response Boat Medium to Station Boston and number nine is scheduled to be delivered to Station San Juan, Puerto Rico in May.

I haven't talked about *Rescue 21*, the Sentinel Class patrol boat, the National Automatic Identification System or a variety of other projects. But I think in the interest of time, these are the highlights I hit before the subcommittee. If you have any questions about anything that's transpiring in Coast Guard Acquisition, I'd of course be happy to answer them. And I thank you for your time and I'll open it up to questions.

SEAMAN SELBY: Okay. Thank you, sir. And John, you were first on the line. So if you want to go ahead --

Q Certainly. This is John Conrad, with the blog gCaptain.com. I read in your testimony here you talk about the success of the *Rescue 21* system, both for the fishing boat capsized in January and the U.S. Airways flight. My question is, what are -- how flexible are programs like this that are heavily reliant on technology able to move with, you know, the rapid advances we're really seeing in communications lately? On a ship we use GMDSS systems, and it seems like there hasn't really been much advances in onboard merchant ships since it was instituted, in 10 years. Is this going to be a problem with *Rescue 21* in the future or does it have capabilities to adapt?

ADM. BLORE: It does have capabilities to adapt. I mean, it's a really excellent question, and certainly something we always find challenging.

And in C4ISR projects, you know, one thing I would say is that, you know, everything's relative. And when you look at the system it was replacing, it was replacing an analogue system that was failing and did not the type of reception that we would need along our coast to be able to be alerted to those citizens in distress and had no direction-finding capability.

So the new system has both direction-finding capability and the ability to receive a 1-watt signal at 2 meters, 20 miles offshore. And as I mentioned at the hearing, we have some cases where it's picked up, you know, the voice at 200 nautical miles offshore, with a stronger signal.

So first is a quantum leap for us. It's just (past/passed ?) about 27,000 miles of coastline. We have lots of documented cases of, you know, somebody in the excitement of a mayday call giving the wrong position, either transposing their latitude and longitude or using a common name that is not known by other mariners, and us being able to go immediately to where they are because of the direction-finding.

We're working that project through General Dynamics. The contract does go through the end of 2012. The contract includes a technology refresh, and we've had several software patches that have been put on it already to kind of bring it up to the modern generation of software, and we'll certainly need to put some things in place after 2012 to maintain it.

But it is something that we're certainly focused on to make sure that we keep it current with what's being used out there for software.

Q Hey, is it -- are you going to be able to integrate new technologies like long-range tracking AIS, UAS, feeds from UAS units and such?

ADM. BLORE: Yeah, absolutely. We have two other related projects, which, I think from the question, you're obviously aware of. We have the National Automatic Identification System, which is going to bring in a feed, showing where the AIS signals are being picked up from. In many cases they're going to use Rescue 21 towers and the antenna for NAIS will be mounted on the Rescue 21 tower.

We also have the interagency operations centers, sometimes referred to as Command 21 project, which is upgrading the sector operations centers themselves. And all those feeds are coming into one common operating picture that's in the sector command center.

This is not my area of expertise, to go too far into C4ISR, but you may understand more that because we've adopted a standard protocol, we can also export that signal. So when I say it's coming into the command post for the sector -- we'll use -- like Sector Seattle -- if necessary, Sector Seattle can export that picture to Sector Los Angeles -- for example, if we have traffic that's moving down the coast, and we want to show Sector Los Angeles what's going on. So it's capable of being forwarded or kept in the sector proper.

But we do use a common operating picture, which all the feeds are going into.

Q That's great news.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you.

SEAMAN SELBY: And Jim, you're next.

Q Good afternoon, Admiral. Jim Dolbow with An Unofficial Coast Guard Blog. Welcome back to the bloggers roundtable.

I'm glad we didn't scare you away.

ADM. BLORE: I'm glad too. And I'll be speaking here for the official Coast Guard acquisition program.

Q Okay. Sounds like a good plan.

The Heritage Foundation recently put out a paper that recommended increasing the number of national security cutters. And I don't want to ask you about that part of the proposal of theirs, but there's been some discussion about national security cutters won't have enough speed to sail with a carrier strike group. Can they deploy with a carrier strike group if needed?

ADM. BLORE: I can't speak specifically to a carrier strike group, because I'm not familiar enough, frankly, with the difference in strike groups. But I can say that we worked with the United States Navy to develop the requirements for the national security cutter. It is specifically identified in its mission profile that it will steam with the Navy, and the Navy's requirement was better than 29 knots. So that's why that speed requirement was put on the national security cutter. It was actually driven as much by the Navy requirement as it was by a Coast Guard requirement.

It does have the complete capability. We were just talking about common operating pictures. But the software's capable, and the Navy is on our common operating picture net right now, so we can export the picture that it's picking up from its sensors into whatever the Navy is using or the particular squadron as a command post, be it an Aegis cruiser or whatever. And we can also take in the Navy feed. We've spoken in previous conversations about the fact that it will also have a skiff on board, which will also be able to import and export information. Part of what we did on our recent trials out of San Diego was hook up with a Navy refueler and make sure that we could take fuel on, because if we are steaming at a high speed, obviously we're going to burn through our fuel a lot quicker.

But yeah, it's fully our intent and met the Navy requirements for the kind of -- you know, I think typically you're going to use the Coast Guard in the lower-threat environment. You know, it's probably not going to be your lead picket ship. It has some anti-missile capability but certainly doesn't have the sophistication of weapons that a Navy combatant would have. But it would be there to help with some of those auxiliary missions; you know, resupply of the fleet, if you had a refugee situation, certainly humanitarian relief; you know, the ability to steam into a port with a white cutter that has some different international signals than coming in with a Naval combatant.

So all those services would be available to the Navy, and that's why we built it the way we did.

Q Thank so much, Admiral. Great response.

SEAMAN SELBY: And Tim, you were next.

Q Yeah, this is Tim Flanagan from PugetSoundMaritime.com I was interested -- have any Coast Guard helicopters been armed up to now?

ADM. BLORE: Yes, sir. We -- we were pretty late to the arming helicopter program in the Coast Guard. And it was about 1998, maybe plus or minus a year, that for the first time we started arming helicopters in the drug war.

And that was a specific squadron called HITRON, the Helicopter Interdiction Squadron, which is now located in Jacksonville, Florida. And I believe they have either six or eight HH-65 aircraft, which is our smaller helicopter, which -- we them airborne use of force equipped. And they're the ones that are currently going out and, if necessary, you know, compelling, like, a fast boat to stop by, if necessary, targeting the outboard engines and eliminating their propulsion system, I guess would be the nice way to say it.

Q Right.

ADM. BLORE: And they've been able to do that. I think they have about a hundred percent success rate. And building off of that as we entered, you know, 2000, we recognized that -- especially as we went past September 11th, 2001 -- that that capability to stop a vessel is something that we're going to need for port security, really, in any major harbor. And that's why we started the program.

All the HH-60 aircraft are larger aircraft, have the kit already installed onboard to put the weapons onboard, if you need to use them. We have about 33 of the H-65s that have them now. I believe the last unit -- or close to the last unit where this introduced is in your neighborhood, which is Air Station Port Angeles. And Air Station Port Angeles has the airborne use of force capability now at that unit just off of Puget Sound.

So that's where we're going with the program. You know, in the next three years, basically any Coast Guard helicopter will be capable of airborne use of force. Q And just as follow-up, so what does that involve? Is that some kind of a machine gun or what is that?

ADM. BLORE: They get a heads-up display for avionics, just to help the pilots fly a little bit with the other items that are going on as part of the use-of-force activity. I think they get a FLIR upgrade, a forward-looking infrared. And the actual weaponry itself is a M-240 crew-served machine gun. And they have a 50 caliber target rifle.

The machine gun is typically used for warning shots that go through a -- for the drug war, they go through a sequence of escalating the use of force.

You know, they will initially come with a -- literally a helicopter siren, lights. They'll hold up a board that says "stop." They'll fly by the boat a number of times. And then as it escalates, and with appropriate authorities and permissions, they'll fire warning shots in front of the -- normally a fast boat, and of course, with the machine gun, since you can kind of stitch the water in front of the boat, it's very, very visible.

And then if it does become an issue, with the appropriate authority and permissions to stop the vessel, they pull the machine gun off, put the .50-caliber in place, and that's a single shot into the outboard engines from a

pretty close-aboard position as the helicopter basically flies formation on the boat. And they're very highly trained. They practice this every day. I think we've done it virtually without any injury.

And, you know, we've had boats that we've intercepted with as many as five outboards. And it's kind of interesting when you watch the videos, because they don't stop. You know, they take out the first outboard, and it slows them down three or four knots, and they keep running. And you take out the second outboard, and they keep running. And it's only at the point where you've basically destroyed three or four of the outboards that they finally realize, you know, the game's kind of over.

But the .50-caliber does a good job because it puts, you know, a fairly sizeable round with a lot of momentum into the outboard.

Q Right. I'd love to see some of that video.

ADM. BLORE: I think I've seen it on, like, the History Channel and, you know, Discover (sic) and some of those other programs when they talk about the helicopter use of force. It's in the public domain.

Q Thank you.

SEAMAN SELBY: And if we want to have some follow-up questions right now, John, you'd be first.

Q Yeah, absolutely --

Q Oh -- wait -- Q Go ahead.

Q Hi, David Axe -- joined -- (good to see you ?). And I just want to get on the list.

SEAMAN SELBY: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry about that, David. I didn't know you had joined.

Q That's okay.

SEAMAN SELBY: So go ahead with your questions, David.

Q Great, fantastic. Admiral, hi. David Axe from War is Boring. I wanted to get an update on the UAS situation, if I could.

ADM. BLORE: Sure, David. I don't know that there's been a lot of development since the last time we spoke. We're still basically all separated into categories, and mid-altitude, you know, kind of wide-area surveillance, fixed-wing UAS. We still are working closely with Customs and Border Protection, watching their Predator program. We did stand up a joint office, a joint program office, which we may not have had last time I spoke to you about it.

And we have a couple Coast Guard officers that are there, and basically they're working with CBP on their program to see if there's any unique requirements that the Coast Guard would want so that CBP could consider those if they buy more assets. We have one trained Coast Guard officer who's a Predator operator and one trained as a sensor operator.

There's a maritime version of the Predator that General Atomics is going to introduce next year. And we are watching that closely.

We're not providing any funding for it, but we're watching it.

So that's pretty much where we are. We're still looking at other fixed-wing programs but, frankly, closely monitoring the CBP program, since they're a sister agency with command and control and logistics already in place. And pretty much the same story with a vertical-lift tactical UAS -- in this case being Fire Scout -- with us working closely with the Navy on PMA-266.

We did have a representative onboard the McInerney when they did their testing, and we'll have a representative onboard McInerney when they do their testing again this summer. I think you're familiar with what they did. We've done a dry-fit test on the Bertholf. So they, you know, craned a Fire Scout onboard and then we moved it around the deck, folded the blades and made sure there weren't any safety hazards as far as being able to tie it down and move it around. And we're, you know, excited and waiting for the Navy to integrate a maritime radar. And when that happens, we'll see where we go from there.

So I haven't eliminated, again, other UAS's, but I would certainly say that Navy program is the most attractive to us right now; again, because of the logistics, command and control, support and other things. The Bertholf is physically wired to operate Fire Scout. It was a kind of standard communication system that they were using when -- back in the days when we were doing Eagle Eye. So all the antenna placements and everything are in place. And Waesche being built that way, also. So whether it's Fire Scout or another UAV, we'll be prepared to take one onboard when the time comes.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you, sir.

Q Okay, we've got -- Can I have a follow-up real quick?

SEAMAN SELBY: One second, David. Did somebody else just join us?

Q This is Raymond Pritchett (sp) from information --

Q This is Jim Dolbow. My phone dropped.

SEAMAN SELBY: Jim and Raymond?

Actually, David, let's see if we can give everybody a chance, and then we'll try to come back around for some follow-ups. Q Okay. Thanks.

SEAMAN SELBY: So, Jim, go ahead.

Q This is Jim Dolbow. I mean, are you on round two yet?

SEAMAN SELBY: Oh, oh, I'm sorry, Jim. No, we're not. Who else joined us?

Q Raymond Pritchett.

SEAMAN SELBY: Raymond? Okay. Jim, sorry, we're going to go to Raymond.

Q Hey, Admiral, I'm sorry I wasn't able to get here on time. I really appreciate you joining us today. I have a question about the first and the second Bertholf. The whole issues have -- apparently, the Navy said that the stability design that you guys had created for the first two national security cutters for the -- to fix it so that it would be able to operate 230 days for 30 years, that came back and they said that they didn't like that.

Did you go into that earlier? And can you review that a little bit? Because I -- as I understand it, that's happened since the last time we had spoken, I believe.

ADM. BLORE: It has, and I guess I could say we already covered it, but then about six people would start screaming that we didn't. So I'll -- no, it's a good question, and it hasn't come up before.

We did get our report back from the Carderock design studios, part of the Naval Sea Systems Command. I'll change some of the language you're using a little bit to what I think is a little more accurate. But this is a -- not a structural issue in the sense of strength but a fatigue life issue in the sense of not wanting to have any major repairs necessary to the structure itself over its first 30 years, thus the term "30-year fatigue life."

And what we did -- we did modeling with Carderock on the current design of Bertholf and Waesche, at -- as NSC number one and number two, and decided that we wanted to change that design a little bit to ensure that we'd get 30 years without major repairs, which we've never had on any of our cutters, and it's something we strongly aspire to, not just because of the expense of making the major repairs later but, as importantly, because you got to take the cutter off line and you don't have its operational use then.

So we did do a redesign. We did provide to Carderock for their review. And they basically came up with two groupings of conclusions. We have a new design for starting with NSC number three, or a modified design, I should really say. It'll from the outside look exactly like the Bertholf or the Waesche. But since that one hadn't been constructed yet, we were able to do more things with the way the plate is installed and where there's thinner plate and thicker plate. And they basically said: Hey, you got it right on three through eight. You know, there's some minor things here and there, but basically you got a 30-year fatigue life.

For number one and two, they said: Hey, huge improvement over the way it was before, but we still think you have two areas you need to look at. And the first one that would be an issue is on the 01 deck, first deck above the main deck, and it's in the superstructure, which is actually very, very good, because that's an area where it'll be very visible if anything is occurring before we think it would.

But their conservative estimate is that, you know, you won't see anything for six, seven, eight years. And that assumes you're operating that for 230 days a year in the North Pacific, like from now till then.

So of course we know both Bertholf and Waesche -- Waesche hasn't been delivered yet. Bertholf's spending a fair amount of time in port while it goes through its final testing.

So what we agreed to do with Carderock and what they recommended in their cover letter to the report was, we had already instrumented Bertholf and

in -- kind of in anticipation of this to measure the strains and stresses that are going through the frame to make sure that the empirical modeling that Carderock is doing is accurately showing us what would happen to the Bertholf. It's not that the model itself would be wrong but does it have the right inputs for a class of ship like the Bertholf, since the Navy doesn't operate a similar class.

So we have those sensors in place. We have already taken readings on them. Carderock has recommended that we do that for about 18 months to two years. We'll feed that back into the model. We already have a yard availability set up for Bertholf. That's about four years from this May. And whatever we come up with as far as readings in the next couple years, fed back through model, we'll identify if those two areas still need to be enhanced a little bit, and we'll do that during that yard availability, which again will be about -- a little over four years from today.

So that's the plan, and Waesche goes into the yard immediately after Bertholf comes out, because any learning of doing the first enhancement we want those workers to carry over to the second enhancement. And that's where we are.

Q Thank you very much.

SEAMAN SELBY: Okay. And we only have a few minutes left, but I'll try to get as many bloggers back in as I can.

John, you were next.

Q Yes, absolutely. I was just interviewing Craig Bennett, director of the NPFC. We -- right now with the piracy situation in Somalia and also looking back at unexpected events like Katrina, it seems that a lot of the programs that you guys have in place are really amazing and have immediate use and need.

The NPFC -- National Pollution Funds -- you know, taxes crude oil imports and creates a pool of resources so that you can purchase private services and put them to use immediately. Has the acquisitions ever considered something like that, where we could, you know, there was another Katrina, you could get UAVs or advanced communications from private providers in times of emergency, bring them out of acquisitions and into the field quickly?

ADM. BLORE: No. The short answer would be no, we haven't. I'm familiar with the National Pollution Fund Center and the tax that's put on a barrel of oil. And it's -- and it's used exactly as you said. If there's a major oil spill and the Coast Guard needs to call in civilian support -- which is more typically how those things are cleaned up now -- that we can dip into the fund if the responsible party doesn't have sufficient funding to either cover it or it's beyond what his liabilities are.

But no, we do not have a similar program in the sense of being able to hire like, you know, commercial support for, you know -- you know, refugee transport or something like that. You know, I'm sure some agencies like ICE probably do. But I don't know that we have any direct authorities like that in the Coast Guard. And I certainly know we don't have any user fees or anything like that that would feed that sort of fund.

Q Okay, thank you, Admiral.

SEAMAN SELBY: Jim?

Q Hi, Admiral, Jim Dolbow. I'm going to switch hats and wear the Naval Institute Blog hat right now. I was just wondering, is there any plan to -- any interest in Foreign Military Sales of your deep water assets?

ADM. BLORE: Yes, there is. And before I start the answer, for Petty Officer Selby, let me just say that I thought I was here for an hour. So if you need to disconnect here at 14:00 I certainly will understand and support that. But I'm fine until 14:30.

SEAMAN SELBY: Yes, sir. We'll see what we can do to extend the phone call. I'll get on that right now.

ADM. BLORE: Okay. Thank you.

Yeah, as far as foreign military sales, we have a small international acquisition program. I think it's around \$35 million a year now. We have traditionally sold used Coast Guard assets, very used Coast Guard assets, which have been used in South America and Africa. However, in the last couple years it's really shifted to new small boats. And we sell a lot of Zodiacs, Homeland Security SAFE boats, Archangels, those class of boats up to about 45 feet.

The other thing that's interesting about it is the shift has really moved from South America to Africa and Eurasia. And we actually have many more customers now in Africa and Eurasia than we do in South America, although we still have a lot of activity in South America.

And yes, absolutely one of our hopes is that we will sell some of the new assets that we're procuring. We have had some interest. We've had both the Chileans and the Australians look at Response Boat Medium. We've had the Australians look at the mission package for the C-130J, which I think we have a very unique mission package for the C-130J, which hasn't been emulated in the other military services, so we think that's commercially viable on the international market.

We're certainly hoping the Sentinel-class patrol boat may be of interest once we start delivering it. And I think we have our first international sale for the Ocean Sentry as part of the Merida Initiative with Mexico. So we're coordinating with them to provide at least one and perhaps two CASA aircraft to the Mexican government.

I might also point out that, just like this Bloggers Roundtable, that we don't do any international acquisition without our partners in the Navy. I actually have a sub-unit of their international acquisition program that's here at the Coast Guard, where they actually pay for some of the employees. So it's very much of a kind of hand-in-glove relationship that we have with the Navy.

SEAMAN SELBY: Excellent. And yes, I extended for --

Q Thanks, Admiral.

SEAMAN SELBY: Sorry about that, sir.

We extended for 15 minutes. So Tim, you were next to follow up. Q Well, I have no further questions. I just want to encourage the Coast Guard to

keep ordering boats from -- (inaudible) -- boat builders. That's good for our economy up here.

ADM. BLORE: Yes, sir.

SEAMAN SELBY: And David?

Q Great. Admiral, to loop back around to the UAS issue, you had mentioned the joint office with Customs and Border Patrol. Can you tell me if any lessons have emerged from that cooperation?

ADM. BLORE: It's pretty new. I don't know that I can credit any lessons learned directly from the Joint Project Office.

I'd say there's already been lessons learned prior to the Joint Project Office, because we've been working very closely with Customs and Border Protection on it.

You know, part of it was going to their Air and Marine Operations Center, the AMOC, in Riverside, and watching how they do their command-and-control for Predator. Because, you know, previous to this, we're familiar with how DOD does it and how they fly overseas in a combat area, but of course, as you can imagine, flying here in U.S. airspace is going to be much, much different.

And I think one of the principal lessons learned was we don't want to duplicate CBP's command-and-control system. I mean, they got it down; they have the correct relationship with the FAA and the airspace they're flying with. And so, you know, our intent would be to join them in their command post, whether there's Coasties sitting there or not. We'll build that partnership with CBP.

So I think that, you know, one of the main lessons we've learned is this is not something we want to develop on our own. We got a going program right now with CBP. So if we can continue to go forward, it'll be in partnership with them, where they're doing logistics and command-and-control and we're, you know, perhaps providing some of the operators and certainly some of the search areas that we want to go into -- and, you know, that feeds down to our cutters.

But -- yeah, I think I'd probably stop there. I think that's been the major lesson learned.

Q Okay. Great, thank you.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you, David. And Ray (sp), did you have another follow-up question?

Q Yeah. Last time we talked, Admiral, you discussed the off-shore patrol cutter, and you said that there was an announcement that was pending 60 to 90 days out. And I was wondering if we'd reached that point where you could talk a little bit more about that program, if you had developed it, in terms of what platform or any sort of options that you're looking at specifically.

I had brought up the point that -- asking whether or not there's been any pressure to put the littoral combat ship variants into that role, and you said that you'd heard about that. And I was just wondering if there was any new activity in that front.

SEAMAN SELBY: Well, I think -- a two-part answer, both pretty short. The first part of the question, as to whether we're ready to announce a particular acquisition strategy or our final requirements, no, we're not. Right now we're in that portion where we're doing affordability assessments. So we have a set of preliminary requirements; we're running those through both our partners in the Navy and our own technical authorities, our surface logistics center in Baltimore, to get some reality to what the requirements that we've identified would cost and how we might be able to alter those, either to help, you know, production timelines or schedule timelines or affordability itself. So that's the first part. We're really not ready to go there.

Certainly, LCS is something that we would consider. I meet fairly regularly, as does my staff, with Naval Sea Systems Command. And, you know, I just spoke with Admiral Landay earlier this week over lunch and, you know, we talked about LCS. I think there's a study underway in the Navy, or about to be completed in the Navy, that would put a more fuel-efficient power plant on the same hull.

I think -- in relation to the previous question about international acquisition, I think the study was actually initiated to take a look at potential LCS sales internationally and whether some nations might be more attracted to a less expensive ship that maybe wasn't as fast, but was more fuel efficient. As it turns out, that's certainly something the Coast Guard would be very interested in, too.

So I haven't seen the study yet, but I understand, you know, they have -- you know, basically, they look at combinations of, like, diesel engines instead of the gas turbines, you know, shafts and traditional propellers along with jet drives, depending on which variant.

We'll be very interested in that when it comes out. But, no, we have not made any final decisions as far as the requirements for the offshore patrol cutter.

Q Would the LCS -- you guys are pretty much deployed wherever the Navy goes, and particularly as they're approaching this piracy issue. Have you looked at a littoral combat ship module for the Coast Guard? Is that something that's been discussed as a possibility, or is that just an idea out there in the -- in Neverland?

ADM. BLORE: Well, I think it's certainly an idea. That is not something that would probably initiate within my directorate in acquisition. I'd be at the other end, when they said we have a requirement for it. I'm sure it's something that's being discussed in our capabilities directorate and our strategic planning directorate. And I know I have heard it mentioned at briefings before, about whether there should be, in essence, a Coast Guard module that could go into the LCS when it's doing like an anti-piracy mission or maybe a humanitarian relief mission. So I know it's being discussed, but I don't know how far along it is.

The only other thing I would say about your premise is I'd say it's actually unusual more than it's typical that we're operating with the Navy. There are certainly examples in the Gulf, in the piracy war, and in interception operations in the Arabian Gulf, where we're with them. But typically, we're operating without them, either in the Caribbean or well offshore, Western Pacific, Eastern Pacific.

You know, the Navy tends to, for good reason, depart our coastline and then deploy wherever they're going to. And we're kind of filling that band from about 100 miles out to about 1,000 (miles) to 2,000 miles. And a lot of times, we're the only one out there.

Q I was thinking of the Boutwell and the Dallas. And I mean, you guys have recently been deploying a lot more in terms of overseas deployments, it seems like anyway.

ADM. BLORE: No, I -- I don't --

Q Recently, anyway.

ADM. BLORE: Yeah, I don't disagree that we have normally one or two out there all the time. But again, in that example there's 12 high-endurance cutters, and at any one time we generally have one to two deployed with the Navy. So that's absolutely right for those one or two that are deployed out there, but, you know, the other ones, when they're operating, are generally operating in an area where they need to be pretty fuel efficient, because the distance to a gas station is pretty long.

Q Thank you very much, Admiral.

ADM. BLORE: You're welcome.

SEAMAN SELBY: And do we have any more follow-up questions?

Q Yeah, this is John Conrad with gCaptain again. Our top three stories continuously on gCaptain, both in the forums and the amount of feedback we get, are piracy; the UAS, which just seems to make sense to our readers; and topics of marine safety. But I think you're really covered, and I think acquisitions really has a good hold on those three as far as your capabilities. So my question's a bit shorter.

What keeps you awake at night, Admiral?

ADM. BLORE: Well, there's the dog issue.

Q (Laughs.)

ADM. BLORE: But primarily workforce issues, not so much the acquisition projects themselves, although, you know, part of major acquisition is risk, part of risk is managing risk, and part of managing risk is sometimes you don't sleep as well at night while you develop alternative strategies.

But primarily the one that really bothers me as far as, you know, looking out in the future is the acquisition workforce, and not just for the Coast Guard but for all of our sister services and the larger federal agencies.

You know, right now we run about a 15 percent to 20 percent vacancy rate in some of our professions. Contracting officer is a good example. Business financial management is another good example. And we're keeping up with that. You know, we have very active hiring programs, and you know, we're doing the job fairs and looking for people.

But the economy's pretty weak right now, unfortunately. But the economy's going to recover, and that's what I worry about a little bit, not the economy recovering per se, but if we're having this much difficulty finding those fully qualified and certified people to come work in those positions today, once the economy is booming, I would offer that it's probably going to be more difficult, not less difficult.

So that is something that we work with our department and our oversight committees on. There's been a lot of talk about building up, you know, the acquisition capabilities within both the Department of Defense and our agency, and of course I fully support that. I think that's a great idea.

But we have to recognize that it takes me about three-and-a-half years to fully train a contracting officer. You know, you need about probably 10 years of experience before you could put that same contracting officer on a really major project.

Program management, kind of the same thing -- you know, to get any level of initial certification is probably two to three years. And certainly you're going to want 10, 15 years' experience before that person starts going solo on a major project.

So you know, we need to be growing people for two decades away, starting today.

Now I have a departmental internship program that feeds folks into this right out of college. And I have a(n) agency internship program, and we have something called the career entry opportunity program, which allows me to do direct hires. So we have a variety of things we're trying to do, but workforce certification, training are the things that I worry about in the long term.

Q Interesting. And gCaptain is a service organization. We're here to serve mariners but also Coast Guard. So if we can post any internship opportunities or a job, please let us know. We'd be happy to do so.

ADM. BLORE: Okay. Thank you.

SEAMAN SELBY: Okay. And any more follow-ups? (Pause.)

All right.

Q Yes.

SEAMAN SELBY: Oh.

Q I've just got a follow-up on the -- you were talking about the program managers. The -- I was reading through the notes -- and I'm not sure who provided them, if it was you or if it was the Transportation Committee -- from the recent testimony that you gave. I guess it was just last week. And you were talking about the Program Manager 3 issues where there -- I guess that moves -- that the officers are being rotated to new assignments, and you'd have new people coming in. Is this an issue where there's just not enough people in the Coast Guard for that level of acquisition, at the Level 3 position for the program managers? Was I reading that correctly? Just -- it's just a matter of normal turnover, and this is somewhat hurting your staff? Is that correct, or -

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ADM. BLORE: Well, I think you have some of the elements there. I mean, we have control over how often the military program managers rotate. So we can control that directly. But it was more getting to -- that we do need to be a little bit larger. We're a workforce now of about 850 federal employees, of which a little less than half are military and a little more than half are civilian. You know, we think we need to be about 950; 960 would be about right size for our organization. You know, it doesn't sound like a lot, but that's the core capability for acquisition in the Coast Guard. There's a lot of other activities we can partner with the Navy on.

But the Level 3 certification, which is the highest level of program management certification, is something that, you know, maybe, as a self-criticism, the Coast Guard didn't emphasize as much in its military forces three or four years ago. So we would bring line officers in. They would certainly get the necessary experience, but we didn't ask them so much to say, you know, "You really need to go out and get your civilian credentials." We have always required that of our civilian workforce, and certainly -- I've been in acquisition now just over three years, and it's -- I've made it quite clear here that I don't really -- doesn't matter to me whether you're military or civilian; if you're going to be a project manager with a Level 1 project, which is the largest project, you're going to be a Level 3-certified program manager.

And the workforces really ran with that. I mean, you know, it's -- we have very dedicated people. Once we set the expectation that as a military officer we want you to have certification, we have done, in a variety of levels across the 13 acquisition functions, over 250 certifications over the last three years. And those have to be signed off by the Department of Homeland Security. So we have to do whole package that shows why somebody has the right training and the right experience.

And I think right now we have about 19 Level 3-certified commanders and captains. So part of it is setting up -- I think I used the term quasi-career path, where an officer starting out in the Coast Guard might say, "Look, I really find this acquisition profession exciting. I want to do it." So maybe we'd bring him in as a lieutenant, give him some basic training, rotate him back out to the field, bring him back in as a lieutenant commander or commander, get a higher level of certification, go back out and get some field experience, and then come back into acquisition.

The important thing to us is the diversity of the workforce mixture. It's good to have some military officers here who have been out there, working the equipment, you know, alongside civilians that have maybe been doing acquisition longer but haven't been out there directly doing mission execution.

And that works best for us. So that's what we're focusing on with our military. I don't know any impediments in the military that would prevent us from getting there.

The workforce hiring issue is primarily civilian. But it's certainly something we need to do a better job of establishing. But that's what I was talking about at the hearing.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you, sir.

Q Thank you very much.

SEAMAN SELBY: And thank you all to the -- all the bloggers for your questions and comments today.

And Rear Admiral Blore, if you have any final comments, you can make those now.

ADM. BLORE: No, I don't. I really do appreciate you hosting this. I appreciate the interest.

And in response to an earlier comment, we certainly do intend to do these periodically. We think it's good for our transparency and we think it's important for the taxpayer that we be very transparent on these programs that they're funding. But thank you very much.

SEAMAN SHELBY: Thank you very much, sir.

And thank you, gentlemen, today. Today's program will be available online on the Bloggers link on DOD.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with source documents, such as bio, this audio file and the print transcript.

Again, thank you, gentlemen and our blogger participants. This concludes our call today.

END.