



NPS IN THE NEWS

Weekly Media Report – Apr. 13-19, 2021

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RESEARCH:

1. [NPS and US Coast Guard R&D Center to Jointly Research Maritime Solutions](#)

(Navy.mil 14 April 21)

CHIPS 15 April 21)

(NPS.edu 14 April 21)

(Eurekalert 14 April 21) ... Office of University Communications

As a result of the Tri-Service Maritime Strategy (TSMS) released in December, which underscored the need for joint cooperation in today's security environment, the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, Calif. and the U.S. Coast Guard Research and Development Center (RDC) in New London, Conn. agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Apr. 14 extending their previous three-year direct collaboration on joint research projects and exchanges to five more years. NPS President retired Vice Adm. Ann E. Rondeau and RDC Commanding Officer Capt. Dan Keane met through an online collaboration tool, virtually, to sign the memo. The emphasis of the MOU is to further optimize joint collaboration for specific research and educational outcomes that directly support defense priorities and Coast Guard statutory missions within the TSMS.

2. [Navy, Coast Guard Formalize Partnership Between Naval Postgraduate School and Coast Guard Research and Development Center](#)

(SEAPOW Magazine 15 April 21) ... Edward Lundquist

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3. [DHS Partners with DWX to Advance Homeland Security Solutions](#)

(Newswise 13 April 21)

Innovative technology development and acquisition have become increasingly competitive and fast moving. To keep pace with rapidly emerging technologies, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) is partnering with DEFENSEWERX (DWX), a nonprofit organization focused on cultivating ecosystems that enable the acceleration of innovative solutions to benefit the nation. This partnership will enable DHS S&T to leverage DWX's network of innovation hubs co-located with Department of Defense laboratories across the country and source ideas to explore and augment ongoing S&T activities spanning DHS mission areas... DWX, a 501(c)(3) organization established in 2012 and headquartered in Niceville, Florida, provides services in technology transfer, innovation and collaboration, prototyping, and workforce development/STEM outreach. DWX also serves as a PI for the Air Force Research Laboratory's Munitions Directorate, U.S. Special Operations Command Headquarters, Air University, Army Cyber Command, U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center, and **Naval Postgraduate School**.

4. DHS Partnership Targets Homeland Security Solutions Advancement

(Homeland Preparedness News 13 April 21) ... Douglas Clark

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5. How Could the U.S. Military Already Have a Sixth Generation Fighter?

(NationalInterest.org 18 April 21) ... Kris Osborn

A massive and still largely unknown technology breakthrough may be upon us, by virtue of the apparent Air Force decision to not only fast-track a new 6th-Gen fighter platform but actually fly it... The challenge of trying to discern the optimal time to actually build a new airframe is something that has been explored for many years, as evidenced by a **Naval Postgraduate School** essay from 2016 called "The 6th-Generation Quandry." The essay poses the question as to whether it might be equally if not more effective to postpone formal 6th-generation development until truly breakthrough advances emerge, while pursuing advanced variants of current, yet upgradeable platforms in the interim.

ALUMNI:

6. NAVSUP FLC Jacksonville Executive Director Awarded Navy's Highest Honor for Distinguished Civilian Service

(DVIDS 13 April 21) ... Naval Supply Systems Command

On April 13, Kevin F. Mooney, a Naval Postgraduate School alumnus, was presented with the Navy's Distinguished Civilian Service Award (DCSA) for his service as Executive Director, Naval Supply Systems Command (NAVSUP) Fleet Logistics Center Jacksonville, and Executive Director, Commander Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia from September 2011 to February 2020.

7. Boise's PlexTrac Latest Local Firm to Pick Up Large Funding Round

(BoiseDev 14 April 21) ... Don Day

Boise-based PlexTrac picked up a new round of funding – bringing in more than \$10 million to help it grow.

Idaho native Dan DeCloss started PlexTrac after building Scentsy's cybersecurity program. He graduated from Northwest Nazarene University and the **Naval Postgraduate School**.

8. GMU Center for Government Contracting Taps Two Fellows

(Virginia Business 14 April 21) ... Jason Roop

The Center for Government Contracting at George Mason University has named two senior fellows, it announced this week.

The Fairfax-based center added Stephanie Halcrow, who most recently served on the House Armed Services Committee as a professional staff member, and promoted researcher Eric Lofgren.

Halcrow is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, who earned her **MBA from the Naval Postgraduate School**. She retired from a career with the U.S. Air Force in 2015, leaving as inspector general of Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

9. Navy Picks a Face Familiar in Japan to Lead Yokosuka-based 7th Fleet

(Stars and Stripes 19 April 21) ... Joseph Ditzler

The White House has nominated a naval officer with command experience in the Western Pacific to lead the 7th Fleet as it aims to keep pace with its Chinese competition.

Rear Adm. Karl O. Thomas, the assistant deputy chief for naval operations and Naval Postgraduate School alumnus, plans and strategy at the Pentagon, would return to Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, to command the largest of America's overseas naval fleets, the Defense Department announced Wednesday. Thomas previously served as



commander of Task Force 70 and Carrier Strike Group 5, centered on the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, homeported in Yokosuka.

UPCOMING NEWS & EVENTS:

April 20-22: [Naval Research Working Group \(NRWG\) 21](#)

April 27: [V-SGL with Mr. Joseph Bryan: The Security Implications of Climate Change](#)

April 29: [Ask an Astronaut!](#)

May 11-13: [18th Annual Acquisition Research Symposium](#)

May 14: [NPS Students' Big Idea Exchange 2021 \(BIX21\)](#)



RESEARCH:

NPS and US Coast Guard R&D Center to Jointly Research Maritime Solutions

(Eurrkalert 14 Apr 21)

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With mid-career Coast Guard officers as students at NPS, the MOU will help focus NPS on aspects of the TSMS that chiefly fall to the Coast Guard in order to define research projects that those students, and NPS faculty, can work on together and advance toward solving key maritime challenges. In addition to identifying thesis topics of mutual interest, the MOU includes access and use of each institution's unique laboratories and facilities and involves other key research exchanges to mutually advance their mission of research and education for warfighting advantage.

"The Tri-Service Maritime Strategy prioritizes developing future capability and capacity for both the Navy and the Coast Guard," said Rondeau. "Our formalized partnership not only strengthens the strong ties between NPS and the Coast Guard, but it brings to bear our defense-focused faculty and operationally-experienced Navy and Coast Guard students in joint projects to develop our future force. The relationship between NPS and RDC is critically important, which is supported also by our relationship with Rear Adm. Penoyer of the Eleventh Coast Guard District and Lt. Cmdr. John Gatti of the local Coast Guard Station Monterey. We all look forward to enhancing our applied research and education that will help solve the toughest maritime challenges."

According to Keane, one of the cornerstones of the RDC portfolio accomplishment strategy are the collaborations they have with a wide range of partners from Department of Defense and Department of Energy Labs, to the Federal Lab Consortium, and into academia.

"Perhaps one our strongest and most impactful partnerships is with the Naval Postgraduate School," noted Keane. "Since an MOU was signed three years ago, the RDC has become a topic sponsor, we have proposed questions related to our portfolio that have turned into academic products, NPS researchers have worked with our researchers on summer studies, and we have provided platforms for NPS experimentation. We believe that we have just scratched the surface and the future is incredibly bright. We are excited about the next five years."

Rear Adm. Brian Penoyer, Eleventh Coast Guard District commander noted that NPS has been a true force-multiplier for the Coast Guard and the RDC.

"This partnership helps us quantify disaster relief responses, provides a better understanding of drug trafficking patterns at sea, and fosters an environment of innovation for Coast Guard men and women.," said Penoyer. "It's through these relationships that we maintain our mission-ready total workforce to continue safeguarding our nation."

Currently, institution-level planning is underway to facilitate joint research projects on such things including renewable energy, additive manufacturing, maritime-domain awareness and wargaming.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2573303/nps-us-coast-guard-rd-center-to-jointly-research-maritime-solutions/>

<https://www.doncio.navy.mil/CHIPS/ArticleDetails.aspx?ID=14573>

<https://nps.edu/-/nps-u.s.-coast-guard-r-d-center-to-jointly-research-maritime-solutions>

https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-04/nps-nau041421.php

[Return to Index](#)



Navy, Coast Guard Formalize Partnership Between Naval Postgraduate School and Coast Guard Research and Development Center

(SEAPOWER Magazine 15 April 21) ... Edward Lundquist

The U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and Coast Guard Research and Development Center (RDC) signed a new five-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) on April 14, 2021, which facilitates collaboration on joint research that directly supports common defense priorities and Coast Guard statutory missions.

NPS President retired Vice Adm. Ann E. Rondeau and RDC Commanding Officer Capt. Dan Keane met on a virtual platform to both sign the document that will continue and enhance collaborative research and educational cooperation between the two institutions. The document establishes a framework for future collaboration, joint research and access to capabilities.

“The Tri-Service Maritime Strategy (TSMS), Advantage at Sea, prioritizes developing future capability and capacity for both the Navy and the Coast Guard,” said Rondeau. “Our formalized partnership not only strengthens the strong ties between NPS and the Coast Guard, but it brings to bear our defense-focused faculty and operationally experienced Navy and Coast Guard students in joint projects to develop our future force and support that strategy.”

Keane said partnerships are vital to the RDC portfolio accomplishment strategy, such as with Department of Defense and Department of Energy labs, the Federal Lab Consortium, and academia. “Perhaps one our strongest and most impactful partnerships is with the Naval Postgraduate School,” he said.

“Since an MOU was signed three years ago, the RDC has become a topic sponsor, we have proposed questions related to our portfolio that have turned into academic products; NPS researchers have worked with our researchers on summer studies; and we have provided platforms for NPS experimentation. We believe that we have just scratched the surface and the future is incredibly bright,” said Keane. “The partnership is strong today, and is only going to grow stronger in the future. We are excited about the next five years.”

According to a joint statement about the signing, the MOU will help focus NPS on aspects of the TSMS that chiefly fall to the Coast Guard to define research projects that those students, and NPS faculty, can work on together and advance toward solving key maritime challenges. “In addition to identifying thesis topics of mutual interest, the MOU includes access and use of each institution’s unique laboratories and facilities, and involves other key research exchanges to mutually advance their mission of research and education for warfighting advantage,” the statement said.

Planning is underway to facilitate joint research projects on such things including renewable energy, additive manufacturing, maritime-domain awareness and wargaming.

There is a small cohort of mid-career Coast Guard officers attending NPS as students, joining the 600 naval officers and 300 Marine Corps officers attending the school.

According to NPS Dean of Research Dr. Jeffery Paduan, NPS has an impressive cadre of subject matter experts. The school offers masters and doctorate programs in 70 different fields of studies with 227 tenure-track faculty and 347 non-tenure track faculty.

Paduan said both NPS and RDC have distinguished histories as leading research institutions. “The Navy and Coast Guard face overlapping challenges at sea, and both of our organizations complement each other in addressing these problems. This MOU will lead to many more joint projects and shared benefits.”

Students will benefit from thesis topics and capstone projects of mutual interest, with access to each institution’s unique laboratories, facilities, expertise and research capabilities at sea and ashore.

Rondeau said the teaming brings opportunities to understand and solve problems, and solidifies a promising “partnership in science, technology, education, learning and teaming — and in the end, winning. This MOU opens up our apertures to possibilities that are in front of us. I truly believe this has power beyond even what we can imagine today.”



<https://seapowermagazine.org/navy-coast-guard-formalize-partnership-between-naval-postgraduate-school-and-coast-guard-research-and-development-center/>

[Return to Index](#)

DHS Partners with DWX to Advance Homeland Security Solutions

(Newswise 13 Apr 21)

Innovative technology development and acquisition have become increasingly competitive and fast moving. To keep pace with rapidly emerging technologies, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) is partnering with DEFENSEWERX (DWX), a nonprofit organization focused on cultivating ecosystems that enable the acceleration of innovative solutions to benefit the nation. This partnership will enable DHS S&T to leverage DWX's network of innovation hubs co-located with Department of Defense laboratories across the country and source ideas to explore and augment ongoing S&T activities spanning DHS mission areas.

DHS S&T's Office of Industry Partnerships (OIP) executed a new partnership intermediary agreement (PIA) with DWX. As a partnership intermediary (PI) – a state or local government or a nonprofit entity that is owned, funded, chartered, or operated in whole or in part by a state or local government – DWX will work closely with DHS S&T to conduct cooperative activities with small businesses and educational institutions.

The purpose of this PIA is to assist DHS S&T with its technology transfer and commercialization functions over five task areas that include assessing the current DHS S&T innovation ecosystem; establishing a pilot DHS Innovation Hub and determining how to develop an Innovation Hub system for DHS; and developing recommendations to support and integrate future DHS S&T innovation and technology transfer and commercialization activities to benefit DHS and the Homeland Security Enterprise. DHS S&T seeks to broaden collaboration and integration of existing programs, expand the organization's footprint into innovation communities, and increase opportunities to commercialize new technologies quickly to address DHS mission needs.

DWX, a 501(c)(3) organization established in 2012 and headquartered in Niceville, Florida, provides services in technology transfer, innovation and collaboration, prototyping, and workforce development/STEM outreach. DWX also serves as a PI for the Air Force Research Laboratory's Munitions Directorate, U.S. Special Operations Command Headquarters, Air University, Army Cyber Command, U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center, and **Naval Postgraduate School**.

S&T's PIA Program leverages the specialized skills of partnership intermediaries to advance DHS technology transfer and commercialization activities. For more information about the DHS S&T PIA program, please visit our website at <https://www.dhs.gov/science-and-technology/technology-transfer-partnership-intermediaries> or contact us by email at T2C.PIA@hq.dhs.gov.

<https://www.newswise.com/articles/dhs-partners-with-dwx-to-advance-homeland-security-solutions>

[Return to Index](#)

DHS Partnership Targets Homeland Security Solutions Advancement

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DWX is a nonprofit organization focusing on cultivating ecosystems enabling innovative solutions acceleration. The collaboration would enable DHS S&T to leverage DWX's network of hubs co-located with Department of Defense laboratories nationwide and source ideas exploring and augmenting ongoing S&T activities spanning DHS mission areas.



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<https://homelandprepnews.com/stories/66844-dhs-partnership-targets-homeland-security-solutions-advancement/>

[Return to Index](#)

How Could the U.S. Military Already Have a Sixth Generation Fighter?

(NationalInterest.org 18 April 21) ... Kris Osborn

A massive and still largely unknown technology breakthrough may be upon us, by virtue of the apparent Air Force decision to not only fast-track a new 6th-Gen fighter platform but actually fly it.

While of course technical details and specifics regarding the kinds of 6th-Gen platforms which have been in development are closely held or not public for security reasons, that fact that one is here now seems to suggest that sufficient technological breakthroughs have occurred to inspire a decision to actually “build and fly” a new stealth fighter jet platform.

Developers have for many years now been immersed in technological exploration, prototyping, and conceptual work related to 6th-Gen fighter technology, looking at things like building stealthier airframes, applications of AI, miniaturized long-range sensors, targeting technology and drones operating with ever-increasing levels of autonomy.

Does the fact that a 6th Gen aircraft has already flown suggest that, perhaps, some of the most essential ingredients of long-term transformational technologies are, in effect, already here?

For instance, some now-in-development next-gen stealth technologies, including new radar-evading configurations, coating materials, and advanced thermal-signature reduction have for many years been fast-approaching levels of combat readiness. Maybe some of these things are here now, given the pace of technological innovation?

New long-range, high-speed, course-correcting or even self-guiding weapons, combined with new stealth attributes or AI-enabled sensors could indeed help a U.S. 6th-Gen platform achieve overmatch for decades to come, Navy and Air Force developers have for quite some time been pushing the boundaries of the “art-of-the-possible” to the maximum extent, so perhaps certain major breakthrough have happened? Would not seem unlikely given the extent to which digital engineering, weapons guidance technology, autonomy, and AI-enabled integrated systems and networking have been progressing in recent years.

The challenge of trying to discern the optimal time to actually build a new airframe is something that has been explored for many years, as evidenced by a **Naval Postgraduate School** essay from 2016 called “The 6th-Generation Quandry.” The essay poses the question as to whether it might be equally if not more effective to postpone formal 6th-generation development until truly breakthrough advances emerge, while pursuing advanced variants of current, yet upgradeable platforms in the interim.

Could this question having been anticipated years ago, have yielded answers to a degree such that the Air Force did indeed go ahead and fast-track a new platform? It does appear that way.

The 2016 paper, from the **Naval Postgraduate School** Acquisition Research Program, cites a handful of “at-the-time” cutting edge developmental items showing significant long-term promise. The paper cites “new models of the F-35 optimized for air combat,” the emerging B-21, drone-launching C-

130 “mother ships” and “weapons truck arsenal planes” are positioned to optimize current technological progress. However, none of these kinds of technology are disappearing by any estimation, given the long-term plans in place for promising F-35 modernization.

Given that so many key elements of modernization can be achieved through mission systems, avionics, AI-enabled targeting, and surveillance, and of course weapons guidance, Pentagon and Lockheed developers recognize that the F-35 can in future decades can achieve new breakthrough levels of performance with software upgrades and other kinds of technological adaptations. This may be why many envision integrated connectivity between the F-35 and 6th-Gen fighters as they potentially fly together into the 2080s.

<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/how-could-us-military-already-have-sixth-generation-fighter-183096>

[Return to Index](#)

ALUMNI:

NAVSUP FLC Jacksonville Executive Director Awarded Navy’s Highest Honor for Distinguished Civilian Service

(DVIDS 13 Apr 21) ... Naval Supply Systems Command

On April 13, Kevin F. Mooney was presented with the Navy’s Distinguished Civilian Service Award (DCSA) for his service as Executive Director, Naval Supply Systems Command (NAVSUP) Fleet Logistics Center Jacksonville, and Executive Director, Commander Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia from September 2011 to February 2020.

The Navy Distinguished Service Award is the highest honor the Secretary of the Navy can confer upon civilian members of the Department of the Navy, and is typically reserved for those whose contributions to the Department of the Navy are exceptional in their scope and merit.

Having been previously endorsed by the Secretary of the Navy as a nominee for the Department of Defense’s 65th DCSA, Mooney was unaware of his nomination by NAVSUP to the Department of the Navy for its equivalent award. NAVSUP FLC Jacksonville Commanding Officer, Capt. William H. Clarke was pleased to surprise Mooney with the award presentation during a virtual command meeting.

According to Clarke, “Mr. Kevin Mooney has been a leader in advancing supply chain accountability, effectiveness and auditability across the Navy, which has had far-reaching implications to the Department of Defense. His expertise and leadership have proven invaluable in standing up inventory accuracy initiatives throughout the Southeast Region and beyond.” Clarke went on to say, “His ability to champion projects and see them through to fruition has pushed our Fleet Logistics Center to the leading edge within the NAVSUP Enterprise. Where others see a daunting task, Mr. Mooney sees an opportunity to do what is right.”

Mooney’s award citation from the Secretary of the Navy stated, “Through [his] efforts, the supply chain management and inventory accuracy capabilities of the Department of Defense were transformed to be more effective, efficient and responsive. He was the catalyst for the ongoing Navy Material Accountability Campaign concept that impacts both Navy and Department [of Defense] supply chains, resulting in improved readiness.”

The citation went on to recognize Mooney for his contributions to the first operational employment of NAVSUP’s Enterprise Logistics Response Team during the 2017 hurricane season, which provided logistics support for military installation recovery and defense support to civil authorities. The 2017 hurricane season is reported to have been the costliest on record and included hurricanes Harvey and Maria.

Additionally, Mooney was honored for his management acumen, strategic foresight, and shore installation expertise while serving as the Executive Director for Commander, Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia from 2011 to 2015. During that time he was instrumental in strategic deployments



to Bahrain, the Forward Naval Forces establishment in Spain and the creation of a new facility in Romania.

Mooney's previous civilian positions include, Director of Corporate Operations for the Southeast Regional Maintenance Center in Mayport, Fla.; NSA Naples Business Manager; Navy Region Europe Transition Officer (Base Closure Officer) and Deputy Operations Officer for Fleet Industrial Supply Center Yokosuka, Japan.

Mooney retired from the US Navy in 2006 after 20 years as an active duty Supply Corps Officer and is a graduate of St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas and holds a B.A. in Economics. He also earned his **M.S. in Management from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif.**, with a concentration in Logistics Engineering. He is a qualified Acquisition Professional and a Certified Professional Logistician.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/393700/navsup-flc-jacksonville-executive-director-awarded-navys-highest-honor-distinguished-civilian-service>

[Return to Index](#)

Boise's PlexTrac Latest Local Firm to Pick Up Large Funding Round

(BoiseDev 14 April 21) ... Don Day

Boise-based PlexTrac picked up a new round of funding – bringing in more than \$10 million to help it grow.

Noro-Moseley Partners of Atlanta, GA and Madrona Venture Group of Seattle led the funding – a so-called Series A round. Boise-based StageDotO, which helped PlexTrac with seed funding in 2019, also participated in the funding round.

The parties did not what value the latest funding would give PlexTrac.

Blue + red = purple

PlexTrac launched in 2016, and calls itself the “purple teaming platform.” In cybersecurity, groups of people who try to go on offense and break into systems to find vulnerabilities are known as “red team” members. Folks who try to shore up systems from outside attacks are known as “blue team” members. PlexTrac works to build solutions to help reporting for both. Red, plus blue – equals purple.

Idaho native Dan DeCloss started PlexTrac after building Scentsy's cybersecurity program. He graduated from Northwest Nazarene University and the **Naval Postgraduate School**.

“Security professionals in all types of organizations are faced with unprecedented threats, but how they work has not substantially changed,” DeCloss said of the challenge PlexTrac works to solve. “PlexTrac brings red and blue cybersecurity teams together in one workflow to build transparency and efficiency at remediating vulnerabilities and defending against increasingly sophisticated adversaries.”

The company said it saw large growth in 2020 and expanded its team – including a number of hires from the Idaho Air National Guard's 224th Cyber Operations Squadron.

“Never before have security professionals seen the level of pressure they are now facing to protect their assets — and communicate with teams across the organization and outside of it,” Noro-Moseley partner John Ale said. “Dan brings personal experience and a clear vision to this challenge.”

PlexTrac said it is currently filling jobs both in Boise and remote.

<https://boisedev.com/news/2021/04/13/plextrac-funding/>

[Return to Index](#)



GMU Center for Government Contracting Taps Two Fellows

(Virginia Business 14 April 21) ... Jason Roop

The Center for Government Contracting at George Mason University has named two senior fellows, it announced this week.

The Fairfax-based center added Stephanie Halcrow, who most recently served on the House Armed Services Committee as a professional staff member, and promoted researcher Eric Lofgren.

Halcrow is a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, who earned her **MBA from the Naval Postgraduate School**. She retired from a career with the U.S. Air Force in 2015, leaving as inspector general of Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

Lofgren holds undergraduate degrees in history and economics from Virginia Tech and earned his master's degree in economics from George Mason University.

The center cites his work in budget reform, defense acquisition and cost estimation. Lofgren also produces the podcast "Acquisition Talk" and manages an accompanying daily blog.

The center, which falls under the university's School of Business, says it aims to provide research, collaboration, education and training to "address business, policy, regulatory and other issues in government contracting."

<https://www.virginiabusiness.com/article/gmu-center-for-government-contracting-taps-two-fellows/>

[Return to Index](#)

Navy Picks a Face Familiar in Japan to Lead Yokosuka-based 7th Fleet

(Stars and Stripes 19 April 21) ... Joseph Ditzler

The White House has nominated a naval officer with command experience in the Western Pacific to lead the 7th Fleet as it aims to keep pace with its Chinese competition.

Rear Adm. Karl O. Thomas, the assistant deputy chief for naval operations, plans and strategy at the Pentagon, would return to Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, to command the largest of America's overseas naval fleets, the Defense Department announced Wednesday. Thomas previously served as commander of Task Force 70 and Carrier Strike Group 5, centered on the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, homeported in Yokosuka.

A naval aviator, Thomas began his career in the E-2C Hawkeye, a tactical early-warning aircraft, and rose up the command ranks with service as executive officer aboard the carriers U.S.S. Dwight D. Eisenhower and George Washington, and commander of a third, the USS Carl Vinson, according to his Navy biography.

A Northern Virginia native, Thomas earned his commission in 1985 through the Naval ROTC at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. **He also holds a master's degree from the Naval Postgraduate School.**

If confirmed by the Senate, Thomas would succeed Vice Adm. Bill Merz, who took his post Sept. 12, 2019. The job also comes with a promotion. Thomas would take a leading role in an international arena where a rising China confronts its neighbors, and sometimes the United States. The 7th Fleet is the tool the U.S. employs to demonstrate its reach and resolve to its allies and friends, and to Beijing.

The 7th Fleet, which includes up to 70 vessels and 20,000 sailors, may keep the peace or shoulder the U.S. response if hotspots like the contested Senkaku Islands or Taiwan kindle into conflict.

President Joe Biden's administration has affirmed its commitment to assist Japan should the Senkakus, a group of islets set strategically northeast of Taiwan, come under assault. Japan complains of increasing instances of China's coast guard interfering with Japanese fishing vessels in the area. Both nations this year have empowered their coast guards to open fire there if threatened.

The head of Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Philip Davidson, in March told the Senate Armed Services Committee that China may be contemplating a move to reclaim Taiwan sooner rather than later. China considers Taiwan a breakaway province.

"We have indications that the risks are actually going up," Davidson said.



Unlike its treaty with Japan, the U.S. has no obligation to come to Taiwan's military support, but it aids the island democracy through outward signs, such as the visit last week of by former U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd and two former deputy secretaries of state, and by direct arms sales.

The U.S. recognizes China's claim but considers Taiwan's status unresolved. The 7th Fleet periodically sends warships to the Taiwan Strait in defiance of Chinese demands that third nations seek its permission before steaming through the 110-mile-wide passage.

The 7th Fleet also carries the flag on an increasing number of freedom-of-navigation patrols through the South China Sea, a 1.3 million square-mile area beset by knotty quarrels.

An estimated \$3.4 trillion in trade passed through the South China Sea in 2016 out of a global total of \$15.9 trillion, according to ChinaPower, an online project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

China has built up and occupied seven small islands and reefs in the Spratly Islands and constructed airfields, barracks and missile sites there, along with other outposts manned by the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam, according to the CIA World Factbook.

China ignores a 2016 U.N. tribunal decision in favor of the Philippines in a dispute over sovereignty in the area.

Beginning in late March, the Philippines, a U.S. ally, and China engaged in a simmering stand-off when dozens of Chinese maritime militia vessels, posing as fishing boats, anchored at Whitsun Reef inside the Philippine economic exclusion zone, according to Foreign Policy magazine.

<https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/navy-picks-a-face-familiar-in-japan-to-lead-yokosuka-based-7th-fleet-1.670255>

[Return to Index](#)

