

USS America Second Line of Defense

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-uss-america-on-track-to-the-future-an-update-from-captain-hall/>

The USS America on Track to the Future: An Update from Captain Hall

2013-12-05 We first met with Captain Hall at the time of the christening of the latest large deck amphibious ship for the USN-USMC team.

Recently, we were able to discuss the progress of the ship and the next phase of the ship's preparation for deployment.

The Captain is an experienced CRUDES officer. For those of us not raised in the USN, this means an officer with Cruiser-Destroyer surface fleet background. And for Navy folks he would be described as a “black shoe” as opposed to a “brown shoe.”

Again for those of us who have not served in the USN, this refers coming from the surface ship community rather than the aviation community.

Credit Video of USS America during the builder trials: Huntington Ingalls, November 2013

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKDyvjek0BY>

He has served as the chief engineer on a Spruance class destroyer and most recently was a Captain of a DDG. And in his last deployment with the DDG, he deployed with the USS Kearsarge as well in the Indian Ocean.

It is important to remember that Admiral Halsey, when he went into the hospital before the Battle of Midway recommended that his surface ship Commander (a “black shoe” in Navy parlance) Admiral Spruance take command of Task Force 16, the USS Enterprise and USS Hornet battle group. Admiral Nimitz CINCPAC, a submariner, accepted Halsey's recommendation. He leaned on the ability of Spruance to maneuver the ships, to attack and withdraw as a key element of operational dominance.

We are seeing once again a merging of the communities.

In [our last interview](#), the prospective commander of the USS America highlighted the nature of the ship and its future contribution:

We are a large deck amphibious ship, just as the Kearsarge. But we are an aviation-centric large deck amphibious ship and we've been designed specifically without a well deck so we can support the USMC's next generation of aircraft.

We can get out there with a much larger hanger bay with two high-hat areas to support maintenance on the much larger MV-22s. The maintenance requirements for the F-35 are met and we have the capability to expand when required for future development. With our added fuel, ordnance, maintenance capability, supply and support capacity, we can sustain the aviation capability much longer on station.

The ship recently completed its builder trials and is awaiting its acceptance trials, to demonstrate its capability to the US Navy's Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) and these are currently scheduled for January 2014.

According to [a NAVSEA press release](#):



USS America during its builder trials. Credit: Huntington Ingalls, November 2013.

The future amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) completed builder's trials Nov. 9, marking a significant milestone as the ship progresses toward acceptance trials and delivery to the Navy.

The trials took place off the coast of the Huntington Ingalls Industries' shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss.

USS America during its builder trials. Credit: Huntington Ingalls, November 2013.

"The ship performed well at sea and largely exceeded my expectations. The state of

completion is right where it should be for builder's trials," said Capt. Chris Mercer, Amphibious Warfare program manager for the Program Executive Office, Ships. "Our joint government and industry team comprehensively tested every aspect of the ship's equipment and systems, and the results leave us with a clear path to a successful acceptance trials and delivery next year."

America will be the first of the Navy's next generation of "big deck" amphibious ships that are designed to replace the aging Tarawa class. This new class has been designed to accommodate the future needs of the Marine Corps' aviation combat element with additional aviation maintenance capability, increased fuel capacity and a significant increase in available stowage for parts and support equipment.

According to Captain Hall, the team had just completed the builders trials in early November.

He clarified that a builders trial is when the shipbuilder takes the ship out for the first time and turns all the equipment on and pushes it to various limits.

We are onboard as observers and to do assessments, but not operate the ship. That is done by the shipbuilder. The ship maneuvers very well for a large ship.

The purpose is to discover any anomalies which need to be dealt with prior to the acceptance trials by the US Navy.

He underscored that:

The builders trials went well and put us on a good path to the acceptance trials towards the end of January. During those trials the USN will determine what anomalies remain to be dealt with prior to final acceptance.

If all goes well, we should take possession of the ship in late March or so. Then we focus upon the crew certification process.

Of course, we have been doing a lot of training preparation as well for this phase.

The crew of more than 1,000 will prepare to operate the ship and to leave for our homeport in San Diego.

We are looking forward to the ship commissioning in San Francisco in the Fall and then on to our first tour.

He added that “this a big ship and unlike my destroyers handles quite differently. But the two gas turbine engines provide significant improvements in engine responsiveness over the old steam engines. We can start up the engines within 5 minutes to get underway.”

Having two shafts is a nice thing to have over the single screw ships of the past.

Of course, challenges can get in the way of the schedule but the USS America is coming to the fleet.

When you have as large and as complex a ship as this challenges remain.

But the shipbuilder and the Navy have incorporated many lessons learned from building the USS Makin Island.

And the team is already applying lessons learned from the USS America build to the USS Tripoli which is being built now.

And when Captain Hull and his crew get to sea that is when the innovation of interest to the USN-USMC team gets underway.

“Shaping the con-ops of a ship like this is a continuous development process and we are eager to get started.”

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-uss-enterprise-the-end-of-an-era-and-the-uss-america-opens-the-new-one/>

The USS Enterprise: The End of An Era and the USS America Opens the New One

2012-12-02 by Robbin Laird

The ceremony to declare the USS Enterprise inactive was held yesterday.

After a glorious career, and after shaping many innovations in Naval history, the USS Enterprise enters into history.

It is an end of an era, but a new one is dawning in US maritime history.

The christening of the USS America earlier this year was the other event, which correlated with the retirement of the USS Enterprise, provided the twin pillars of the future.

Eventually, the USS Ford will “replace” the USS Enterprise.

But it is an entirely new ship which when combined with kinds of assets already planned for the USS America can shape the next revolution in US maritime operations.

If the Ford were to be equipped as if it was the USS Enterprise, the entire point of the historic transition would be lost.

As I wrote earlier about the USS America:

It is not often that a new ship of the line is christened. And when it is, thoughts of how it might be used, where it might operate and how it might make new naval history are part of the excitement.

This was clearly evident at the christening of the USS America, the fourth ship of that name, in Pascagoula, Mississippi on October 20th.

This ship is not only the lead ship in a new class but will integrate the newest aviation of the USMC-USN team aboard a single operational platform at sea.

It will operate F-35 Bravos, Ospreys and CH-53Ks in the years to come. And the first ship will operate out of San Diego, and be part of the Pacific century.

Not far away, F-35 Bravos are being prepared for action in Eglin AFB. And in a confluence of events, two new F-35Bs landed at Eglin – one British and one USMC – the day before the christening.

Although called an LHA, it is not. Rather than being a Landing Helicopter Assault ship, it is flagship for 21st century operations. And these operations will be shaped by the need to operate at greater distance, and to strike with aircraft with significantly greater capability than the aircraft they are replacing.

The Osprey and the F-35 Bravo can operate at greater distance, speed and lethality than what they are replacing. The 360-degree aircraft – the F-35B – will provide along with its sister assets a change as big as that for which Admiral Sims and Admiral Halsey planned for with the introduction of the original aircraft carriers prior to World War II.

<http://defense.aol.com/2012/07/16/what-the-cno-was-really-saying-about-the-future-force/>

The future will deploy soon, and rethinking its impact on the fleet and re-shaping the entire concepts of operations for the Pacific century is upon us.

<http://www.sldinfo.com/special-report-on-crafting-a-new-pacific-strategy/>

And the good news is that many of our allies are joining us in this approach in other parts of the world, notably the Italians and the Brits are adding F-35Bs to their warships and may well add Ospreys in the future.

[UK, F-35 and Strategy](#)

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-italian-f-35-faco-a-key-asset-in-the-global-f-35-support-system/>

Ironically, the USS Enterprise, in its final tour, participated in the transition as a key element participating in Bold Alligator 2012.

As the Enterprise moved away from the assault phase, the large deck amphibious ships played the direct air assault role presaging an element of the historical transition.

<http://www.sldinfo.com/re-thinking-maneuver-warfare-from-the-sea/>

<http://www.sldinfo.com/captain-hall-discusses-the-uss-america-looking-towards-the-future/>

Captain Hall Discusses the USS America: Looking Towards the Future

2012-11-03 In a four-part follow up set of interviews, *Second Line of Defense* is looking at the role and impact of the USS America.

Interviews have been conducted with the prospective commander of the ship, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, a senior USMC general on its role, and, finally, with the Deputy Commander, of the 2nd Expeditionary Strike Group, the role of the USS America as a flagship for an ESG is discussed.

Each interview has allowed us to focus on different aspects of the process of change associated with the ship.

- With Captain Hall we were able to focus on the integration of different capabilities aboard the ship.

- With Captain Mercer, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, we were able focus on the intersection between those capabilities and innovation in the fleet.
- With Major General Walsh, Deputy Commanding General of the USMC Combat Development Command, we focused on how the ship provides an important impulse to the USMC approach to the future.
- And with Col. Bradley Weisz, Deputy Commander of 2nd Expeditionary Strike Group, we focused on the role of the USS America as a potential flagship for an ESG.

Second Line of Defense visited the Ingalls shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi for the christening of the USS America. During the visit, we had a chance to talk with Captain Robert Hall, Jr., the prospective commanding officer of the ship. We were able to follow up that discussion with a longer interview.

During the Christening of the USS America, the Commandant of the USMC, General Amos, turned to Captain Hall and noted that all of the older officers on the podium would love to have his job. And a large part of the reason for this is rather simple: this warship is bringing together three revolutions at once: the Osprey revolution with the F-35 “flying combat revolution” with a new generation of large deck amphibious ships.

And as the ship’s sponsor put it succinctly to the crew of the former USS America: “I know you would love the name to go to an aircraft carrier, but this ship is a mini-aircraft carrier.” And so the Captain is preparing the command approach for this mini-aircraft carrier.

The Captain is an experienced CRUDES officer. For those of us not raised in the USN, this means an officer with Cruiser-Destroyer surface fleet background. And for Navy folks he would be described as a “black shoe” as opposed to a “brown shoe.” Again for those of us who have not served in the USN this refers coming from the surface ship community rather than the aviation community.

He has served as the chief engineer on a Spruance class destroyer and most recently was a Captain of a DDG. And in his last deployment with the DDG, he deployed with the USS Kearsarge as well in the Indian Ocean.

It is important to remember that Admiral Halsey, when he went into the hospital before the Battle of Midway recommended that his surface ship Commander (a “black shoe” in Navy parlance) Admiral Spruance take command of Task Force 16, the USS Enterprise and USS Hornet battle group. Admiral Nimitz CINCPAC, a submariner, accepted Halsey’s recommendation. He leaned on the ability of Spruance to maneuver the ships, to attack and withdraw as a key element of operational dominance. We are seeing once again a merging of the communities.

SLD: How would you describe the USS America?

Captain Hall: The USS America is a warship. It’s an amphibious class ship, but it’s a warship like any other and so mixing the communities together brings some core strengths together. I’ll have a lot of amphibious experience on the America with my crew and my expertise in the surface navy will help us to integrate much better as a team.

SLD: What are some of the core capabilities of the ship?

Captain Hall: We are a large deck amphibious ship, just as the Kearsarge. But we are an aviation-centric large deck amphibious ship and we've been designed specifically without a well deck so we can support the USMC's next generation of aircraft.

We can get out there with a much larger hanger bay with two high-hat areas to support maintenance on the much larger MV-22s. The maintenance requirements for the F-35 are met and we have the capability to expand when required for future development. With our added fuel, ordnance, maintenance capability, supply and support capacity, we can sustain the aviation capability much longer on station.

SLD: And as the first ship deploying with the Ospreys and F-35s in combination you will shape a number of lessons learned important to the rest of the fleet.

Captain Hall: Without a doubt being first of its class and in full support of these next generation of aircraft is an important step. I think we'll be sharing lessons learned with every potential platform.

SLD: What is the process moving forward?

Captain Hall: The next few months, we're continuing the building process, and then diving into the test and trials phase. We are expecting the Builder's trials probably towards the end of July and then Acceptance trials approximately 8-10 weeks after that. Right now it's looking like early FY14 for ship custody transfer and certification. After that we commission and transfer to the fleet.

SLD: The ship is built to evolve over time with growth capabilities?

Captain Hall: We are configured to grow. We have excess space and six large generators onboard for power generation.

SLD: It must be exciting to be bringing together the new ship design, with the Ospreys and the F-35s into a new operational capability?

Captain Hall: It is. Matching the three together will provide the USN-USMC team with an incredibly versatile and potent force multiplier. Highlighting the awesome capabilities of America is something we need to do moving forward as we continue to fine-tune her concept of operations.

An Historical Note:

Admiral Spruance was one of the best Admirals to ever serve in US Navy.

From his chair aboard the flagship USS Enterprise, Spruance directed the fighting of Task Force 16, made up of the USS Enterprise, the USS Hornet and supporting vessels, large and small.

- With Captain Mercer, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, we were able focus on the intersection between those capabilities and innovation in the fleet.
- With Major General Walsh, Deputy Commanding General of the USMC Combat Development Command, we focused on how the ship provides an important impulse to the USMC approach to the future.
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LHA 6, enabled with the F-35B JSF and MV-22B Osprey, significantly increases the USN-USM ability to conduct over-the-horizon (OTH) ship-to-objective maneuver operations. With the ability to project Marine Air-Ground Task Forces directly to critical operational objectives located deep inland while simultaneously dislocating our adversaries both in space and in time, LHA 6 becomes an immediate game changer. Credit Photo: SLD

The day prior to the christening of the future USS America (LHA 6), *Second Line of Defense* sat down with Captain Chris Mercer, USN, Amphibious Ships Program Manager to discuss the ship and the approach to building the ship.

The ship is a new class of Large Deck Amphibious Ships built to work with current and new USN-USMC aircraft, and re-shape how LHAs operate in the 21st century. Captain Mercer also discussed the synergy between efforts on this ship with the new class of large deck carriers, the Ford class.

SLD: How would you characterize the design shift from the WASP to the AMERICA?

Mercer: It is more aviation centric. So the Flight 0 LHA (R), the America class ships are a modified repeat of the Wasp class ships.

If you look at the size of the ship, the size of the flight deck, they are very similar, as is the island.

You'll see changes in the exhaust stack because of what we did down low in the ship for maintainability, sustainability and reduced total ownership cost.

But it is very much an aviation centric design. We essentially gave much more space to the aviation community, and included many of the cornerstone modifications required to support the joint strike fighter and MV22. We filled in the well deck volume that was used to bring the

ground combat element to the beach via surface craft, with aviation support spaces: maintenance, fuel and weapons.

[LHA\(R\) Rqmts Ltr-30 April 2004](#)

SLD: What is the optimal loading of the F-35 Bravo?

Mercer: You could top end at 23 but it really depends on the footprint of all the logistics and support elements that's coming with the aircraft.

SLD: With these new assets, the ship can play a role beyond simply being a lead in an ARG-MEU and provide a flagship role of an Expeditionary Strike Group.

Mercer: That is true. It can be part of shaping a sea shield. It can be married up with an LPD and LSD and brings in other strike capabilities and surface combatants.

And in the absence of a large deck carrier, you could do a load out of MV22s, and joint strike fighters providing the air dominance that you might need in a combined ARG type of amphibious assault.

We saw some of this presaged in Afghanistan 10 years ago, when the Marines projected deep ashore. The MV-22s with the F-35s will provide a powerful tandem to provide such support.

SLD: How are you working to shape synergy between the new aviation assets and the design of the ship?

Mercer: We have our partner design agents in Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) who joined with us to design the ship specifically for that synergy of the MV22 and joint strike fighter through air ship integration work. That's how we arrived at the design that we have for the Flight 0 ships America and Tripoli, which is LHA-7.

SLD: What about the C5ISR enablement of the ship?

Mercer: We have a very large C5ISR suite in the ship, one of the largest afloat.

The Navy, by Naval Sea Systems Command, SPAWAR, and also NAVAIR, designs our spaces and together we look at what those requirements are, the bandwidth and the types of circuits.

All of those are directed through our requirements process to determine what we put on the ship, and that results in what we call a total C5ISR integrated package or an acronym we call TCIP.

That equipment is all procured and put together in mock-ups down in Charleston, South Carolina.

We energize it all, test it all, and then we bring that integrated package to the ship.

In terms of the additional C5ISR type of information that will be coming from the joint strike fighter, that work is still ongoing.

But inside the ship, we've got plenty of margins to bring in those C5ISR systems into our command and control spaces, and electronic suite spaces. Certainly plenty of footprint for the various types of antennas they might need.

We are excited to get the ship out and exercise it, and show those capabilities to the Navy and the Marine Corp. I think they'll be very pleased.

SLD: Even though you don't have a well deck, the America is part of a fleet and will support insertion of vehicles at the appropriate moment as well. It is part of fleet and must shape your thinking?

Mercer: Those are the lines along which we think as well. When we think about vehicle lift, we look at the whole fleet. We look at what an ARG can bring. Our ship does have a vehicle square albeit we'll lift that via airlift, and when you marry that up with an LPD and an LSD or even another ARG if you're doing multiple ARGs, there will be significant vehicle lift. And prepositioned squadrons, and the joint high-speed vessel, will all contribute to vehicle lift as well.

SLD: When one thinks about LCS, or JHSV or whatever assets we are going to put into the littoral, the aviation assets operating off this ship are crucial for a reach back function for the littoral forces. How does this affect thinking about the America?

Mercer: If you can vector in from wherever that air support is for those sorts of littoral operations, and certainly a ship like the future USS America will be there with those aviation assets, in that same area of operation to provide support and cover.

SLD: Could you discuss the propulsion plant on the ship, which is an important enhancement in efficiency for the operation of the large deck amphibs.

Mercer: In the late 1990s, early 2000s we embarked on a design to remove all the steam, go all electric, and put a hybrid propulsion plant in LHD-8 where we would provide a propulsion gas turbine engine to do your sprints and to go fast to your objective.

But most of the life of the ship is spent under 12 knots.

We have carried this experience forward to the future USS America. We put in two 5,000-horsepower electric motors, and geared those into the same gear set that the main gas turbine engines are geared into, and that's what we provide for propulsion.

In fact, most of the life of the ship, in design 75% of the life of the ship, will be on those electric motors. And we project most of its operational life underway will be with the auxiliary propulsion system.

The two-screw design inherent with this propulsion plant has advantages as well. If you wanted to do split plant operations and save fuel you can do that. If you want to go fast, you get both plants rolling full power ahead.

SLD: In shaping the configuration of the ship, obviously the workflow of the new aircraft will affect how the spaces are used on the ship. And you will do a lot of innovation as the ship starts to be used.

Mercer: We're working with our NAVAIR and Marine Corp Aviation stakeholders to define what those spaces are that they need. First, to load out all of their support equipment in stores, in avionic support and maintenance spaces, and all of their workshops, but then also to sit down and look at how everything flows through the ship.

The workflow of everything from shops, and cargo magazines, and movement of yellow gear and aircraft through the hangar will be crucial to the operation of the ship.

We also expanded the hangar, made the hangar larger on the future America compared to the Wasp class, and gave it two maintenance high hats with aviation maintenance bridge cranes in there, so there is a significant expansion of the aviation maintenance capabilities in the ship which will enhance operations as well.

SLD: I assume that your efforts here are informing similar efforts for the folks building the new large deck carrier, the USS Ford?

Mercer: It is. It's happening every day and with formal airship integrations, once a quarter to share all the things that we're learning as we are moving both our programs mutually forward.

SLD: Finally, how do the F-35 and V-22 affect the ship design?

Mercer: The airplane's bigger, the MV22 is larger than CH-46 by a fair amount; the F-35 is bigger than the Harrier.

Both have a bigger logistic footprint. The V-22 has unique maintenance requirements. We've got to open-up the airplane unfolded to be able to maintain it, something we didn't have to do as much with the CH-46.

And the ship's design has to take all of this into account.

For the first interview see the following:

<http://www.sldinfo.com/captain-hall-discusses-the-uss-america-looking-towards-the-future/>

Baseline Characteristics of USS America.

BLUF: LHA 6 (USS AMERICA) is basically an aviation-centric modified repeat of LHD 8 (USS MAKIN ISLAND); with no well deck.

Background Information:

- Key differences between LHA 6 and the LHD class ships include an enlarged hangar deck, enhanced aviation maintenance facilities, increased aviation fuel capacity, additional aviation storerooms, electronically reconfigurable C4ISR suite and removal of the well deck.
- Removal of the well deck for landing craft provides for an extended hangar deck with two significantly wider high bay areas, each fitted with an overhead crane for aircraft maintenance. These changes were required in order to operate the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter and MV-22B Osprey which are considerably larger than the aircraft they replace, the AV-8B Harrier & CH-46E.
- LHA 6 will provide a flexible, multi-mission platform with capabilities that cover the entire range of military operations (ROMO) from forward deployed crisis response to forcible entry operations.
- With a displacement of 45,000 tons, LHA 6 is as big as the aircraft carriers of other nations, and can easily fulfill similar missions when configured with 20 x F-35B Joint Strike Fighters.
- LHA 6 will also provide forward presence and power projection as an integral part of joint, interagency and multinational maritime expeditionary forces.
- Scheduled to be delivered to the U.S. Navy in late 2013, LHA 6 will eventually replace the USS PELELIU (LHA 5) which is currently operating with the Third Fleet Commander (C3F) on the West Coast.
- LHA 7, the USS TRIPOLI, is scheduled to be delivered to the U.S. Navy in late 2018.
- LHA 8 is currently being designed to be able to embark two LCACs or one LCU; a smaller well deck than that of the WASP Class LHDs.

General Characteristics of LHA 6 vs LHD 8

LHA 6 (USS AMERICA)

LHD 8 (USS MAKIN ISLAND)

Length: 844 feet

Length: 844 feet

Beam: 106 feet

Beam: 106 feet

Displacement: 45,000 tons full load

Displacement: 42,000 tons full load

Speed: 20+ knots

Speed: 20+ knots

Crew: 65 officers, 1,059 enlisted

Crew: 65 officers, 994 enlisted

Marines: 1,687 troops (184 surge)

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Aircraft: 12 x MV-22Bs, 6 x AV-8Bs,

Aircraft: 12 x MV-22Bs, 6 x AV-8Bs,

4 x CH-53Es, 4 x AH-1s, 3 x UH-1s,

4 x CH-53Es, 4 x AH-1s, 3 x UH-1s,

2 x MH-60s

2 x MH-60s

Landing Craft: None

Landing Craft: 3 LCACs or 2 LCUs

General Arrangement Considerations of LHA 6

- LHA 6 is an aviation-centric modified repeat of LHD 8
- LHA 6 hangar is significantly larger than LHD 1-8
- Aviation shops & storerooms generally larger than LHD 1-8
- LHA 6 cargo capacity greater than LHD 1-8
- LHA 6 JP-5 capacity greater than LHD 1-8
- LHA 6 vehicle capacity less than LHD 1-8
- LHA 6 has no well deck = no LCAC or LCU

Traditional MEU missions that LHA 6 could potentially support include:

- Conventional Operations (Amphibious Assaults, Raids & Demonstrations)
- Tactical Recovery of Aircraft & Personnel (TRAP)
- Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR)
- Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) & Embassy Reinforcements
- Aviation Ops from Expeditionary Shore-Based Sites/FOBs
- Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Events
- Stability/Security Operations & Peace Enforcement
- Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO)
- Reconnaissance & Surveillance (R&S)
- Airfield & Port Seizures

Summary

LHA 6, enabled with the F-35B JSF and MV-22B Osprey, significantly increases your ability to conduct over-the-horizon (OTH) ship-to-objective maneuver operations.

With the ability to project Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) directly to critical operational objectives located deep inland while simultaneously dislocating our adversaries both in space and in time, LHA 6 becomes an immediate game changer.

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-impact-of-the-uss-america-on-usmc-operations-a-magtf-ace-on-steroids-usmc-operations-a-magtf-on-steroids/>

The Impact of the USS America on USMC Operations: “A MAGTF ACE on Steroids”

2012-11-21 In a four-part follow up set of interviews, *Second Line of Defense* is looking at the role and impact of the USS America.

Interviews have been conducted with the prospective commander of the ship, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, a senior USMC general on its role, and with the Deputy Commander, of the 2nd Expeditionary Strike Group, the role of the USS America as a flagship for an ESG is discussed.

Each interview has allowed us to focus on different aspects of the process of change associated with the ship.

With Captain Hall we were able to focus on the integration of different capabilities aboard the ship.

With Captain Mercer, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, we were able focus on the intersection between those capabilities and innovation in the fleet.

With Col. Bradley Weisz, Deputy Commander of 2nd Expeditionary Strike Group, we focused on the role of the USS America as a potential flagship for an ESG.

And, finally, with Major General Walsh, Deputy Commanding General of the USMC Combat Development Command, we focused on how the ship provides an important impulse to the USMC approach to the future.

Walsh attended the christening of the USS America and with his background in Aviation as former background working at both HQs Marine Corps, in Iraq and at 2nd MAW is well qualified to discuss its impact on USMC operations.

But his [current position](#) as Deputy Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command means that he charged with the responsibility of working for the Corps on thinking through the evolution of expeditionary operations in the period ahead.

The USS America is a new type of large deck amphibious ship. As Captain Hall, the CO of the ship has put it:

We are a large deck amphibious ship, just as the Kearsarge. But we are an aviation-centric large deck amphibious ship and we've been designed specifically without a well deck so we can support the next generation of aircraft.

We can get out there with a much larger hanger bay with two high-hat areas to support maintenance on the much larger MV-22s. The maintenance requirements for the F-35 are met and we have the capability to expand when required for future development. With our added fuel, maintenance, supply, support, we can sustain the aviation capability much greater on station.

SLD: How is the USMC planning to leverage this new capability?

Major General Walsh: The Marines focus operationally on being a scalable and tailorable force. We tend to look at a deck as an opportunity to maximize scalability and tailorability for the mission that will be assigned.

We want to be able to disaggregate our assets, and having this capability truly allows us to do that, but it also allows us to aggregate and come together dependent upon the mission.

We will be able to use the new aviation assets combined with greater operational support to those aircraft to expand the scope and range of our ability to support scalable and tailorable forces.

SLD: When we talked just after you got back from [Iraq](#), it was clear that the newest aircraft in the USMC operational kit – the Osprey – was a game changer. The F-35 will be as well. But it will take some time to figure how to use it and how operations will change as a consequence. Don't you see a direct parallel to marrying the Osprey with the USS America and the future inclusion of the F-35 B onto the America deck?

Major General Walsh: I do. With the CH-46s in Iraq, I had to put out Forward Arming and Refueling Points (FARPs) to support them. This meant sending convoys, equipment, and Marines out to operate and secure the FARPs. This also required protecting the FARPs after they were in place.

With the Osprey, I could simply leap past all of that. The Osprey completely changed how we operated. The demand became to use the Ospreys throughout Iraq because it could go through Iraq in one day easily, and just run around the battle space. It changed completely how we used our heliborne assets.

I expect we will have the same experience with the F-35 B, only more so. When I went from flying F-4s to F-18s that was a shift.

With the F-35 it is a leap of multiple generations of technology all at once.

It's more of exponential curve than we did when we went from third generation to fourth generation aircraft.

It will not only bring in stealth and precision strike but all electronic attack and C5ISR to the USS America as a presence asset. This will be revolutionary.

SLD: The ship will have a significant upgrade in C5ISR over the USS Kearsarge, for example. And as the F-35B brings its C5ISR capability to the ship, the interaction between the ship and the aircraft, will also shape how the ship can be integrated into the surface and subsurface fleet. What is your perspective on this dynamic?

Major General Walsh: One of the things I participate in is what we are calling the air/sea battle area. I am on the senior steering group as the Marine Corps representative.

One focus area is what we are calling network integrated attack. From a USMC perspective, we are working on integrating such an approach into our presence mission.

We look at the USS America from this perspective.

We are looking to integrate the ship, the aviation assets and the fleet into a single scalable and tailorable operational force.

The ship's got to be integrated too. It has tremendous capabilities from a mechanical standpoint, the size of it, the structure, hanger base, cranes, and an ability to be able connect and do the things that we need from a command and control standpoint.

But if it can't connect in this network integrated world, it's not going to be effective.

It's got to be plugging in just as with our other platforms are so we can talk to Aegis Cruisers, it can talk to subs, we can talk to the AWACS and it can be plugged into the carrier's network.

All of this needs to be integrated into one single-joint force.

The Marines focus on going to go where the enemy isn't, and finding the gaps and seams to insert force.

It is not just about precision warfare.

It is about presence, engagement, and pushing information around the battlespace and sustained operations when necessary.

SLD: From your perspective, the integration of C5ISR from the ship to the aircraft to the ground force and to the fleet is really a central piece of the equation?

Major General Walsh: From a USMC operational perspective, it is central.

We are not going to be doing be able to do all the innovative things that we're developing with our platforms, our aircraft and what our Marines are going to do ashore if we can't work an integrated force.

And all the capabilities that we're developing, like G/ATOR and plugging it in with things like the common aviation command and control system (CAC2S) is central to our effort.

We need to put the glue together to tie the Marine air ground taskforce (MAGTF), with our brothers and sisters out at sea to be able to project power from the sea.

SLD: From the USMC perspective, the F-35 B is a Swiss army navy enabling expeditionary operations. How will it interact with the operational approach of the USS America?

Major General Walsh: Everything we try to do is to buy something that's going to fit into the toolbox, and provides capabilities for many uses. With the Harriers they were good for one thing — precision attack. They were attack aircraft to really be Marine's airborne artillery from the sea or move ashore to be that airborne artillery, so we could start getting some more fire support capabilities early in the operation while we phased our artillery ashore.

With the F-35, fire support is just one element. Preparing to insert force and then provide support for that force ashore, the F-35 will provide C5ISR, electronic strike, and guidance to where to maneuver and support the force.

But I'll tell you, the young guys are hungry to get on with this because they understand that they will be able to support in a 360 degree manner the entire MAGTF. They can not do this with Harriers or F-18s, or the support we get from Navy Growlers.

The F-35 will provide the Air Combat Element (ACE) and the MAGTF the complete package.

This will be an entirely new capability with the F-35 as the combat Swiss army knife connected to the capabilities of the USS America and its power projection assets. The term gamechanger tends to be over used but I truly believe the Litening II will be that set of capabilities.

But my operational experience in Iraq demonstrated that the Osprey was just that.

And the package of USS America, with the Osprey, the C-53K, AH-1Z, UH-1Y and the F-35 Bravo on board will be that in spades.

It will be a MAGTF ACE on steroids.

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-coming-of-the-uss-america-to-an-expeditionary-strike-group-esg/>

The Coming of the USS AMERICA to an Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG)

2012-11-12 In a four-part follow up set of interviews, *Second Line of Defense* is looking at the role and impact of the USS America.

Interviews have been conducted with the prospective commander of the ship, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, a senior USMC general on its role, and, finally, with the

Deputy Commander, of the 2nd Expeditionary Strike Group, the role of the USS America as a flagship for an ESG is discussed.

- Each interview has allowed us to focus on different aspects of the process of change associated with the ship.
- With Captain Hall we were able to focus on the integration of different capabilities aboard the ship.
- With Captain Mercer, the head of amphibious ship building in the USN, we were able focus on the intersection between those capabilities and innovation in the fleet.
- With Major General Walsh, Deputy Commanding General of the USMC Combat Development Command, we focused on how the ship provides an important impulse to the USMC approach to the future.
- And with Col. Bradley Weisz, Deputy Commander of 2nd Expeditionary Strike Group, we focused on the role of the USS America as a potential flagship for an ESG.

We first met Col Weisz before and after [BOLD ALLIGATOR 2012](#), an exercise that presages in many ways the role, which the USS AMERICA will play in future Expeditionary Strike Groups.

(For an earlier interview with Weisz on the USS America see the following:

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-coming-of-the-america-class-warship-to-the-usn-usmc-blue-green-team/>).

In many ways, the operational characteristics of the USS AMERICA with its new aviation capabilities can lead to a re-naming of the ESG itself.

The point being is that the ship and its associated fleet elements are about presence, and the ability to provide extended forward presence. With MV-22 Ospreys and F-35 Bravos the ship can operate to envelop an adversary and to project force to where the enemy is not; rather than providing simple frontal assault, and pushing landing craft and amphibious assault vehicles ashore.

It is a different approach and a different capability; which has been presaged in BOLD ALLIGATOR 2012.

SLD: How does the AMERICA class LHA affect ESG operations?

Col Weisz: With its improved C5ISR capabilities as well as increased operational and planning spaces, the USS AMERICA can operate very effectively as an ESG Flagship. When the ESG Commander comes aboard the USS AMERICA, he or she will be able to command the Strike Group more effectively than in the past, than can be done with our current large deck amphibs.

Yes, the Command and Control (C2) capabilities will be quite similar to what we currently have aboard our large deck aircraft carriers, from a C5ISR point of view. You will also have access to critical operational and planning spaces that you currently see on both the USS BLUE RIDGE and [USS MOUNT WHITNEY](#); very capable Fleet Command Ships.

SLD: With BOLD ALLIGATOR 2012, we saw a couple of lessons learned which might shape the way ahead for the AMERICA. The first was the launching of 16 Harriers off of the USS KEARSARGE and working with several large decks at the same time, and the challenges to managing command and control.

Col Weisz: For BOLD ALLIGATOR 12, we had 16 AV-8B Harriers operating aboard the USS KEARSARGE. All in all, it worked out fairly well. The Blue-Green Team, the Navy-Marine Corps Team, has done this before; specifically in Operations DESERT SHIELD, DESERT STORM, and more recently IRAQI FREEDOM; so the concept is well proven but will always need some adjustments according to the situation and environment you are operating in.

What we hadn't done in awhile though was put two big deck amphibs, two LHDs, in close proximity of each other, so that caused us to work through some of our aviation command and control procedures and ensure we were always operating safely.

But again, the concept of using the big deck amphib as an AV-8B Harrier Carrier worked out well.

In the very near future, we will be able to do this same mission with 20 plus F-35 Bravos operating off the flight deck; which significantly increases our strike, EW, ISR and C2 capabilities.

Can you imagine what we could have done in support of Operation ODYSSEY DAWN if we had 20 plus F-35Bs on the USS AMERICA operating off the coast of Libya? Yes, one could have easily run the air war, the air campaign, from right there. The USS AMERICA with 20 plus F-35 Bravos aboard gives you a phenomenal strike, EW, ISR and C2 capability. It truly is a mini-aircraft carrier; very capable.

SLD: We have observed that one aspect that bringing a big warship like the USS AMERICA to the fleet is that provides for innovation in the entire strike capabilities of the fleet.

Col Weisz: Yes, currently Rear Admiral Terry Kraft from the Navy Warfare Development Command here in Norfolk, is running the AMERICA class LHA integration initiative. He is a former Carrier Strike Group Commander; in fact, he recently commanded the ENTERPRISE Carrier Strike Group in support of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM.

He is utilizing his extensive experience as a Naval Flight Officer with thousands of flight hours operating from large deck aircraft carriers and applying them to both the AMERICA class LHA and FORD class CVN integration initiatives.

His Chief of Staff is Captain Pete Pagano, former Phibron Four Commodore who led the KEARSARGE ARG strike operations in support of Operation ODYSSEY DAWN in Libya.

SLD: We have observed as well that there is a new role for the "black shoes" in all of this. The surface navy can play an ever-greater role than in the immediate past as the AMERICA enters the fleet. When you have an officer like Captain Hall, prospective commander of the USS AMERICA, who really is very, very knowledgeable about the weapons aboard the Aegis and the

systems aboard the Aegis, he can actually start thinking as he gets his 35s airborne about the relationship between this ship and Aegis and the other surface combatants.

There's a real revolution possible here and shaping approaches to get better value out of the capabilities we've already put on the destroyer class.

Col Weisz: Yes, that is a great point. The current commander for Expeditionary Strike Group TWO is Rear Admiral Ann Phillips, a Surface Warfare Officer. She was the first Commanding Officer of the USS MUSTIN (DDG 89), the Commodore of Destroyer Squadron 28 and the recent Director of Surface Warfare (OPNAV N86).

She is a subject matter expert in the surface warfare community and has the right background to understand how the surface combatant fleet like cruisers and destroyers can effectively integrate with the amphibious warfare ships; it is those kind of officers that are able to integrate and network these systems together.

SLD: Another aspect of an AMERICA led task force or ESG is its "chameleon" like quality. It can hold a variety of assets, which can be mixed or matched for the mission. It can be a full up F-35B strike ship with 19-23 planes; or have a majority of Ospreys or more CH-53s aboard to carry equipment ashore.

It is a flexibility that can signal to the enemy presence; but not present a final statement as to capability.

Col Weisz: An AMERICA class ESG can perform a variety of amphibious missions, depending on the capabilities aboard. You can deploy the ESG to lead a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mission, what we can HA/DR.

You can have the AMERICA class ESG lead a large scale non-combatant evacuation operation, a NEO, where thousands of US, Coalition and Third Country Nationals need help. You can beef up the America class ESG so that it can conduct major combat operations; utilizing its robust strike capabilities.

You can even add Special Operations to the ESG, giving yourself a unique niche capability.

SLD: Let us close on discussing how the new ship and its capabilities might lead to a different approach to integrating a surface and subsurface ship task force. Rather than using the Carrier Battle Group concept as the organizing principle, there now is the possibility of getting very creative in terms of ESG approaches and concepts. What are the possibilities?

Col Weisz: The possibilities are numerous and there is significant potential, great potential, for innovation here. You have to remember that cruisers, destroyers and submarines use to deploy with the ESG. Then we moved away from that concept.

With F-35Bs, MV-22Bs and soon to be CH-53Ks aboard AMERICA class LHAs, I think there could be a return to these deployments, with a significant focus on strike, raid and ISR capabilities.

This is a great time for innovation across the fleet.

<http://www.sldinfo.com/building-the-uss-america-factory-methods-shape-possible-uptick-in-production/>

BUILDING THE USS AMERICA: FACTORY METHODS SHAPE POSSIBLE UPTICK IN PRODUCTION



2012-10-31 The USN-USMC team needs more carrier-enabled decks.

Large deck carriers can be built in only a quite long period and are built in dry docks, which are large and expensive to build.

The USS America can be built by factory methods and around 70% put together before it goes to the dry dock. This allows the numbers of this type of ship to built up over time, using innovative production methods.

The video below shows the ship being moved to its drydock after being significantly built on land by factory production methods.

Credit Video: Huntington Ingalls



<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-challenge-to-naval-aviation-the-uss-america-answers-the-call/>

The Challenge to Naval Aviation: The USS America Answers the Call

Just when the large deck carrier demand goes up, but the supply goes down, adding the USS America to the fleet provides a long-term solution set. The expanding capabilities of the Gator

navy come as change occurs in other parts of the USN fleet. And in the time it takes to build 1 large deck carrier, you can build 3 USS America's.

A large part of the difference in build times is rooted in that you can build a much greater proportion of the America in factories and on land before you have to put it into the dry dock. This means a faster build time when the ship is being finished.

A much higher degree of factory build means that the capability of the shipyard to build more Americas is also rooted in the manufacturing process.

Also, there is greater synergy between the America class and large deck carriers than with historical large deck amphibians. The America class has more aviation punch than the historical large deck amphibians.

And the synergy between the new large deck carrier (the USS Ford) and the America is significant.

As one of the America class ship designers put it: "We are talking regularly with the Ford design and build team about the work flow of F-35s and Osprey's coming aboard the America."

The challenge facing the USN was described as follows in a recent *Inside the Navy* article:

As the Enterprise (CVN-65) transits the Mediterranean Sea for the last time on its way home to Virginia for retirement and inactivation, the Navy is bracing for a new reality — starting Dec. 1, it will have only 10 aircraft carriers.

The key to maintaining an effective and responsive Navy is being able to both project power through regularly scheduled rotations and add surge forces when needed, Navy spokesman Lt. Cdr. John Fage told Inside the Navy on Oct. 16. But with just 10 ships in the fleet until the Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78) delivers in 2015, Program Executive Officer for Aircraft Carriers Rear Adm. Thomas Moore told ITN in an August interview that surging becomes much more complicated and risks long-term damage to the fleet.

"The demand signal is not likely to go down any time soon, and so we're working pretty hard within in the maintenance community, and [Vice] Adm [Kevin] McCoy and his whole team at [Naval Sea Systems Command] and the shipyards, are looking real hard at what we can do to make sure we hand these ships back over to the combatant commanders and the operators ready to go," Moore said. "And so we've been very successful with that, but we've been very honest with them about what we can and can't do. And to be honest with you, more of it at this point is, the combatant commanders say 'I want X number of carriers' and we say 'I can give you Y.'"

Excerpted from *Inside the Navy*, 10/29/2012,

When Enterprise inactivates . .

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-uss-america-an-lha-which-isnt/>

The USS America: An LHA Which Isn't

2012-10-20 by Robbin Laird

The USS America was christened today in the Ingalls shipyard.

This is the fourth ship to bear the name USS America.

[History of USS America](#)

It was done with a gathering of veterans, ship workers, and industrialists, members of the crew and various high ranking military officers and civilian officials.

The wife of the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (General Pace) was the ship's sponsor and provided modesty and grace to the ceremony. She recognized the achievements of the past USS America and the veterans of the ship in the audience.

She also delivered one of the best lines of the day:

“I know you (the crew of the former USS America) would love the name to go to an aircraft carrier, but this ship is mini-aircraft carrier.”

Good insight from Lynne Pace and a response to those troubled by the missing well deck!

The President of Ingalls Shipbuilding ([Irwin Edenzon](#)) provided a sterling introduction to the ceremonies by honoring the workers of Ingalls who have collectively built more than half of all active USN surface ships.

One highlight of this presentation was introducing the audience to a father (who is building the ship) and a son (who is in the USN) and will serve in the ship.

The executive simply drove home the point that the workers carry about the quality of their work because they understand the consequences of failure for those serving aboard the ships built in the yard.

The Commandant focused upon the meaning of the ship within overall national strategy.

He underscored that having the kind of forward presence which the ship would provide was crucial for influencing events and giving the President options to deal with crises. He cited the famous operations at the beginning of the Afghan war whereby the USN-USMC team went deep into Afghanistan from large deck amphibians and set up Camp Rhino.

The clear implication was that with the increased capability which new aviation will provide for this class of ship, one could expect more of this type of operational dynamic.

The Vice CNO ([Admiral Mark Ferguson](#)) who is a surface warrior focused on the importance of adding a surface ship of such size and capability to the fleet. He emphasized that global presence was built upon such capability being inherent within the fleet, and able to support the USN-USMC team.

In short, the day provided an opening on the era of innovation which this ship will bring to the USN-USMC team, the joint commander and to coalition operations.

Although it is called an LHA ([Landing Helicopter Assault](#)) ship it is not. It is moving far beyond what a helo amphibious ship can provide for operations and for assault from the sea.

And it is the lead ship in driving a new cycle of innovation for the USN-USMC team.

This will be a focus of follow on pieces.

And for an earlier piece see the following:

<http://www.sldinfo.com/the-christening-of-the-america-class-amphibious-ship-the-opening-of-a-new-era/>

And for the [Navy reportage](#) on the event see the following text and link:

The newest amphibious assault ship America (LHA 6) was christened Oct. 20 at a ceremony in Pascagoula, Miss.

“When America joins the fleet, we’ll be a stronger, more flexible, and a better Marine Corps team. We need this ship,” said Vice Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Mark Ferguson during the ceremony.

The 844-foot ship will be a flexible, multi-mission platform necessary to quickly respond to incidents world-wide and provide forward presence and project power as part of joint, interagency, and multinational maritime expeditionary forces.

America also marks the first of the Navy’s newest class of amphibious assault ships replacing the Tawara class. It is considered to be the next generation “big-deck” amphibious ship. The new ship will be more capable to support current and future aircraft such as the tilt-rotor MV-22 Osprey and Joint Strike Fighter.

“It’s kind of like a mini-aircraft carrier,” said Lynne Pace, the ship’s sponsor prior to breaking a bottle of champagne over the bow.

As an amphibious ship, its mission will include embarking, transporting, controlling, inserting, sustaining and extracting elements of a marine air-ground task force, and support forces by helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft.

“To the crew, you are charged with a very special responsibility between now and the commissioning of this ship. You will set the standard of excellence. You will set the personality,” Ferguson told the ship’s crew.

This is the fourth ship in Navy history to be named America. The first was a 74-gun ship-of-the-line that was used by the Continental Navy that was then presented to the king of France as a gift in appreciation for his country’s support to the new nation. The preceding America was a Kitty-Hawk class aircraft carrier that played key roles between the Vietnam War and Operation Desert Storm.

Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Miss., laid the keel in July 2009 and plans to deliver the ship in 2013 after conducting a series of sea trials.

The USS America will be homeported in San Diego.