

Opening Statement

“State of the Surface Navy – Joint Seapower / Readiness Hearing”

March 3, 2022

I’d like to start by thanking our two witnesses for appearing before the joint subcommittees today:

Admiral Bill Lescher, Vice Chief of Naval Operations,

and

Vice Admiral Roy Kitchener, Commander, US Naval Surface Forces, who also hails from the great state of Connecticut.

We gather today to address the State of the Surface Navy, and in particular, the culture of the Surface Navy with regards to mishaps and mishap prevention. In the past five years, we have seen an alarming number of high-profile mishaps within the Surface Fleet.

In 2017 alone, the Navy suffered two collisions, one allision, and one grounding – most notably, the incidents involving the USS *Fitzgerald* and USS *John McCain*, which resulted in the deaths of 17 sailors, injured 51, and caused many months of operational and maintenance delays.

Furthermore, in July of 2020, while conducting a maintenance availability, the USS *Bonhomme Richard* suffered a devastating fire that the crew was ill prepared to fight, ultimately resulting in the loss of the ship.

Now, the goal of this hearing is not to rehash the details of these tragic events, but rather to discuss how the Navy is using the lessons learned from these mishaps to shape how it trains...how it fights...in order assure the American people that these mishaps will not happen again.

In publishing the 2017 *Comprehensive Review of Recent Surface Force Incidents*, and the 2020 *Major Fires Review*, I recognize the considerable effort that the Navy has put towards finding the root causes of these mishaps, and I am pleased with the Navy's ownership and transparency in communicating their shortcomings. But identification alone is not enough. Many of the underlying issues identified are cultural: they require both action and oversight to ensure that corrective measures are effective and enduring.

So today, I encourage the witnesses to illustrate for the committees how the Surface Fleet is changing to incorporate lessons learned from its *Comprehensive Review* and *Major Fires Review* –

How we are assessing risk and making informed risk decisions, at both the deck plate and the organizational level;

How we are ensuring that lessons learned in 2017 don't become investigation root causes in 2025 or 2045;

And how the Surface Navy is leveraging institutional learning to ensure tragedies like the *Fitzgerald* or *Bonhomme Richard* do not happen again.

Thank you again to our witnesses, and I now turn it over to Ranking Member Wittman for his opening remarks.