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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES

STATEMENT OF

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

ON

STATE OF THE SURFACE NAVY

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Chairman Courtney, Ranking Member Wittman, Chairman Garamendi, Ranking Member Waltz, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Subcommittees on Seapower and Readiness, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the state of our Surface Navy. We look forward to updating you on the actions the Navy is taking at speed to deliver consistently strong performance in the Surface Navy, and across the Navy more broadly, as we accelerate the warfighting advantage of the most lethal maritime force in the world.

American security rests upon our ability to control the seas and project power in a maritime domain which is growing rapidly in lethality and complexity; the Surface Navy is a centerpiece of these missions. Our adversaries today seek to challenge our warfighting advantage and, through military buildup and aggressive behavior, undermine the existing international rules-based order. In countering this threat, the men and women of the United States Navy work hard every day to deliver sustained excellence, maintaining a competitive edge that keeps America safe and the global economy working. As China invests in increased naval capability and capacity with a clearly stated intent to become the world's preeminent military, and Russia invests strongly in asymmetric capabilities to enable military aggression, we will continue to work closely with our oversight committees to deliver warfighting advantage through the capabilities and platforms with which we fight, and most consequentially, through leaders and teams trained to think, learn, and solve problems better than any adversary.

What We've Learned

The Navy has teams with great culture and great performance, evidenced by the critical Combatant Commander outcomes our Navy enabled in 2021 while steaming 22,000 days, flying 1,000,000 hours, and completing 59 complex maintenance availabilities. Yet, we also see examples of teams with poor culture and weak performance. The loss of the *USS Bonhomme*

Richard was a stark reminder that the gap between our best and our worst performers is too great. To remain the world's strongest Navy in an era of strategic competition, we must have consistently strong performance.

The command investigation of the *Bonhomme Richard* fire, and the Major Fires Review completed in its wake, gave us a deeper appreciation of the systemic causes of variability in the Surface Navy and more broadly across our force. These systemic causes include an outdated approach to institutional learning and problem-solving that overemphasizes instructions, checklists and rules, while undervaluing the human element—the development of people, a learning mindset and critical thinking. Too often, from an institutional perspective, we have viewed poor performance as one-off failures, made short term adjustments, and focused on administrative solutions, adding burdensome regulations and guidance, over developing our people.

This institutional learning weakness has resulted in inconsistent application of the Navy-best leadership behaviors demonstrated in our highest-performing Navy units and organizations. These best practices emphasize empowering our people; engaging in rigorous self-assessing, self-correcting, and learning behaviors to identify problems before they grow large; and effectively collaborating across organizations and echelons to solve problems and control risk. These best practices align closely with our Navy core values of honor, courage, and commitment – values that place people squarely at the center of our work, reward doing what is right in the face of adversity, and lead us to never stop focusing on learning and doing better with the resources entrusted to us.

Get Real, Get Better

In January, the Chief of Naval Operations issued a call to action for every Navy leader to learn and apply this set of Navy-proven leadership and problem solving best practices consistently across the force. The Get Real, Get Better call to action leverages our greatest advantages—our people and culture—and is informed by years of Navy learning from exceptional enterprise improvement, strategic assessments, and deckplate best practices from all Navy communities.

Our best units and organizations today consistently “Get Real” with strong *self-assessment* competencies: they are honest and transparent about actual capabilities and limitations; challenge beliefs using data, analysis, and diverse input; and “embrace the red” by taking pride in illuminating constraints to improvement and fixing them. Our best units build on this exceptional self-assessment competency with “Get Better” *self-correcting* behavior: fixing small problems before they become larger issues; addressing root causes, not symptoms, of problems; applying world-class problem-solving tools and best practices; setting clear accountability; working collaboratively; and quickly elevating barriers to progress that cannot be resolved at their level.

The Navy is implementing the Get Real, Get Better call to action by, with, and through our Type Commanders and the other community Flag Officer and Senior Executive leaders. We are reorienting organizational elements to teach the foundational cultural attributes and problem-solving skills in a continuum of leadership education. We are taking action to simplify, streamline, and align bureaucratic processes to reduce burdens on our people and better support our warfighters. And we are making changes to the Navy’s talent management processes in order

to make it clear that we are rewarding and promoting leaders based not only on strong outcomes achieved, but also on the teams they build and the learning culture they develop.

Learning-to-Action Board

One of the key organizational changes implemented to counter weak institutional learning is the Learning to Action Board (L2AB), formed in October 2021 and co-chaired by the Vice Chief of Naval Operations and Under Secretary of the Navy. The L2AB is similar to the Readiness Reform Oversight Council which successfully drove comprehensive implementation of the Fitzgerald and McCain collision recommendations; however, it has a broader and more enduring scope designed to provide sustained assessment and awareness, at all levels of the Navy, of ongoing compliance and the effectiveness of actions taken in response to reports, investigations and reviews—to include GAO reports. The L2AB will test whether recommended actions and corrective measures *remain in effect* over time – is our force complying with them – and whether they are providing the *intended effect* – are these measures making a difference in how our Navy performs.

The L2AB assigns ownership of corrective actions to accountable commanders, tracks implementation to provide transparency up echelon on status, and identifies any barriers to implementation that need to be resolved. This proven approach mirrors the structure and cadence of accountability for learning that the Navy has used with strong success in Performance to Plan enterprise improvement initiatives spanning aviation readiness to supply chain effectiveness.

The initial L2AB sessions focused on effectively implementing the most consequential recommendations of the *Bonhomme Richard* investigation and the Major Fires Review. These include: clarifying command and control relationships in the training, readiness, and

maintenance of ships; simplifying, streamlining, and aligning Fleet guidance on fire protection standards; reviewing the adequacy of fire protection and suppression systems; and reviewing the effectiveness of current damage control training.

The L2AB's initial work on the related vector of improving the institutional learning *feedback loop* is to evaluate how *consistently* across the Navy the recommendations of the 2018 Comprehensive Review (CR) and Strategic Readiness Review (SRR) have been implemented, and how *effective* the recommendations have been in correcting the root causes of the *Fitzgerald* and *John S McCain* collisions.

Naval Safety Command

Another key organizational improvement has been to elevate our Naval Safety Center to the Naval Safety Command, establishing a new mission and mandate on February 4, 2022. In response to a primary recommendation from the Major Fires Review, the Naval Safety Command will now serve as the naval enterprise lead for non-nuclear safety standards, expertise, and oversight of a new Safety Management System (SMS).

This design facilitates a Get Real, Get Better focus on safety by expanding the role of the Naval Safety Command to include: assessing the effectiveness of Fleet, Type Command, Systems Command, and Major Command safety *oversight* of their subordinate units; no-notice assessments of individual units in place of the former assist visits, with results passed up to the Fleet level; and checking prior Navy learning and recommendations as directed by the L2AB. Naval Safety Command unit evaluations will now include evaluation of the unit's ability to self-assess their own safety culture, similar to Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) approach in evaluating a unit's ability to self-assess material condition. This high-leverage change in the

Naval Safety Command's approach acts on the insight that the inability to strongly self-assess was a foundational causal factor for the *Bonhomme Richard* fire and other incidents. An equally high-leverage change is that the Naval Safety Command will not only assess front-line units on their safety performance, but will evaluate and hold accountable *the entire chain of command* for how it supports subordinate units in managing risk and building a strong safety culture.

The ongoing Naval Safety Command task to lead deployment of a revised Navy Safety Management System (SMS) this year is equally consequential. The SMS represents a fundamental shift from reacting to mishaps to proactively and transparently identifying, owning, and controlling risk. At its core, the new SMS reinforces risk-management, problem-solving, and critical thinking at all levels of the Navy; ensures that accountability for risk is held at the appropriate level; and verifies that assurance and regulatory requirements are met. Building on best practice from the military and industry, the SMS is a top-down refocus of the Navy's practice of safety, a principles-based approach to managing risk and building a strong safety culture throughout the fleet.

Overall, the Learning to Action Board and Naval Safety Command are designed to be sustained, long-term mechanisms that ensure we are learning, implementing, and evaluating lessons across the Navy – from the deckplate up and the Fleet down – so that we attain the world class safety standard our Sailors and families deserve.

Fire Safety Efforts

In addition to Navy actions to attain consistently strong performance across the entire force, we are taking actions to improve fire safety specifically. Fleet and Type Commanders are improving fire protection standards onboard our ships and in our shipyards. U.S. Fleet Forces is

working to streamline industrial fire safety practices, instructions and requirements for the Navy so that they can be more effectively executed on the deck plates and more easily understood. In the shipyards, Naval Sea Systems Command has established the Industrial Fire Safety Assurance Group, a team focused on being *predictive* about identifying the greatest fire safety risk using industrial shipboard metrics and disseminating best practices and lessons learned throughout the shipyards.

The commanders of Naval Surface Forces Atlantic and Pacific have conducted over 250 no-notice, off-hours Fire Safety Assessments onboard ships to measure both our as-is fire preparedness and our ability to self-assess fire preparedness. Connecting this effort to learning, a monthly roll-up of common errors and trends in deficiencies is published and disseminated to the fleet, with follow-up from the Type Commander to verify lessons are broadly implemented. We have seen improved compliance and deckplate knowledge of firefighting skills through this assessment and lessons dissemination work. The development of the Damage Control-Industrial certification has also been key to enable Type Commanders to assess a ship's readiness to enter the shipyards and combat fire, flooding and other casualties in this hazardous work environments. Eleven ships have gone through this certification and are better prepared to meet fire prevention and safety standards.

Surface Navy Efforts

Beyond fire safety, the Surface Navy has continued with a strong focus on self-assessing and self-correcting in areas highlighted as gaps in the Comprehensive Readiness Review, Strategic Readiness Review, and other reports. In manning, we reduced gaps at sea in 2021 from almost 11,000 billets authorized to less than 6,000 billets authorized. We have more work to do

to meet the full manpower requirement on our surface ships, but we have a better understanding of the most effective levers to reach our manning targets.

We are also improving maintenance completion in our private shipyards. Together with industry partners, we reduced the days of maintenance delay on large CNO availabilities in our private shipyards by nearly 20 percent in Fiscal Year 2021. We have brought data and advanced analytics to inform the plan for each availability period, and improved our processes to better scope work and structure each availability.

The lynchpin of Surface Navy improvement is the modernization of training for both officers and enlisted personnel. We are developing Sailors who are better mariners, better warfighters, and better critical thinkers and problem solvers. Since 2017, we have increased Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) maritime skills training to nine weeks as part of a continuum of learning consisting of challenging scenarios in simulators, and honest feedback to Surface Warfare junior officers to accelerate learning and proficiency. This learning continuum includes 535 hours of ship-handling training for Junior Officers – a threefold increase since 2017. We have developed 10 “Go/No-Go” ship-handling assessment checkpoints throughout a SWO career to ensure the Navy produces professional mariners who meet community standards. Milestone assessments and feedback from the Fleet indicates that these men and women are demonstrating a high degree of proficiency and succeeding in high-stress, complex maritime environments around the world.

Through Ready Relevant Learning and the Surface Training Advanced Virtual Environment, we have modernized how our enlisted force learns the technical skillsets required to fight and maintain ships today. Realistic virtual trainers and combat simulators like the Combined Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW)

Trainers, known as CIAT, are improving the performance of Sailors and teams in high-end combat. CIAT facilitates realistic, high-fidelity training in Fleet Concentration Areas for Sailors who operate our most technically complicated systems. CIAT includes a thorough, integrated, debrief capability for both individual and team analysis. This cutting-edge technology records scenario ground truth, instructor/watch stander console displays, and all scenario audio for post exercise analysis. Fleet Training Wholeness efforts now integrate ships, aircraft, and simulators with ranges in a common strike group training environment that realistically replicates the complex operational environment and high end threats.

Conclusion

The implementation of Get Real, Get Better principles – combined with the actions of our Fleet, Type, and Systems commanders, the transformative Navy enterprise learning accruing from the Performance to Plan and Naval Sustainment System improvement processes, and the actions of the Surface Navy community as a whole – are accelerating our efforts to reduce performance variability and achieve continuously strong Navy performance. We are moving forward rapidly to become a *consistently* self-assessing, self-correcting, and learning Navy which demonstrates exceptional performance every day. We are confident our approach will result in an even more ready and lethal Navy, capable of defending United States interests around the world, and we look forward to partnering with the committees to accelerate the Navy's warfighting advantage.