

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 28, 2009

The Honorable Jack Murtha  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Room H-149 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable C.W. Bill Young  
Ranking member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense  
Room H-149 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murtha and Ranking Member Young,

As you consider the 2009 Overseas Contingency Operations Supplemental Request, we call your attention to a severe shortfall in funding for the Navy's ship depot maintenance requirements. The supplemental requests only \$155.1 million for ship depot maintenance, or roughly one-third of the Navy's stated requirement. This divergence of resourcing and requirements is of great concern and puts readiness and long-term fleet sustainment at risk.

Since submission of the fiscal year 2009 budget request, the Navy has indentified \$702 million in unfunded requirements for ship maintenance. A portion of this requirement was covered by \$285 million received in the 2009 Bridge Supplemental, but the Navy continues to face at least a \$417 million resourcing gap in this account. A more worrisome concern is that this estimated shortfall does not include the yet-to-be-determined cost for repairs to the USS PORT ROYAL, the USS HARTFORD and the USS NEW ORLEANS. As you well know, ship repair activities are not just "nice to have"; they are critical to the mission. Our Navy must be adequately resourced to respond in time-critical situations, such as the rescue of the crew and captain of the MAERSK ALABAMA. Inadequate funding jeopardizes long-term readiness and challenges our ability to field a Navy sized to deal with growing threats and instability around the world. In order to build a 313-ship Navy, it is imperative that the ships we have today reach their expected service life. Deferring maintenance and repair actions needlessly drives up long-term maintenance and procurement costs, and reduces warfighting capability.

We ask for your support for full funding of the Navy's stated requirement of \$417 million for ship depot maintenance in the 2009 supplemental. This funding is critical to the current readiness of the fleet and essential if we are to get the service life we expect from the ships we have already fielded.

Sincerely,

M. D.

B. D.

J. R. G.

w. Callahan

Rob. Withers

# U.S. Navy Readiness Flaws Exposed

## *On Ships and Subs, Problems Included Corrosion, Broken Radios*

By Philip Ewing

The U.S. Navy has systemic, service-wide problems with preventive maintenance, surface ship firefighting systems, corrosion, communications, steering and anchoring, according to an internal readiness presentation obtained by Defense News.

The document added new levels of detail to an ongoing issue: As the Navy has fielded smaller crews, seen tightening budgets, cut schoolhouse training and converted to a corporate-style "enterprise" model of operations, the service has struggled to keep its surface fleet in fighting shape.

The briefing slides summarized the findings of 38 surface ship and 13 submarine inspections completed last year by the Navy's exacting Board of Inspection and Survey (InSurv).

Some of the problems:

\*Six ships — one cruiser, two destroyers, two small-deck amphibs and one attack submarine — were ruled "unfit" in 2008, and could not get underway for demonstrations. Before this report came out, only two ships were publicly known to have been deemed unfit in 2008.

\*Inspectors found that 27 ships had problems with the Halon systems that help fight fires in the main engine rooms, and 21 had problems with the aqueous fire fighting foam systems, designed to put out aviation fires.

\*Of the nine classes of ships inspected, seven had problems with their high-frequency radio systems because sailors didn't know how to maintain them.

\*None of the four dock landing ships scheduled for material inspections in 2008 could meet them on time, and two of the four still hadn't been inspected when the report was prepared. Two of three material inspections for mine countermeasures ships had to be rescheduled.

The undated report was prepared by Rear Adm. Mike Klein, president of InSurv.

The 2008 report is the broadest picture yet to emerge about the condition of the force. It also details recurring problems that InSurv recommends the Navy should fix.

Navy officials say they have already begun taking steps they say will resolve the fleet's material problems.

Fleet Forces Command and Naval Surface Force spokesmen declined requests to interview subject-matter experts to discuss the findings of the report, saying it had not yet been presented to senior leadership.

But officials in both those commands have spoken recently about the importance of maintaining the fleet for as long as possible. On March 25, four admirals — from the Navy staff, Fleet Forces and Naval Sea Systems Command — told the readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee that despite a few bad apples, the surface force was in a good state of readiness overall.

When shown the InSurv report, the chairman of that subcommittee, Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Texas, said he planned to continue prodding the Navy to ensure he was satisfied its ships were fit to fight.

“We’re going to get to the bottom of it — we can’t afford for our young men and women to be residing in these conditions,” Ortiz said.

### **‘Penny-Wise, Pound-Foolish’**

Five former ship commanding officers, asked to review the report, said its findings were troubling. Each has close knowledge of the Navy’s current practices. Four agreed to speak on the condition their names not be used because they were not authorized to talk about the report.

A retired submarine skipper said the report showed problems he’d have expected from the old Soviet Navy, which he said fielded good ships and then permitted them to rust and fail for lack of funding.

A retired cruiser commander said that nothing in the report surprised him, and that it reminded him of the “penny-wise, pound-foolish” mentality he spent years dealing with.

It “sounds good for any current administration of senior naval officers to say, ‘Look how much money I saved the Navy, boss,’” an administration that then promotes out to the next level. That leaves the next generation to grapple with the cutbacks that “made their predecessors look so good,” he said.

A second retired cruiser commander acknowledged the InSurv report findings were bothersome, but he cautioned that the nature of such reports meant things in the fleet might not be as bad as the document makes them seem. InSurv inspectors rate with what he called a “binary” system, in which the only possible grades are “A” or “F.” So even if a piece of equipment is functioning relatively well, it will be failed for not meeting precise regulations.

Extrapolated to the entire fleet, that phenomenon could explain why ships are getting Fs that actually deserve Bs or Cs — not quite outstanding, but certainly not rust-buckets.

Of course, InSurv’s job is listing problems on the ships it inspects, said the second cruiser skipper, and it can’t let them slide. The difficult thing is, “Where will you draw the line?” he asked.

### **Preventative Maintenance Woes**

The experts agreed the report's most worrisome finding was that sailors across the service continued to have problems with preventive maintenance and with assessing their own states of readiness.

The experts blamed smaller crews, shrinking budgets and less real-life training for a generation of sailors often too overworked to care properly for their ships. The factors added up to crews unable to perform regular inspections and maintenance, which enabled small problems to fester into chronic conditions.

The 2008 annual report covered a year in which Vice Adm. D.C. Curtis, Naval Surface Force commander, declared the surface force needed to "get back to basics" after the destroyer Stout and the cruiser Chosin were deemed "unfit for sustained combat operations" in their InSurv. Curtis set ship self-assessment as a top priority, as did Rear Adm. Kevin Quinn, commander of surface forces for the Atlantic Fleet. Quinn's initiative called for the fleet to "take a fix" on how it was doing with readiness.

According to the 2008 annual report, the answer is that readiness is suffering. The report contains photos of leaky pipes and badly corroded bulkheads, signs that crews had walked past problems for so long that they became major hazards.

Still, even though every crew member bears some responsibility for knowing when a ship is in bad shape, none bears more than the commanding officer, said Jan van Tol, a retired Navy captain whose career included the command of three ships, including the amphibious assault ship Essex. When captains aren't trained to conduct and follow up on regular inspections, the system collapses, he said.

"I'm an operations guy by background. My engineering ability fits at the end of my pinkie. What made the difference in my ability to conduct zone inspections was the Senior Officer Material Readiness Course" — an 11-week course that put officers on temporary assigned duty to a training ship.

"That course was disestablished in the 1990s because it was expensive," van Tol said. "The Navy had made the decision that the costs were greater than the benefits. My peers, overall, tend to believe that was a significant mistake."

### **Stretching Service Life**

The Navy's top officials have repeated since the beginning of the year that they are putting a new priority on maintaining the current fleet. Each ship must serve for its full design life if the Navy is to grow to its goal of at least 313 ships, said NavSea commander Vice Adm. Kevin McCoy; 75 percent of that fleet is already in the water today.

Rear Adm. James McManamon, NavSea's deputy commander of surface warfare, made a presentation at a conference April 9 about the Surface Ship Life Cycle Management Activity, in which he outlined NavSea's plans to get maximum life from ships.

Scheduled to stand up May 8, the program will take its cues from similar submarine and aircraft carrier planning authorities. That means better use of classwide maintenance plans, detailed surveys to determine the current condition of today's ships, and a willingness to pay a little more now to resolve problems that will cost a lot to fix in a few years, McManamon said.