

SALUTE

PSNS & IMF

MEETING THE MISSION

New decommissioning process designed to return Sailors to the fleet sooner

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DECOMMISSIONING: Two submarine crews have been merged into one as they work to prepare USS Topeka (SSN 754) and USS Helena (SSN 725) for decommissioning at PSNS & IMF. The process, called Alternate Inactivation Construct, is designed to get Sailors back to the fleet sooner. (U.S. Navy photo by Wendy Hallmark)



BACK TO THE FLEET

A process called the 'Alternate Inactivation Construct' is currently in use at PSNS & IMF to help get Sailors working to decommission submarines back to the fleet sooner.



ABOVE: USS Topeka (SSN 754) and USS Helena (SSN 725) crew members are debriefed after a fire certification drill along Pier 3 at PSNS & IMF. The drill is designed to prepare Sailors for upcoming hot work and hull cuts. (U.S. Navy photo by Wendy Hallmark)

By Max Maxfield
PSNS & IMF Public Affairs

Puget Sound Naval Shipyard & Intermediate Maintenance Facility is using the Alternate Inactivation Construct decommissioning process on USS Helena (SSN 725) and USS Topeka (SSN 754) to help return Sailors back to the fleet as quickly as possible.

The Alternate Inactivation Construct, or AIC as it is commonly referred to around the shipyard, is a decommissioning process that differs from the traditional Submarine Recycling Program, which required most of the crew of a submarine to help support the inactivation process from start to end. The Alternate Inactivation Construct allows PSNS & IMF and ship's force to put up to four ships in a layup condition simultaneously, while reducing the crew size of the first submarine to approximately 60 percent. Added benefits in reductions are seen with the

second submarine reducing their crew to about 30 percent, and the third submarine and fourth submarine retaining only about 20 and 10 percent of their crews respectively.

According to Daniel Woodell, Code 350 AIC project superintendent, the primary reason for using this construct is to rapidly return highly-trained and qualified Sailors to fleet-facing roles.

The ongoing work on Helena and Topeka builds on previous AIC efforts, which helped establish the process being used today.

"The concept of the Alternate Inactivation Construct was first formally tested at PSNS & IMF with the Los Angeles-class submarines USS Jacksonville (SSN 699) and USS Bremerton (SSN 698), which pioneered the use of a reduced crew to oversee the dual inactivation of vessels," said Woodell. "The lessons

that improve current efforts have been gathered from a series of evolving process improvements that are continually

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ABOVE: Senior Chief Torpedoman's Mate Ethan Becker, USS Helena (SSN 725), and Torpedoman's Mate 2nd Class Tyson Tomes, USS Topeka (SSN 754), work together during a drill.

being worked on in Code 350."

Woodell explained that AIC is a tool developed to efficiently deploy available resources, including personnel and infrastructure, at any given time. It is employed based on specific shipyard and naval needs. Based on the success of the Helena and Topeka projects, the Alternate Inactivation Construct could become another effective tool PSNS & IMF has to help support the Navy's strategic objectives.

Once dry dock space becomes available, Helena and Topeka will be inactivated. They will be defueled and prepared for long-term storage at Mooring A. After that, the remainder of the crew release occurs.

"The application of the AIC as a strategic tool is being evaluated for use in the near future for other submarines," he said. "There are opportunities to include future vessels in the AIC program as they are taken out of service adding to the number of highly trained and experienced Sailors who can be rapidly returned to supporting the nuclear fleet."

Woodell said the success of the AIC construct will be measured by two primary indicators: project execution and strategic fleet enhancement.

"If the Navy can successfully place submarines into this minimal-manning status on time and within budget, it will represent a significant process improvement," he said. "The resulting cost savings are substantial, as the Navy can avoid having highly-trained Sailors monitoring a non-operational vessel in port. Secondly, and more importantly, the true benefit is realized when those same Sailors are reassigned to active submarines. This directly reduces personnel costs and ensures that our operational vessels are fully staffed with qualified, experienced crews ready to execute their missions at sea. Therefore, the ultimate validation of the AIC process is not just a successful layup, but a stronger, more capable, and more efficient fleet."

PSNS' efforts to better sequence work has contributed to the improved AIC. However, technological advancements and lessons learned from previous inactivation projects are also helping to reduce the cost and schedule of AICs.

"The implementation of innovative tools like the latest cold-cutting techniques and streamlined welding procedures have significantly accelerated the work," Woodell said. "Finally, a focus on team dynamics and effective mentoring has enhanced overall project efficiency. By integrating these lessons, PSNS & IMF has progressively reduced the cost and duration of decommissioning vessels, which is



ABOVE: Capt. Dillon Tolmie, commander, USS Topeka (SSN 754), briefs his crew before an upcoming procedure. Topeka and USS Helena (SSN 725) are undergoing preparations for decommissioning through a new process called Alternate Inactivation Construct. The process merges the two submarine crews into one in order to get Sailors back to the fleet sooner. The two submarines are slated for decommissioning.

AT RIGHT: Electronics Technician Submarine Navigation Seaman Samuel Hohimer, left, and Sonar Technician Submarine Seaman Apprentice Joseph Galvin take a supply wagon to collect provisions for Sailors aboard USS Topeka (SSN 754) and USS Helena (SSN 725).

(U.S. Navy photos by Wendy Hallmark)



critical to achieving the primary goal of the AIC: returning highly-qualified Sailors to the active fleet as quickly as possible."

A significant secondary strategic advantage behind the AIC is that it optimizes the use of shipyard infrastructure. The AIC concept was developed to manage the sequence of submarines entering the decommissioning process, making the best use of available dry dock and storage space.

"Instead of letting these vessels wait in a queue and tie up resources, the AIC allows the Navy to place them in a safe, stable, and

low-maintenance 'layup' status," Woodell said. "By drastically reducing the manning required for an inactivated submarine, the AIC frees up a percentage of the experienced Ship's Force members to be reassigned to operational vessels where their skills are urgently needed. In essence, the AIC is a deliberate strategic trade-off, prioritizing an immediate and vital boost in fleet readiness over the speed of final disposal. It transforms a logistical challenge into a direct solution for strengthening the active warfighting force."