



Another example of a mission ready ship because of a U.S. Navy Port Engineer

First LCS deploys to European waters for the 6th Fleet

By Megan Eckstein

May 5, 04:18 PM 2022

WASHINGTON — A littoral combat ship is headed to European waters for the first time, with the Freedom-variant **LCS Sioux City (LCS 11)** leaving its Florida home port to operate in U.S. 6th Fleet's area of responsibility.

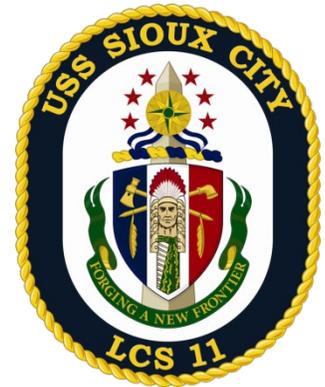
The deployment is years in the making, after the Navy intended to push an LCS into 6th Fleet in 2020 but was hindered by a class wide technical flaw that emerged.

The fleet's area of responsibility includes waters in Europe and Africa, but the Navy did not state specifically where the ship may operate.

“Sioux City's deployment allows us to integrate the LCS's unique operational capability into our already diverse fleet,” 6th Fleet Commander Vice Adm. Gene Black said in a Navy news release. “The agility of Littoral Combat Ships allows them to operate in both near-shore and open-ocean environments, enhancing our ability to provide security and stability across the European theater.”



The San Diego-based LCS's have made more progress operationally, with the first deployment to the Western Pacific taking place in 2013 and the Independent-variant LCS's having a routine presence there since 2019. However, on the East Coast, Freedom-variant ships struggled with technical issues.



A ship was planned to conduct a first deployment through 6th Fleet and to 5th Fleet in the Middle East in 2020. However, in late 2020 the Navy discovered a class wide defect and ordered a stand down.

In November, the Navy accepted a new combining gear design after nearly a year of engineering work to resolve a flaw that restricted the ships from operating at top speeds.

LCS Squadron 2 Commodore Capt. David Miller told Defense News in a December visit to Mayport, Florida, that the Freedom variants continued to operate throughout 2021 locally and into 4th Fleet's area of responsibility in Central and South America, but the Navy did not want to take the risk of sending the ships to the other side of the Atlantic until the combining gear issue was fixed.

Sioux City, the ship heading to 6th Fleet, deployed to 4th Fleet from March to July 2021, and again from September to December.

The deployable LCS's in Mayport have two crews, a blue and a gold crew, that rotate between operating on the ship and training back at home. The crews swap every couple of months, allowing the ship to stay deployed longer without exhausting the personnel onboard.

Sioux City is in a division of ships within LCSRON 2 that specializes in surface warfare. The Navy announced the ship would bring with it two manned MH-60S Seahawk helicopters from the Sea Knights of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 22, though the ship is also capable of deploying with one manned Helo and one MQ-8 Fire Scout drone.

The Navy in its fiscal 2023 budget request asked to decommission all the current Freedom LCS hulls — nine in total — after the service determined their potential operational value in a complex theater isn't worth the money the service is spending to crew, operate and maintain them. Several lawmakers have pushed back against this idea. Congress later this year will write the annual national defense policy and spending bills that will determine these LCSs' futures.

Megan Eckstein is the naval warfare reporter at Defense News. She has covered military news since 2009, with a focus on U.S. Navy and Marine Corps operations, acquisition programs, and budgets. She has reported from four geographic fleets and is happiest when she's filing stories from a ship. Megan is a University of Maryland alumna.

Webmaster's Note: **USS *Sioux City* (LCS-11)** is a *Freedom*-class littoral combat ship of the United States Navy. She is the first ship named after Sioux City, the fourth-largest city in Iowa.