

USN, Landing Craft – LCU 1700

# NAVIGATING the seas with confidence

As the world rapidly shifts to unmanned solutions, Swiftships became the platform provider of choice for the US Navy (USN) and it's international allies. In an environment of tragedies due to the pandemic, this dynamic integrator has had a remarkable 18 months developing new partnerships and collaborations with other industry leaders that have put it at the pinnacle of military watercraft design and manufacturing. Profile by Andy Probert.

Swiftships was identified by the US Department of Defense as a mission-critical contractor during the pandemic as it continues to produce USN Landing Craft Utility (LCU 1700) vessels, as well as Medium Unmanned Surface Vehicles (MUSVs).

“Our future is incredibly bright and robust. Even though Covid-19 impacted businesses worldwide, we continued to grow our order book and backlog with new contracts that will yield \$1 billion in orders,” said Swiftships’ CEO, Shehrazee Shah.

Morgan City, Louisiana-based Swiftships is a globally-respected original equipment

manufacturer (OEM) for mission-critical programs and products. Its capability encompasses the hull, electronics, weapons, and weapon system integration. It has also earned its stripes in the co-production and modernisation of hulls into military craft globally.

“Our investment into cutting-edge technology and engineering solutions have led to us partnering with the Pentagon’s Science & Technology office for “War-Game” initiatives to enable the re-engineering and customisation existing commercial technology utilising a Fast Support Vessel (FSV) that was initially envisioned to serve the oil

“Our desire and commitment to keep driving forward, supported by key suppliers, collaborators and partners, has yielded to ever high order book not only ensuring a strong position in the future but offer the very best in class military vessels”

Mr Shehrazee Shah CEO



Construction of LCU 1700

fields as an ABS classed commercial crew and support vessel,” declared company President and co-owner Jeffery Leleux.

## Testaments to superiority

Mr Shah outlined a series of contract ‘wins’ over the past 18 months, underlining Swiftships’ growth in the platform and MRO markets in the US and internationally.

For the USN, Swiftships, together with L3 Harris (L3H), was awarded a contract to build nine MUSVs as part of a US Government Acquisition identified as a Category (ACAT) type II program (major system defined per 10 USC 2302d of Title 10).

Another significant accomplishment includes a recent award from the US Army’s Watercraft Sustainment & Maintenance

(AWSM) program for both the US Fleet (Zone 1) and International fleet (Zone 2), where Swiftships offer Service Life Extension of Platform (SLEP) for multiple army watercraft, including the Landing Craft 2000 class (LCU 2000).

At the heart of its success, Swiftships continues to maintain and expand its collaborations with long-term partners like Lockheed Martin (LM), L3H and Serco NA (Serco) to help drive innovative solutions for clients.

Other success in the Middle East includes Swiftships’ partnership with Lockheed Martin (LM) through a Joint Venture with the Saudi Arabian Military Industry (SAMI) to provide Modernisation Repair and Overhaul (MRO) efforts in support of the Royal Saudi Naval Force’s (RSNF) Multi-Mission Surface Combatants (MMSC) Tuwaiq class.

In addition to the massive MRO task, the Egyptian Navy (EN) added 10 Coastal Patrol Crafts (CPC) to be co-produced at the Egyptian Ship Repair Building Company (ESRBC) and the Egyptian Naval Shipyard (ESNY).

“Our awards extended into Asia for the co-production of the Pakistan Navy’s (PN) Gun Boat (GB) fleet in collaboration with Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works (KS&EW),” added Mr Shah. “The final achievement of the period came in the”



Swiftships Corvette Class



resecuring of the support contract for the Iraqi Navy (IqN) fleet with Continuous Lifecycle Support (CLS) for its entire naval fleet in Um-Qasr, Iraq.

### Promising outlook and expansion

Mr Shah commented that Swiftships’ outlook for the next five years is “auspicious,” as it offers foreign governments and their military sovereignty using its proven MRO and kitting supply through US State Department Transfer of Technology (ToT) programs.

“I believe it removes capacity planning threshold risks for Swiftships by providing Manufacturing License Agreements (MLA) for approved partner nations,” he added.

Swiftships’ addition of the previous McDermott Facility in Amelia, Louisiana, has provided an additional 42 acres of production real estate with 320,000 sqft of under roof construction capacity that includes 1,200sqft of port-side clearance. The primary fabrication building consists of eight bays, where each bay measures 400ft x 100ft x 85ft, which can accommodate a 112m vessel or one USN LCS in each bay.

“The facility expansion increases our capacity by tenfold,” said Gibson Lacoste, Director of Production.

“Furthermore, this will enable Swiftships to hire more than 1,000 workers for both aluminum and steel vessels,” Mr Leleux added.

### Mission-critical programs

Swiftships continues to manufacture vessels for the US Navy’s Landing Craft Utility (LCU 1700) program.

“Recently, the Naval Sea Command (NAVSEA), through the program office (PMS 377), awarded five additional LCU 1700s to Swiftships, bringing the total to 12 of the 32 LCU 1700s that the navy intends to build,” said Dan Musmanno, VP of Business Development.

“Our team continues to work closely with Program Executive Office Ships (PEO Ships) and the end-user, US Marine Corps (USMC), to autonomise these craft to ensure safety and empower the War-Fighter with modern technologies.”

Mr Shah reflected: “The global ship-building industry has taken a heavy blow due to the impact of Covid-19. The challenges shipyards face today are associated with supply chains and material procurement that are causing schedules to slip and firm fixed price contracts' costs to increase. Through it all, Swiftships has been fortunate to have the suppliers that have supported it during these challenging times.

“Although we have had international success in the last period, the change of the US administration has impacted the regulations for the federal government award cycle regarding Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs and will further impact the overall 2020-21 revenue growth.”

He cited that Swiftships’ foreign clients using FMS to procure US products and technology have been put on pause indefinitely, and may be further delayed for another 12 months while regulations are streamlined and developed.

“We have also seen the repair industry slow to a standstill, and shipyards are experiencing near-term challenges with impacts

brought on by the heavy burdens of higher labour, general administration, and material costs. The future remains uncertain as many countries are still locked down, and programs remain under moratoriums or force majeure.”

Mr Shah spoke of the potential outlook for the industry for the next five years and the advances in technology where “the industry’s adaptation to autonomous solutions like the USN’s MUSV programs will be limited to players with past performance that will likely be the only participants allowed to bid on future programs as future defense budgets shrink based on the goals of the new administration.”

As the US and international navies embrace USV options, leaders in autonomy, such as Swiftships, will be positioned ahead of competitors. Small-to-medium shipyards are likely to struggle to adapt to technological advances quickly to stay in business as private equity and system integrators move into an acquisition mode.

“For example, Carlyle’s investment into Sea Machine will redefine the leadership roles in the new shipbuilding market for future industry trends,” suggested Mr Shah.

### Undisputed industry leader

“Contracts for USVs, LCUs, patrol boats, and FSVs have transformed us into a global powerhouse, while delivering services buoys to clients in the US, Middle East, Africa, Asia the Far East. Further to its global expansion into maritime solutions and programs, Swiftships has made considerable investments in its



35m Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV)



USN, Medium Unmanned Surface Vehicle (MUSV)



Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system,” highlighted Mr Shah.

“In a collaboration event with a leading IT/System Integrator, ICS Nett, Inc (ICS), Swiftships achieved NIST certification and maintains Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) to meet the Department of Defense’s security protocol,” said Michael Poel, CEO ICS.

“Our desire and commitment to keep driving forward, supported by key suppliers, collaborators and partners, will not only strengthen our hand in future years but offer the very best in class military vessels,” added Mr Shah.

He concluded: “Swiftships stands in a league of its own and does not fear competing with large shipyards

on high-profile projects due to its technological advancements, superior quality, and unparalleled support to customers. In the words of FDR, there is nothing to fear but fear itself, and we are not scared to compete globally to bring success to the bayou and our devoted employees.” ■

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Swiftships Unmanned Challenger Program