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MINE WARFARE

The Navy's Plans to Reassign  
Ships to Ingleside, Texas, and  
to Consolidate Management

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear before the Subcommittee today to discuss our recently issued report on actions the Navy has taken to address mine warfare problems identified during Operations Desert Shield and Storm. I would like to briefly summarize our views regarding two major changes in mine warfare (1) the Navy's decision to centralize operational control of all mine warfare forces and (2) the Navy's plans to consolidate mine warfare forces at Ingleside, Texas.

#### RESULTS IN BRIEF

We endorse the Navy's efforts to strengthen management of mine warfare forces by giving the Commander, Mine Warfare Command, operational control of ships, helicopters, and associated explosive ordnance disposal detachments. We believe that if the Navy provides the needed resources to effectively manage these forces, holding the Mine Warfare Command accountable could improve oversight and direction of mine warfare activities.

However, we are concerned that the Navy has not adequately justified its decision to consolidate its mine warfare forces at Ingleside. The Navy did not adequately study other options that may offer equal or greater benefits than Ingleside at less cost.

#### DENTRALIZED OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF MINE WARFARE FORCES COULD STRENGTHEN MANAGEMENT

During Operation Desert Shield, four mine countermeasures ships, six mine countermeasures helicopters, and two explosive ordnance disposal detachments were deployed to the Persian Gulf. The Navy has stated that the most important lesson learned from mine countermeasures operations during the Gulf War was that no one was in charge of these operations. Navy officials believed that as a result of the lack of a full-time, deployable force commander and staff, no one was responsible for preparing a coordinated mine countermeasures force for deployment.

Consequently, the Navy reorganized its mine warfare activities by centralizing operational control under the Commander, Mine Warfare Command, located in Charleston, South Carolina. The Commander is now responsible for mine warfare training and readiness and for providing full-time, deployable forces to support regional conflicts and contingency operations. The Commander's responsibilities include platform and systems procurement, research and development, force operations, support activities, training, and integrated tactics development.

We believe that if the Navy provides the needed resources to effectively implement these management changes, the new Mine Warfare Commander should be able to address most or all of the command problems identified by Navy officials after the Persian Gulf war.

INGLESIDE MAY NOT BE  
THE BEST LOCATION FOR  
MINE WARFARE FORCES

Another lesson learned during the Gulf War was that the Navy needed to be able to quickly deploy an integrated mine warfare force consisting of ships, helicopters, and explosive ordnance disposal teams. In May 1991, the Navy announced it would begin homeporting 22 mine countermeasures ships at Ingleside, Texas, in early 1992. At the time of our review, the Navy was considering locating other mine warfare forces at Ingleside.

The Navy's new homeport at Ingleside was originally designed to accommodate an aircraft training carrier and a battleship battle group. As you know, the Navy no longer plans to put a carrier at Ingleside and has decommissioned all battleships. As a result, the Navy has been looking for ships to homeport at Ingleside. Defense Department officials acknowledged that the Navy's May 1991 decision to homeport mine countermeasures ships at Ingleside was partly based on the costs already incurred to build Ingleside. They also acknowledged that assigning the mine countermeasures ships to Ingleside would be a major factor in future decisions on consolidating other mine warfare forces. However, neither DOD nor the Navy could provide us any data or analysis to justify why the mine countermeasures ships should be consolidated at Ingleside rather than, for example, based on the East and West Coast.

Consolidating all mine warfare ships at Ingleside will involve significant additional costs. First, the Navy will have to modify the piers to accommodate smaller mine warfare ships. Second, as we have reported before on the Navy's plan to open new homeports, there will be additional costs to make them fully operational. Third, once the ships are moved to Ingleside, other assets used in mine warfare are likely to be moved there also. For example, relocating just one of the Navy's five mine warfare helicopter squadrons to nearby Corpus Christi (Ingleside cannot accommodate helicopters) would cost about \$34 million.

Further, Ingleside's remote location could detract from integrated training and coordination with operational fleet forces--another lesson learned during the Gulf War. For

example, additional transit time would be necessary to train with deploying battle forces.

We believe the Navy should evaluate all facets of the mine countermeasure mission--where the ships will be, where the command structure and helicopters will be, how integrated training will be done--before taking individual actions, such as moving the ships. That is why, in our report, we recommended that the Navy provide a detailed evaluation of Ingleside and other locations--such as a base on both the East and West Coasts--before it relocates mine warfare forces. We also recommended that the Navy stop Ingleside construction and the transfer of ships until it completed this evaluation.

On March 12, 1992, DOD informed us that the Navy would not reconsider its decision to consolidate its mine warfare ships at Ingleside. Further, the Navy has not yet officially announced plans for the future consolidation of its other mine warfare assets.

This concludes my prepared remarks, I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

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