

Submarines USS Hartford, USS Connecticut surface together within the Arctic Circle

Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine USS *Hartford* (SSN 768) and Seawolf-class fast attack submarine, USS *Connecticut* (SSN 22) both surfaced within the Arctic Circle on 10 March 10 during the multinational maritime Ice Exercise (ICEX) 2018 north of Alaska.

Both fast-attack submarines as well as HMS *Trenchant* (S91), are participating in the biennial exercise in the Arctic to train and validate warfighting capabilities of submarines in extreme cold-water conditions.

Said Rear-Admiral James Pitts, commander, Undersea Warfighting Development Center (UWDC): *‘From a military, geographic, and scientific perspective, the Arctic Ocean is truly unique, and remains one of the most challenging ocean environments on earth.’*

ICEX provides the US Submarine Force and partners from the Royal Navy an opportunity to test combat and weapons, sonar, communications and navigation systems in a challenging operational environment. Furthermore, the unique acoustic undersea environment is further compounded by the presence of a contoured, reflective ice canopy when submerged.

According to Pitts, operating in the Arctic ice alters methods and practices by which submarines operate, communicate and navigate.

Pitts added: *‘We must constantly train together with our submarine units and partners to remain proficient in this hemisphere. Having both submarines on the surface is clear demonstration of our proficiency in the Arctic.’*

In recent years, the Arctic has been used as a transit route for submarines. The most recent ICEX was conducted in 2016 with USS *Hampton* (SSN 767) and USS *Hartford* (SSN 768).

The first Arctic under-ice operations by submarines were achieved in 1947-49. On 1 August 1947, the diesel submarine USS *Boarfish* (SS-327), with Arctic Submarine Laboratory’s founder Dr Waldo Lyon onboard serving as an Ice Pilot, conducted the first under-ice transit of an ice floe in the Chukchi Sea.

In 1958, the nuclear-powered USS *Nautilus* made the first crossing of the Arctic Ocean beneath the pack ice. The first surfacing in the Arctic was by USS *Skate* (SSN 578) in March 1959. USS *Sargo* was the first submarine to conduct a winter Bering Strait transit in 1960.

It is understood that the units participating in the exercise are supported by a temporary ice camp on a moving ice floe approximately 150 miles off the coast of the northern slope of Alaska in international waters.

This ice camp, administered by the Arctic Submarine Laboratory (ASL), is a remote Arctic drifting ice station, built on multi-year sea-ice especially for ICEX. It is logistically supported with contract aircraft from Deadhorse, Alaska, and will be de-established once the exercise is over.

ASL is an operational fleet support detachment of the Undersea Warfighting Development Center (UWDC). It is also the Navy Programme Manager for the (US) Submarine Arctic Warfare Programme.

Picture caption:

The Seawolf-class fast-attack submarine USS Connecticut (SSN 22) and the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Hartford (SSN 768) break through the ice 10 March, 2018 in support of Ice Exercise (ICEX) 2018.

ICEX 2018 is a five-week exercise that allows the US Navy to assess its operational readiness in the Arctic, increase experience in the region, advance understanding of the Arctic environment, and continue to develop relationships with other services, allies and partner organizations.

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