

Transforming HII: Innovative Customer Solutions In Response To COVID-19

[Music playing throughout]

Voice of Mike Petters, HII president and CEO

Our customers have been very clear across the board. They've been very clear that they want to find a balance between health and safety and resilience and sustainability of our workforce. The missions that they ask us to do, because national security never sleeps, that is really why the Defense Industrial Base was declared to be mission essential from the very beginning.

Hank Allen, deputy director Maintenance University for East Coast operations, Technical Solutions:

My name is Hank Allen. I'm the deputy director for Maintenance University for East Coast Operations. Maintenance University has been around for about 15 years. We train about 12,000 sailors per year in shipboard maintenance management responsibilities. On March 20, the Commander Naval Surface Forces directed that all classroom training stop.

William Rooks, NSC ship program manager, Ingalls Shipbuilding

I'm the ship program manager on the NSC program, and I've worked NSC 3 through NSC 9 in the program office. Just to hit some of the challenges that COVID put upon NSC 9, when COVID hit in March, we were looking at, for the rest of the year, the challenge for 9 is we had to light off all three of our generators, light off our main propulsion engine, light off our gas turbine, go to dock trials, go to sea, not once, but three times, deliver and see the ship sail away before Christmas. So it was going to be a challenging year before COVID even hit.

Once we took a look at that and realized how the struggle we had with our resources, we really had to lay out a good plan, get additional support from the other programs as well. Just to get to trials was extremely proud of what this crew did and what the entire company did to support us.

Hank Allen

Our training brings sailors from different ships together, and it's while they're already stationed onboard the ship. That's most of our training. We would be bringing them all together into a classroom environment, so it was important that we transform away from that until the COVID-19 mitigation measures, or until we're past that. We decided that we would use Cisco WebEx product in order to provide our training.

William Rooks

When we first started to think about how are we going to safely go to sea while meeting the contractual requirements in this COVID environment, early on I think our operations leadership took the lead, and working with them we really set three goals of what we want to try to do. We want to try to minimize the amount of time out at sea. Can we spend less time out? Which means we're under less of a chance

for exposure. Can we minimize the amount of people, the rider list? Can we reduce that simply so we don't take as many people? And then the third one was, what can we do during sea trials to really limit exposure? Can we keep social distancing? Can we wear a mask? Once we set those three goals, everything we did after that was really based on, can it accomplish one of those goals?

Hank Allen:

I was very apprehensive. I was very apprehensive when we made this shift because I value the student interaction. Using this software that we use enables us to be very interactive. We can show videos, we can have voice-to-voice communications, we limit our class size. Even though it's online, we limit the class size to under 25 so that we can keep that interaction going.

William Rooks:

We had additional groups who really stepped up and helped out. One of the big ones was the Communications department. We created a two page pamphlet that had all of the information. All that information was provided because that'll also let them know that this is very different than what we've done in the past.

Hank Allen:

One thing that we've learned in shifting to the online learning is, although online learning is never really going to fully replace face-to-face, we can use this in some areas when we know that we're not going to have a lot of students to teach in a particular area. We can end up, after COVID-19 is in the rear view mirror, we could find ourselves in a situation where we now have a blended solution. We go back to the face-to-face classroom training where it is cost-efficient to do so, and then in those other areas, maybe we can offer an online version, and if that is what the government decides they want for that particular case.

William Rooks:

I think it's like a lot of things that the company is going through, is there should be lessons learned from this that we can incorporate, whether we still have to deal with a COVID environment or just ship trials in general. One of the big things is, if we could successfully take the ship three times out to sea with 25% less personnel and we still delivered what I think is the most complete NSC to date, why would we consider going back to additional riders in the future? That's a perfect area that we could look at reduction going forward and we can keep that in our class plan.

Hank Allen:

The fact that our leadership really pushed, "Hey, make a change." When I say leadership, I'm talking about our Huntington Ingalls leadership and our IAP leadership, said, "No, we got to keep going. We can't let a single class drop." Working that weekend to get ourselves ready and then back on the podium, even in a virtual environment, that made it easy. Having that venue and having that mindset and that culture that made it easy on March 20th when the word got out to the team very quickly, "Hey, stop all classroom training. It has to stop." But we're going to continue. We're going to leverage WebEx. We're going to leverage online learning to make this work.