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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-442](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Advanced SEAL Delivery System (ASDS) is a mini-submarine that is one of the U.S. Special Operations Command's largest investments. The program is approaching the end of a difficult development and must undergo key testing before decisions are made to proceed beyond the first boat. Over the past several years, the Congress has raised concerns about technical difficulties, schedule delays, cost growth, and management oversight. The Senate Armed Services Committee requested that GAO review the status and problems facing the program. Specifically, this report examines the ASDS program's (1) progress towards meeting requirements and technical challenges, (2) ability to meet schedule and cost projections, and (3) underlying factors contributing to program problems.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that, before the operational evaluation is held, DOD ensure that the overall ASDS test and evaluation master plan and the specific test plan for the operational evaluation are both sufficient in scope and approved. GAO is also recommending that DOD elevate the level of management attention and hold a formal milestone review before buying additional boats. DOD concurred with most of GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-442.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Paul Francis at (202) 512-4841 or francispl@gao.gov.

DEFENSE ACQUISITIONS

Advanced SEAL Delivery System Program Needs Increased Oversight

What GAO Found

While progress has been made in addressing technical difficulties with the first boat, some problems must yet be solved and other capabilities demonstrated before the ASDS can meet all of its key performance requirements. For example, the Navy has not yet been able to develop an adequate propulsion battery. In addition, the ASDS' final design will remain uncertain until technical problems are solved and testing is completed. The degree of uncertainty will be important as the U.S. Special Operations Command could decide that the ASDS is ready to conduct missions and commit to buying more boats after the operational evaluation scheduled for April 2003.

The ability of the ASDS to meet cost and schedule projections is problematic. The program has experienced major schedule delays and cost increases. The program is 6 years behind its original schedule, and, by GAO's estimates, costs have more than tripled. Cost and schedule estimates were being formally revised at the time of this report, but even their accuracy will be uncertain because of unresolved, known problems; the potential for discovering new problems in upcoming testing; and the difficulty of estimating costs for future boats based on the first boat's aging data.

Several underlying factors have contributed to the ASDS' difficult development. In retrospect, the capabilities required of the boat outstripped the developer's resources in terms of technical knowledge, time, and money. Key problems, such as the battery and the propeller, were discovered late—in testing on the first boat—rather than in component or subsystem level testing. Finally, the program suffered from insufficient management attention on the part of both the government and the contractor, which led to missed opportunities for righting the program as it proceeded. Moreover, the management attention that was exercised has been hampered by outdated information.

ASDS Mated to USS *Greeneville* (SSN 772) Off the Coast of Hawaii, September 2002



Source: U.S. Navy.