USS Arleigh Burke Prepares for Homeport Shift to Rota

Sailors aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) man the rails as they get underway from Naval Station Norfolk Mar. 26. Arleigh Burke will replace USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) as one of four forward deployed naval forces (FDNF) located in Spain. Arleigh Burke will join USS Ross (DDG 71), USS Roosevelt (DDG 80), and USS Porter (DDG 78) as the newest member of FDNF Rota. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kris R. Lindstrom*

NORFOLK, Va. – The guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) departed from Naval Station Norfolk, Mar. 26, commencing the ship's homeport shift to Rota, Spain, the U.S. 2nd Fleet Public Affairs said in a March 27 release.

Arleigh Burke will replace USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) as one of four forward-deployed naval forces (FDNF) located in Spain. The ship is named after U.S. Navy Admiral Arleigh Burke

(1901-1996) who distinguished himself during World War II and the Korean War, and served as chief of naval operations during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. Arleigh Burke, the lead ship of its class of Aegis-equipped guided-missile destroyers, was commissioned in Burke's honor in 1991. The honor of naming a vessel after a living figure had only been bestowed four times since 1861.

"As one of the most technologically advanced destroyers in the entire United States Navy, we are excited to provide additional capability to 6th Fleet operations," said Cmdr. Patrick Chapman, commanding officer, USS Arleigh Burke. "However, even stronger than the technology we have been outfitted with is the strength of our crew. Every day we train to be the most effective crew possible, one that is ready for sustained forward presence in the 6th Fleet Area of Operations."

Arleigh Burke was the first U.S. Navy destroyer in the world equipped with the Aegis Weapons Systems and departs for 6th Fleet with the latest Aegis baseline nine upgrades. This higher capability ship is effective in high-threat areas conducting anti-air, antisubmarine, anti-surface, and strike operations.

To prepare for the homeport shift, Arleigh Burke took part in the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group's Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX). COMPTUEX is designed to fully integrate a strike group as a cohesive, multi-mission fighting force, and test the group's ability to carry out sustained combat operations from the sea. Upon completion of COMPTUEX, Arleigh Burke is certified and ready to execute the full spectrum of maritime operations in any theater.

"I am immensely proud of the perseverance of our crew, and of our families who have supported us through our arduous training cycle," said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Jason

Waters. “Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the crew was able to remain healthy and continue with one of the most rigorous schedules I have experienced in my career. Arleigh Burke’s crew and families have performed beyond all expectations. There is no doubt in my mind that we are ready for 6th Fleet.”

In addition to certifying in support of naval operations worldwide, Arleigh Burke Sailors and their families have been focused on preparing for the move to Spain. Arleigh Burke’s leadership team traveled from Norfolk to Naval Station Rota to participate in educational briefings and question-and-answer sessions concerning the homeport shift process and life in Spain. Naval Station Rota also supported virtual meetings for Norfolk crewmembers and their families to learn about the complicated homeport shift process.

The U.S. Navy will continue to meet combatant commander requirements around the world, but in order to do so, protective steps must be taken to ensure the health and safety of Sailors and their families from exposure to COVID-19.

Arleigh Burke will join USS Ross (DDG 71), USS Roosevelt (DDG 80), and USS Porter (DDG 78) as the newest member of FDNF Rota, replacing USS Donald Cook (DDG 75). Donald Cook will return to her new home at Naval Station Mayport, whereas she was previously homeported at Naval Station Norfolk.

USS Fort McHenry

Decommissioning Ceremony Marks 33 Years of Service

Sailors aboard the Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43) main the rails during the decommissioning ceremony at Naval Station Mayport, March 27, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Aaron Lau*

NORFOLK, Va. – The Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43) held a small, COVID-conscious decommissioning ceremony at Naval Station Mayport, Florida, on March 27 before its inactivation, which will occur in April, the U.S. Fleet Forces Command said in a release.

Rear Adm. Robert Katz, commander, Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 2 presided over the ceremony, which included the remaining ship's crew and several of its previous commanding officer, including the ship's commissioning commanding officer, Capt. George "Dusty" Rhodes, who retired in 1999 and featured prominently in the ceremony.

"I am humbled to be with you on this bittersweet day as we

gather here at Naval Station Mayport to commemorate this ship's 33 years of commissioned service," said Katz. "The history of Fort McHenry lies within each of the ship's Sailors, and it is my hope this pride in their namesake guided all who crossed its quarterdeck and reported for duty."

Fort McHenry was commissioned on Aug. 8, 1987, at Lockheed Shipyard in Seattle.

"During my 17 years of sea duty and four commands at sea, I have no doubt that the Fort McHenry crew was the best with whom I ever served," said Rhodes. "They were always more than willing to do whatever it took to fulfill the mission. It is remarkable how closely they have stuck together over the past 34 years. I am proud to be among them."

After arriving in San Diego on Sept. 30, 1987 the ship remained homeported there until 1995 when it replaced the USS San Bernardino (LST 1189) as a forward-deployed ship based in Sasebo, Japan.

Fort McHenry's first deployment to the Western Pacific took place between June 16 and Dec. 16, 1988, as part of an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) along with embarked Marines from the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit. The other ships of the ARG were USS New Orleans (LPH 11), USS Mobile (LKA 115), USS Ogden (LPD 5) and USS Fresno (LST 1182). During the deployment Fort McHenry participated in exercises Cobra Gold-88, Valiant Usher 88-6 and Valiant Blitz 89-1 and the Sailors and Marines got some well-earned liberty during port visits to Okinawa, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, South Korea and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Over the next few decades, Fort McHenry would shift homeport, and deploy several more times, supporting Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Vigilant Warrior and Enduring Freedom. Its crews would assist with humanitarian assistance efforts domestically, such as oil spill cleanup in the Prince William

Sound and internationally, supporting disaster relief efforts in East Timor in 2001, the Philippines and Indonesia in 2004,

In November 1994, the ship received the first women to be permanently assigned to the crew – two lieutenants who reported aboard as the Supply Officer and Electrical Officer.

The ship's final deployment was as part of the USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) Amphibious Ready Group and concluded in July 2019. While deployed to the Europe, Africa and the Middle East area of operations, Fort McHenry, along with embarked Marines from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, conducted maritime security operations and provided a forward naval presence in these critical regions.

During the deployment, Fort McHenry Sailors conducted a burial at sea for the remains of 34 veterans and two military spouses, a passing exercise with Egyptian navy ships in the Northern Arabian Sea and conducted more than 15 strait transits and port visits to Romania, the United Arab Emirates, Germany and Latvia. The ship capped off their deployment by participating in exercise Baltic Operations 2019.

"The last crew of Fort McHenry has performed with toughness and resiliency," said Fabrizio, the ship's final commanding officer. "Like their predecessors onboard, their efforts during the last phase of the ship's active service and the inactivation process have been nothing short of amazing."

The ship will be inactivated on April 16, 2021, and will be designated as Out of Commission in Reserve. That same day, it is scheduled to be towed by a seagoing tug to the Naval Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility in Philadelphia.

Navy Announces New Assignments for Flag Officers

Rear Adm. Blake L. Converse, assigned as deputy commander,

U.S. Pacific Fleet, one of a number of new assignments announced March 29. *U.S. NAVY*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The acting secretary of the Navy and chief of naval operations announced on March 29 the following assignments:

Rear Adm. Blake L. Converse will be assigned as deputy commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Converse is currently serving as commander, Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Rear Adm. Frederick W. Kacher will be assigned as assistant deputy chief of naval operations for operations, plans and strategy, N3/N5B, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C. Kacher is currently serving as commander, Expeditionary Strike Group Seven; and commander, Amphibious Force, Seventh Fleet, Okinawa, Japan.

Rear Adm. (lower half) James A. Aiken, selected for promotion to rear admiral, will be assigned as commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Southern Command; and commander, U.S. Fourth Fleet, Jacksonville, Florida. Aiken is currently serving as commander, Carrier Strike Group Three, Bremerton, Washington.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Joseph D. Noble Jr., selected for promotion to rear admiral, will be assigned as director, logistics operations, Defense Logistics Agency; and commander, Joint Regional Combat Support, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Noble is currently serving as commander, Naval Supply Systems Command Weapons Systems Support, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Dean A. VanderLey, selected for promotion to rear admiral, will be assigned as commander, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific; and director, Fleet Civil Engineer, U.S. Pacific Fleet, with additional duties as fleet civil engineer, N46, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. VanderLey is currently serving as commander, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command

Atlantic with additional duties as fleet civil engineer (N01CE), U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Peter G. Vasely, selected for promotion to rear admiral, will be assigned as commander, special operations, Special Operations Joint Task Force – Afghanistan, U.S. Special Operations Command, Kabul, Afghanistan. Vasely is currently serving as director for operations, Defense Intelligence Agency, Washington, D.C.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Stephen D. Barnett will be assigned as commander, Navy Region Southwest, San Diego, California. Barnett is currently serving as commander, Navy Region Northwest, Silverdale, Washington.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Michael A. Brookes will be assigned as director, J2, U.S. Southern Command, Doral, Florida. Brookes is currently serving as director of intelligence, J2, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Timothy J. Kott will be assigned as commander, Navy Region Hawaii; and commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Kott is currently serving as commander, Carrier Strike Group One, San Diego, California.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Carl A. Lahti will be assigned as commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Japan; and commander, Navy Region Japan, Yokosuka, Japan. Lahti is currently serving as commandant, Naval District Washington, Washington, D.C.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Matthew N. Ott III will be assigned deputy chief of staff for Fleet Ordnance and Supply; and fleet supply officer, N41, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia. Ott is currently serving as executive director, operational contract support, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, Washington, D.C.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Milton J. Sands will be assigned as

commander, Special Operations Command Africa, U.S. Special Operations Command, Stuttgart, Germany. Sands is currently serving as commander, Naval Service Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois.

Capt. Christopher D. Alexander, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Naval Surface and Mine Warfighting Development Center, San Diego, California. Alexander is currently serving as commanding officer, Surface Warfare Officer School Command, Newport, Rhode Island.

Capt. Sean R. Bailey, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy commander, U.S. Naval Forces, U.S. Central Command; and deputy commander, U.S. Fifth Fleet, Manama, Bahrain. Bailey is currently serving as chief of staff, Naval Air Force Atlantic, Norfolk, Virginia.

Capt. Thomas R. Buchanan, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy director for plans and policy, DJ5, U.S. Central Command, Tampa, Florida. Buchanan is currently serving as commandant of midshipman, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

Capt. Christopher J. Cavanaugh, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as director, Maritime Headquarters (N03), U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Cavanaugh is currently serving as director, submarine/nuclear power distribution (PERS-42), Navy Personnel Command, Millington, Tennessee.

Capt. Brad J. Collins, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Navy Region Northwest, Silverdale, Washington. Collins is currently serving as chief of staff, Navy Installations Command, Washington, D.C.

Capt. Jennifer S. Couture, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Naval

Service Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois. Couture is currently serving as assistant chief of staff, Naval Surface Force, Atlantic, Norfolk, Virginia.

Capt. William R. Daly, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy director for policy, plans, strategy, capabilities and resources, J-5/8, U.S. European Command, Stuttgart, Germany. Daly is currently serving as chief of staff, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet, San Diego, California.

Capt. Ronald A. Foy, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy director for global operations, J-3, Joint Staff, Washington, D.C. Foy is currently serving as deputy commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Capt. Patrick J. Hannifin, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy director for political-military affairs (Asia), J5, Joint Staff, Washington, D.C. Hannifin is currently serving as director, aircraft carrier requirements, N98, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.

Capt. Oliver T. Lewis, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy director for political-military affairs (Europe, NATO, Russia), J-5, Joint Staff, Washington, D.C. Lewis is currently serving as executive assistant to the chief of naval operations, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.

Capt. Benjamin R. Nicholson, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command representative, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau; commander, U.S. Naval Forces, Marianas; and commander, Joint Region Marianas, Guam. Nicholson is currently serving as executive assistant to the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs

of Staff, Joint Staff, Washington, D.C.

Capt. Randall W. Peck, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as president, Board of Inspection and Survey, Virginia Beach, Virginia. Peck is currently serving as commanding officer, USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), Norfolk, Virginia.

Capt. Ronald J. Piret, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, Stennis Space Center, Mississippi. Piret is currently serving as chief of staff, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, Stennis Space Center, Mississippi.

Capt. Benjamin G. Reynolds, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as director of Maritime Headquarters, U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa/Sixth Fleet, Naples, Italy. Reynolds is currently serving as director, Operations Division, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Financial Management and Comptroller; and director, Operations Division, Fiscal Management Division, N821, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.

Capt. Mark A. Schafer, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Navy Region Korea; commander, U.S. Naval Forces Korea; and commander, Naval Component, U.S. Forces Korea, United Nations Command, Korea, Busan, Korea. Schafer is currently serving as deputy, staff operations and plans, Joint Special Operations Command, Tampa, Florida.

DOT Announces Funding Availability for Port Infrastructure Development Program

A cargo ship at the Port of Los Angeles. *PORT OF LOS ANGELES*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration announced on March 29 a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) encouraging states and port authorities to apply for $230 million in discretionary grant funding for port and intermodal infrastructure-related projects through the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP).

"Our nation's ports are a key part of our critical infrastructure. They create jobs and make our economy more resilient and sustainable," said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. "This funding will build upon

local investments in infrastructure to deliver long-term economic benefits to American workers and communities, while also addressing climate and equity."

Buttigieg announced this funding at a White House event focused on the development of offshore wind energy programs. Over the past two years, 12 percent of Port Infrastructure Development Program grant applicants included the anticipated development of wind energy facilities and the movement of wind energy components as part of their project proposals. This year's grant funding will bolster these efforts. More information about the development of these offshore wind energy programs can be found here.

The Port Infrastructure Development Program supports the efficient movement of commerce upon which our economy relies. The grants are awarded on a competitive basis to support projects that strengthen and modernize port infrastructure and support the Nation's long-term economic vitality. In keeping with the priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration, the department's review process will also consider how proposed projects address climate change and environmental justice impacts and advance racial equity, reduce barriers to opportunity, and meet challenges faced by rural areas.

"State and local authorities are working to position ports to take advantage of a clean energy economy," said Acting Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley. "These infrastructure grants will continue to bolster their efforts while creating jobs in these communities and the U.S. maritime industry as a whole."

Previous grants have supported projects such as infrastructure resiliency and shore-side improvements to facilitate wind energy projects.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021, made $230 million

available for the Port Infrastructure Development Program, with $205 million reserved for grants to coastal seaports and Great Lakes ports. The minimum award size is $1 million, with a federal cost-share not to exceed 80%. The federal cost share can be higher for certain categories of projects. To provide technical assistance, the department will host a series of webinars during the Port Infrastructure Development Program grant application process. Details and registration information regarding these webinars will be made available at www.transportation.gov/portgrants.

The deadline to submit an application for the Port Infrastructure Development Program is July 30, 2021. For more information, please visit https://www.maritime.dot.gov/PIDPgrants or email PIDPgrants@dot.gov.

Boeing to Sustain Compact Lasers for Marines

A Boeing CLWS unit. *THE BOEING CO.*

ST. LOUIS – Boeing was awarded a $2.5 million contract by the U.S. Marine Corps to sustain the service's Compact Laser Weapon System (CLWS) units, the company said in a March 29 release.

The five-year contract includes maintenance services for the Boeing-built CLWS units defending against hostile unmanned aerial systems in theater. Each CLWS unit is equipped with a best-in-class beam director and acquisition, tracking and pointing software to deliver precision protection.

"We're honored to continue our partnership with the Marine Corps," said Kurt Sorenson, Boeing program manager for CLWS. "This will ensure that their systems continue to operate at the highest levels in defense of our warfighters."

Boeing recently increased the maximum beam power and reliability of the CLWS units – providing enhanced protection against larger and more numerous threats at greater range, as well as enabling them to defeat threats more quickly and efficiently.

Boeing has more than 40 years of innovation and experience building directed energy systems, and has produced laser weapons for use in the air, on land and at sea.

Austal USA Enters Steel Shipbuilding Market

An artist’s conception of Austal USA’s new steel shipbuilding facility. *AUSTAL USA*

MOBILE, Ala. — Austal USA broke ground on its steel manufacturing line March 26, positioning the company to start steel production in April 2022, the company said in a release. This addition of steel capability ensures Austal USA will remain a major contributor to the U.S. shipbuilding industrial base.

“This world-class steel manufacturing line is a treasure for the Gulf Coast, the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard that will provide a much needed boost to the defense industrial base and our Nation’s defense,” said Rep. Jerry Carl, R-Alabama, the congressman for Alabama’s 1st District.

The ceremony marked the start of a new era for Austal USA as the company adds steel shipbuilding capability to its growing business portfolio.

“As demand for the greater and larger Navy and Coast Guard fleets grows, Austal USA is investing to meet those changing requirements,” said Rusty Murdaugh, the company’s interim president. “We’re investing in our people, we’re investing in our processes and we’re investing in our facilities and capabilities.”

Just as Austal helped turn Mobile into the nation’s premier

location for construction of aluminum ships, the company is poised to do the same for steel. During World War II, residents of Mobile built steel Liberty ships that were critical to the war effort. In the coming years, Austal will look to build and deliver steel ships needed by the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy.

Founded on innovation, effectiveness and efficiency, Austal USA will bring its proven lean manufacturing processes and facility design to the steel shipbuilding market. These processes have helped deliver 24 ships to the Navy in the last nine years.

Navy Orders One Additional MQ-4C Triton UAV

An MQ-4C Triton taxis at Andersen Air Force Base. *U.S. AIR FORCE / Senior Airman Michael S. Murphy*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered an additional MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle.

The Naval Air Systems Command has awarded Northrop Grumman Systems Corp. a $98.9 million contract modification to a previously awarded, fixed-priced incentive contract “for one additional low-rate initial production Lot Five MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft system,” the Defense Department said in a March 26 contract announcement.

The order brings LRIP Lot 5 to three Tritons and, counting orders of the four previous LRIP lots, the Navy has ordered a total of 15. The service plans to procure a total of 68 production Tritons.

The Navy has taken delivery of three LRIP 1 Tritons so far, in addition to its two prototypes used for development and testing.

Last year, the Navy began an Early Operational Capability deployment of the Triton to Guam with a detachment of unmanned Patrol Squadron 19. The Navy plans to deploy three orbits overseas by 2025, and later establish two orbits from bases in the continental United States.

Work on the new order is expected to be completed in January 2025.

Iwo Jima ARG and 24th MEU Deploy After Redefining Integrated Training

The amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and ships of the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), embarked with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, simulate a strait transit during a composite unit training exercise (COMPTUEX) off the Atlantic coast, March 1, 2021. COMPTUEX is a month-long training event designed to test the ARG-MEU's capabilities against the full spectrum of military operations. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Davis Harris*

NORFOLK, Va. – The Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) deployed March 25 after completing an intensive, month-long composite training exercise (COMPTUEX) and brief in-port maintenance period, the U.S. 2nd Fleet said in a release.

The ARG-MEU's COMPTUEX was designed to fully integrate roughly 3,700 Sailors and Marines into one cohesive contingency force while testing the units' abilities to carry out sustained operations from the sea. During the exercise, the Blue-Green team executed virtual and live evolutions challenging every major warfare area, including responses to surface and subsurface contacts, electronic attacks, surface

and air amphibious assaults, and precision airstrikes.

COMPTUEX was led by Commander, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 4 and Expeditionary Operations Training Group (EOTG) staff, during which both groups of assessors provided training and mentorship while evaluating the warfighting capabilities of all units. There were two distinct phases of training that increased in complexity and intensity over time.

At sea, simulated attacks by hostile aircraft, ships, and submarines required active responses by the ARG-MEU in real-time. Additionally, there were several live visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) exercises those fully integrated elements of the ARG and MEU at the tactical team level.

On shore, the landing force conducted raids in daytime and nighttime urban environments. They executed multiple tactical recoveries of aircraft and personnel missions, utilizing Navy as well as Marine aviation assets.

The ARG-MEU team was also assessed on their ability to integrate Navy and Marine Corps forces in a variety of warfare areas, essential to ensuring readiness in a variety of joint mission sets.

“The ARG-MEU proved we are adaptable and can respond to a variety of complex and rapidly changing situations,” said Capt. Darren Nelson, commodore of Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 4. “Our success depended on being innovative, thinking strategically, planning operationally, and acting tactically. The training we completed is unique in that only an ARG-MEU conducts this type of combined training in the military.”

The 24th MEU, based out of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is the first East Coast MEU to embark ships with the Department of Defense’s new Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV). The JLTV

is a versatile ground transport vehicle now used by all ground-based elements within the MEU, providing state-of-the-art protection and technology to troops in tow.

Additionally, in response to the commandant of the Marine Corps' new force design, the MEU embarked with a robust Light-Armored Reconnaissance detachment.

"As the nation's crisis response force, the ARG-MEU team must remain ready to respond at a moment's notice when crises arise," explained Col. Eric D. Cloutier, commanding officer, 24th MEU. "This exercise gave our team the opportunity to train how we fight across a range of military operations, providing a force-in-readiness to the fleet that is prepared to decisively engage when called upon."

Emphasizing flexibility during the month-long evolution, this Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) conducted a company-sized amphibious live-fire raid event. During this raid, nearly 100 Marines and Sailors converged on targets at Camp Lejeune's newest range. Finally, the month of ship-to-shore operations culminated with an amphibious assault by a fighting force of nearly 600 Marines and Sailors.

Driving the ARG-MEU's broad spectrum of expeditionary capabilities is its overall readiness as a fighting force. Most notably, this Navy-Marine Corps team took a deliberate approach to maximizing readiness through pre-deployment training while also joining forces to combat COVID-19, using coordinated mitigation procedures before their final at-sea period. In addition to conducting a restriction-of-movement (ROM) prior to embarking for the training exercise and adhering to 100% mask-wearing and other health and safety mitigations, the ARG-MEU were among the first units prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccines once they were approved for emergency use across the Department of Defense.

“The entire ARG-MEU is estimated to have over 90% voluntarily immunized once the last few people receive their second dose underway,” said Nelson. “The impressive number was achieved by making the vaccine available to everyone and by doing everything possible to educate our Sailors and Marines about the vaccine.”

The ARG consists of the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7), transport dock ship USS San Antonio (LPD 17), and dock landing ship USS Carter Hall (LSD 50). Embarked detachments for the Iwo Jima ARG include PHIBRON 4, Fleet Surgical Team (FST) 6, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 26, Tactical Air Control Squadron (TACRON) 21, Naval Beach Group (NBG) 2, Beach Master Unit (BMU) 2, Assault Craft Unit (ACU) 2 and 4, and Sailors from Amphibious Construction Battalion (ACB) 2. Also, joining the training were USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) and USS The Sullivans (DDG 68).

The 24th MEU consists of a ground combat element, Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 1/8, a logistics combat element, Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) 24, and an aviation combat element, Medium Tilt-Rotor Squadron (VMM) 162 Reinforced.

The Iwo Jima ARG-MEU team is manned, trained and equipped to fulfill amphibious requirements in support of maritime security and stability. Amphibious ready groups and larger amphibious task forces provide military commanders a wide range of flexible capabilities including maritime security operations, expeditionary power projection, strike operations, forward naval presence, crisis response, sea control, deterrence, counter-terrorism, information operations, security cooperation and counter-proliferation, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Navy Accepts Delivery of First Tomahawk Block 5 Missile

The guided-missile destroyer USS Chafee (DDG 90) launches a Block 5 Tomahawk, the weapon's newest variant, during a three day missile exercise in November 2020. This event marked the first time a Block 5 Tomahawk missile was operationally tested, marking the Navy's transition to a more advanced capability for the fleet. *U.S. NAVY / Ens. Sean Ianno/Released*
ARLINGTON, Va.—The U.S. Navy accepted its first Block 5 Tomahawk cruise missile from Raytheon Missiles & Defense in March 25 ceremonies at the company's facility in Tucson, Arizona.

The missile is one of the first five Block 4 Tactical Tomahawk missiles that have been inducted into the recertification

process, which takes missiles at the midlife 15-year mark for overhaul, modernization, and re-certification as Block 5 versions.

All Block 5s will feature a new data-link radio and antennas and navigation system. The Block 5a version also will feature a new seeker kit to hit moving targets and will be called the Maritime Strike Tomahawk (MST). The Block 5b version will feature the Joint Multi-Effects Warhead System.

Deliveries of all-new Block 5 missiles will begin in late 2021, said Kim Ernzen, vice president of Naval Power at Raytheon Missiles & Defense, speaking during the ceremonies on Zoom.

Chris Daily, program area director, Naval Air Missiles, for Raytheon Missiles & Defense, said the Tomahawk "remains our "nation's weapon of choice" and that "delivery of the Block 5 is the next evolutionary step for the Tomahawk."

Ernzen noted that the Tomahawk entered service in 1983 and first was used in combat in 1991 during the Persian Gulf War. More that 2,300 Tomahawks have been fired in combat and 500 have been used in test firings. More than 4,000 had been delivered by 2017.

She said the highly survivable Tomahawk is "counted on for its precision" and that Raytheon is "taking existing capability and making it even better."

Capt. John Red, the Navy's Tomahawk Weapon System program manager, also speaking in the event, noted that each Tomahawk now only needs to return to Raytheon's factory only once in the lifecycle of the missile, 15 years after production, for another 15-year life extension.

During the ceremonies, Ernzen and Red signed symbolically the DD250 form signifying the official transfer of the first Block 5 missile.

The Navy ultimately will field only the Block 5 version once the remaining Block 4 Tactical Tomahawks have been converted to Block 5s. The earlier Block 3 versions, which first entered service in 1994, are being withdrawn from use and are being demilitarized.

Navy T-4C Jet Trainer Crashes in Texas; 2 Ejections

A T-45C Goshawk, reported to be the same one that crashed, lands on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), March 15, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Chief Mass Communication Specialist RJ Stratchko*

ARLINGTON, Va. – A U.S. Navy training jet crashed March 24 in Texas, but both crew members ejected safely.

The T-45C Goshawk crashed at approximately 2 p.m. Central time three miles northeast of Nava/ Outlying Field Orange Cove, Texas, the Navy said in a release.

“The two occupants, an instructor, and a student, safely ejected from the aircraft and reported minor injuries,” the release said. “They were transported to a local medical treatment facility for evaluation. Navy and local emergency services responded to the scene and extinguished a small brush fire. Navy personnel are on scene and are cooperating with local authorities.

The aircraft was assigned to Training Air Wing Two at Naval Air Station Kingsville, Texas, was being flown by the Golden Eagles of Training Squadron 22.

The incident is under investigation.