

Coast Guard Offloads \$22 Million in Seized Cocaine in San Juan, Puerto Rico



Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos crewmembers offloaded 1,100 kilograms of cocaine, valued at \$22 million dollars, at Coast Guard Base San Juan Aug. 8, following three separate interdictions of drug smuggling vessels near Puerto Rico. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos and Caribbean Corridor Strike Force agents offloaded 2,425 pounds of seized cocaine Aug. 8, following three separate at-sea interdictions near Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release.

Fourteen men, Dominican Republic nationals, apprehended in

these cases are facing federal prosecution in Puerto Rico. The seized contraband has an estimated wholesale value of approximately \$22 million dollars.

These interdictions are the result of multi-agency efforts involving the Caribbean Border Interagency Group and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force.

During the afternoon of Aug. 3, the aircrew of a Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine multi-role enforcement aircraft detected a 25-foot suspect vessel north of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. During the interdiction, the smugglers jettisoned multiple bales of suspected contraband into the water. Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos, assisted by the aircrew of a Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft, stopped the suspect vessel, apprehended four men and recovered 13 bales of the jettisoned cargo that collectively weighted 1,653 pounds and tested positive for cocaine.

During the afternoon of July 29, the aircrew of Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine multi-role enforcement aircraft detected a 20-foot suspect vessel in waters northwest of Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico. During the interdiction, the smugglers jettisoned multiple bales of suspected contraband into the water. Cutter Joseph Tezanos stopped the smuggling vessel, apprehended four men and recovered eight bales of the jettisoned cargo that collectively weighted approximately 441 pounds and tested positive for cocaine.

During the afternoon of July 27, the aircrew of Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft detected a 20-foot suspect vessel in waters northwest of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. During the interdiction, the smugglers jettisoned multiple bales of suspected contraband into the water. Cutter Joseph Tezanos arrived on scene and stopped the non-compliant vessel, apprehended six men and recovered three bales of the jettisoned cargo that collectively weighted approximately 330 pounds and tested positive for cocaine.

“These successful interdictions reflect the unwavering resolve and strong partnerships between the Coast Guard and our Caribbean Border Interagency Group partners in stopping illicit drug trafficking in the high seas,” said Capt. José E. Díaz, commander of Coast Guard Sector San Juan. “I’m proud of the professionalism and performance of the cutter Joseph Tezanos in apprehending 14 smugglers and preventing these drugs from reaching the shores and streets of Puerto Rico.”

Special Agents supporting the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force are leading the investigation into this case.

Cutter Joseph Tezanos is a 154-foot fast response cutter that is homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

NHHC Debuts New Naval History and Research Center



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, center left, Naval History and Heritage Command Director Sam Cox, second from right, Yeoman 2nd Class Lynnett Evans, and Kenneth Terry, vice president and operations manager at Grunley Construction Co., cut a ribbon during a ceremony showcasing NHHC's newest conservation and preservation site. U.S. NAVY / Arif Patani) WASHINGTON NAVY YARD – Naval History and Heritage Command held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to showcase its newest conservation and preservation site Aug. 8 at the Washington Navy Yard.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday spoke at the event for the new Naval History and Research Center (NHRC). Gilday had attended the new center's ground-breaking ceremony two years ago.

"History shows that the Navy that adapted better, learned faster and improved faster gained warfighting advantages over the long haul," said Gilday. "Stories of the past help us heed the warnings of history while helping us to reflect on and sustain our legacy as the world's premier maritime force.

"This building and the stories and artifacts within will

preserve the experiences and lessons of the past; use the Navy's legacy of valor and sacrifice to inspire current and future generations of Sailors; and let those who serve today know that their sacrifice will always be remembered, honored, and valued," Gilday said.

The new site, made up of two former ordnance factories and warehouses, has now been refurbished into a single state-of-the-art, two-floor structure that maintains the building's national historic district status.

"The Washington Navy Yard is significant to the early history of the U.S. Navy, the development of Washington, D.C., and the nation for its role in the manufacturing of ship equipment, advances in ordnance, and naval administration," said NHHC Director Sam Cox. "Not only will this building continue to be a historic site, but it will be dedicated to preserving all our future naval artifacts."

NHHC and Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Washington began collaborations in 2018 to convert the two adjoining buildings. The NHRC will now house NHHC's Navy Art Collection and Underwater Archeology Branch of the Collection Management Division and Histories and Archives Division, including the Navy Library and Archives Branch.

These divisions have long served researchers and the public in their research and inquiries about naval history.

Since the early 1800s, the Washington Navy Yard has been a collection point for naval artifacts and trophies. In this effort, the two buildings were converted from munitions storage facilities where they will house artifacts for years to come.

NHHC, located at the Washington Navy Yard, is responsible for preserving, analyzing, and disseminating U.S. naval history and heritage. It provides the knowledge foundation for the Navy by maintaining historically relevant resources and

products that reflect the Navy's unique and enduring contributions through our nation's history and supports the fleet by assisting with and delivering professional research, analysis, and interpretive services.

NHHC comprises many activities, including the Navy Department Library, the Navy Operational Archives, the Navy art and artifact collections, underwater archeology, Navy histories, 10 museums, the USS Constitution repair facility and the historic ship Nautilus.

NAVSAFECOM Addresses Deficiencies, Enhances Safe Diving Fleetwide



Explosive Ordnance Disposal 3rd Class Branden Irwin dives in the Black Sea during exercise Breeze 2022, July 21. *BULGARIAN*

NAVY / Lt. Deyan Stefanov

NORFOLK, Va. – Divers across the naval enterprise will be safer, thanks in part to thorough assessments by the Naval Safety Command (NAVSAFECOM) resulting in an update to diving operations and maintenance by Naval Sea Systems Command, NAVSAFECOM Spokeswoman Amy Robinson said in an Aug. 5 release.

The update was published July 11 and addresses findings and recommendations from the then-Naval Safety Center's diving safety assurance letter sent to NAVSEA in December 2021. The letter covered assessments conducted from May to October 2021.

“The goal of the diving safety assessments is to ensure every diving command is operating safely and within governing standards,” said Senior Chief Brett Husbeck, a diving analyst with NAVSAFECOM's Expeditionary Warfare Directorate. “If something isn't correct, we identify the issues and work to get them corrected, which will help prevent mishaps.”

During the assessments, analysts detailed several deficiencies with global portable pressure testing chambers, also known as pressure pots, which Navy and Marine Corps divers use to calibrate, compare and test depth gauges.

“In U.S. Navy diving, we strictly adhere to the procedures. If we don't operate within the standards, someone will get hurt,” said the diving analyst.

Husbeck, who has a background in welding, said one of the items analysts found during four out of seven assessments was severe rust inside the pressure testing chambers due to trapped moisture.

“Over time, the rust can deteriorate the fittings and the welds, which could result in a catastrophic failure,” he said.

From there, analysts traced materiel discrepancies identified during the assessments back to planned maintenance system deficiencies.

These discrepancies, along with others associated with technical manuals and drawings, were noted in a safety assurance letter and forwarded to NAVSEA's Supervisor of Salvage, including recommendations to mitigate risks to divers across the naval enterprise.

Upon receipt, NAVSEA conducted a thorough review of the technical publications associated with pressure test chamber maintenance and operations, according to NAVSEA's response letter.

Using the information observed and derived from the diving safety assessments, NAVSEA addressed findings and implemented actions to ensure technical and maintenance information is available, accurate and corresponds to the correct pressure test chambers.

"Upon completion, NAVSEA sent their response letter and the diving safety assurance letter to dive leaders throughout the enterprise to inform the fleet," said Capt. Robert Marsh, NAVSEA supervisor of diving.

Don Ciesielski, director of NAVSAFECOM's Expeditionary Warfare Directorate, said, "NAVSAFECOM continuously works with other commands to not only keep Sailors and Marines safe, but also enable warfighting readiness throughout the fleet."

"From the assessments and safety assurance letter to the actions and response by NAVSEA, this process illustrates how NAVSAFECOM works with units throughout the naval enterprise to ensure our warfighters are combat-ready, while also mitigating risks to keep the fleet safe."

NAVSAFECOM serves as the naval enterprise lead for non-nuclear safety standards, expertise and oversight of the Navy and

Marine Corps Safety Management System. The command's mission is to preserve warfighting capability, combat lethality, and readiness by working with its stakeholders to identify, mitigate, or eliminate hazards to reduce unnecessary risk to people and resources.

Gen. Langley Assumes Command of U.S. Africa Command



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin passes the U.S. Africa Command guidon to Gen. Michael Langley, incoming commander, U.S. Africa Command, during a change of command ceremony in Stuttgart, Germany, on Aug. 9. *U.S. AFRICOM / Staff Sgt. Flor Gonzalez*

STUTTGART, Germany – U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Michael E. Langley assumed command of U.S. Africa Command in a ceremony at Kelley

Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, Aug. 9, the command said in a release.

“It is truly an honor to stand before you as the new AFRICOM commander,” Langley said at the ceremony. “I look forward to taking on the mantle of leading these talented professionals here at AFRICOM and across our components as we work shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies and partners to advance peace and prosperity for both Africa and the American homeland.”

Langley becomes the sixth U.S. Africa Command commander since the command was established in 2008.

A graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington, Langley was commissioned in 1985 and initially served as an artillery officer. As a general officer, he served as the deputy commanding general for II Marine Expeditionary Force; commanding general for 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade; commander for Marine Forces Europe and Africa; deputy commanding general for Fleet Marine Force Atlantic; and deputy commander for Marine Forces Command and Marine Forces Northern Command.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III presided over the ceremony, with nearly 400 guests from around the world in attendance.

During his remarks, Austin thanked outgoing commander, U.S. Army Gen. Stephen Townsend, for his dedicated leadership over the past three years as he highlighted the critical work the command is doing in Africa.

“The continent is on the front lines of many of this century’s most pressing threats – from mass migration to food insecurity, from COVID-19 to the climate crisis, from the drumbeat of autocracy to the dangers of terrorism,” he said.

Core to U.S. Africa Command’s mission is to work with allies and partners in a whole-of-government approach where defense

supports diplomatic and development efforts to address shared security threats.

“Every day, AFRICOM works alongside our friends as full partners – to strengthen our bonds, to tackle common threats, and to advance a shared vision of an Africa whose people are safe, prosperous, and free to choose their own future,” said Austin.

In other remarks, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, thanked Townsend for his selfless service throughout his career.

“The whole joint force and this nation are proud of your service and thanks you. You have served in peacetime and in combat and through it all you have led with humility, honor, and credibility,” said Milley.

Milley also spoke highly of the incoming commander. Langley “is the right leader at the right time with the right skillset to lead this critical command. He has the unique blend of character, competence, courage, experiences, and knowledge to lead AFRICOM in this challenging time.”

Townsend, who led U.S. Africa Command since July 2019, retires after a U.S. Army career spanning four decades. “The last three years have been an education and Africa is endlessly fascinating. The continent is big, complex, and diverse. America cannot afford to ignore Africa. America’s future security, and I believe prosperity, depends on a more secure and prosperous Africa,” he said.

U.S. Africa Command is one of seven U.S. Department of Defense geographic combatant commands. The command is responsible for all U.S. military operations, exercises, security cooperation, and conducts crisis response on the African continent in order to advance U.S. interests and promote regional security, stability, and prosperity.

MQ-8 Fire Scout Demonstrates Expeditionary Capability during Navy Exercise



The Navy's MQ-8C Fire Scout demonstrated Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations concept during Exercise Resolute Hunter in from Naval Base Ventura County Point Mugu in California. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Navy's MQ-8C Fire Scout recently supported an Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) exercise off the coast of California, demonstrating its capability to transition from ship-to-shore in a maritime environment, the Naval Air Systems Command said Aug. 8.

The MQ-8C Fire Scout participated in the Resolute Hunter exercise June 21-July 1, flying a total of 23 hours and proving the unmanned helicopter's expeditionary use from land and across multiple ship classes.

Resolute Hunter is a joint and coalition large force exercise focused on training personnel on battle management, command and control and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

“Fire Scout is the Navy’s only unmanned helicopter with the ability to deploy from a ship or land with ISR&T at the extended range required for future warfighting,” said Capt. Dennis Monagle, Fire Scout program manager. “The system is vital in expeditionary use for situational awareness and critical decision-making.”

During the exercise, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 23 successfully launched MQ-8C Fire Scout from Point Mugu and completed a hand-off to the detachment’s Portable Mission Control Station (MCS-P) at San Clemente Island. The portable MCS-P ground control station helps Fire Scout basing in austere locations on land, helipad operations in an advanced forward location, and logistics support from ship flight decks.

With the flexible MCS-P, Fire Scout has the ability to land on another ship or an expeditionary shore site where a runway is not feasible.

Fire Scout is currently deployed aboard USS Jackson (LCS 6) in the Indo-Pacific region. The Navy plans to continue deployments aboard LCS with future deployments planned on Constellation-class guided-missile frigates and potential operations from shore sites under the EABO concept.

Navy Receives First Fleet-Representative Next-Generation Jammer Mid-Band Pods



Kennie Martinez and Marc Dannemiller, Raytheon Intelligence & Space employees, unbox the first of two Next Generation Jammer Mid-Band fleet representative pods that were delivered to the Airborne Electronic Attack Systems pod shop at Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, Patuxent River, Maryland, July 7. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The U.S. Navy's first AN/ALQ-249 Next Generation Jammer Mid-Band (NGJ-MB) production representative pods arrived at the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division Patuxent River, Maryland, July 7, the Naval Air Systems Command said Aug. 8.

The two fleet representative test articles, which make up an NGJ-MB shipset, were delivered to the Airborne Electronic Attack Systems Program Office (PMA-234) pod shop where they

will be used to complete the developmental test program and commence operational test that requires the use of operationally representative hardware and software.

Lt. Alexander Belbin, AEA project officer with NAWCAD's Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 23, said he's most looking forward to being able to test what the fleet is getting.

"We will test the pods for everything we expect to encounter in the fleet," said Belbin. "For example, the power they generate, the frequency range they operate in, and the effects we can achieve against expected targets across the spectrum."

The remainder of developmental test will be conducted by VX-23 and VX-31, located at the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, China Lake, California, and operational testing will be conducted by VX-9 at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake. To date, NGJ-MB has successfully completed more than 300 hours of developmental flight testing and has more than 5,000 hours of chamber and lab testing using the engineering development models that were designed specifically for developmental testing.

NGJ-MB is part of a larger system that will augment and ultimately replace the legacy ALQ-99 Tactical Jamming System currently used on the EA-18G Growler.

Belbin said NGJ-MB's increased power and capacity to target multiple systems will be significant enhancements over the ALQ-99.

"I have flown the Growler in the fleet and will eventually be going back. I may one day fly missions with the very pods that we will be testing for the first time," Belbin said.

The U.S. Navy will receive six shipsets from Raytheon Intelligence & Space, the original equipment manufacturer. Once the flight test program is complete, the pods will be sent to the fleet in conjunction with the first low rate

initial production shipsets for initial operational capability, which is scheduled for fall 2023.

“It is imperative we deliver this game-changing electronic warfare capability to the warfighter as quickly as possible,” said Capt. Dave Rueter, PMA-234 program manager. “Receiving the production representative pods allows us to finish the flight test program and ensure we have a reliable product for the U.S. Navy and our Royal Australian Air Force cooperative partners.”

U.S. Navy Recovers F/A-18E from Mediterranean Sea



An F/A-18E Super Hornet, attached to the “Blue Blasters” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 34, launches off the flight deck

of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), July 30. A Super Hornet that blew overboard earlier that month has been recovered. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Crayton Agnew*

NAPLES, Italy – On Aug. 3, the U.S. Navy successfully recovered the F/A-18E Super Hornet aircraft assigned to Carrier Air Wing 1, embarked aboard USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), that blew overboard due to unexpected heavy weather in the Mediterranean Sea July 8.

The aircraft was recovered from a depth of approximately 9,500 feet by a team from Task Force (CTF) 68, Naval Sea Systems Command's Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, USS Harry S. Truman, Naval Strike Fighter Wing Atlantic, and U.S. 6th Fleet embarked on the multi-purpose construction vessel Everest.

"Inherent to Task Force 68 is our ability to adapt to any mission set – we can rapidly mobilize and deploy scalable command, control, and communications, in order to seamlessly integrate and provide forward command and control when and where needed," said CTF 68 Commodore, Capt. Geoffrey Townsend.

The aircraft was recovered using a CURV-21 remotely operated vehicle to attach specialized rigging and lift lines to the aircraft. A lifting hook was attached to the rigging to raise the aircraft to the surface and hoist it aboard Everest.

"The rapid response of the combined team, including SUPSALV and Phoenix International personnel, allowed us to conduct safe recovery operations within 27 days of the incident," said Lt. Cmdr. Miguel Lewis, U.S. 6th Fleet salvage officer. "Our task tailored team operated safely and efficiently to meet the timeline. The search and recovery took less than 24 hours, a true testament to the team's dedication and capability."

The recovery efforts demonstrate the U.S. Navy's capabilities to conduct deep-water search and recovery operations worldwide. The aircraft was delivered to a nearby military

installation where it will be transported to the United States.

Largest International Maritime Exercise, RIMPAC 2022, Concludes



Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Takanami-class destroyer JS Takanami (DD 110) conducts a replenishment at sea with Royal Australian Navy auxiliary oiler replenishment ship HMAS Supply (A 195) during Rim of the Pacific 2022. *JAPAN MARITIME SELF-DEFENSE FORCE / Petty Officer 1st Class Miura Naoto*

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM – The world's largest international maritime exercise concluded Aug. 4 following more than a month of realistic, relevant combined operations training conducted in and around the Hawaiian Islands and Southern California, Commander, U.S. Third 3rd Public Affairs

said in an Aug. 5 release.

Twenty-six nations, 38 surface ships, three submarines, nine national land forces, more than 30 unmanned systems, approximately 170 aircraft and over 25,000 personnel participated in the 28th edition of the biennial Rim of the Pacific, or RIMPAC.

RIMPAC 2022 Combined Task Force Commander, U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Michael Boyle expressed that returning to a full-scale exercise, with multiple exercise firsts, has been a success across all domains.

“By coming together as capable, adaptive partners, and in the scale that we are, we are making a statement about our commitment to work together, to foster and sustain those relationships that are critical to ensuring the safety of the sea lanes and the security of the world’s interconnected oceans,” Boyle said.

Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Rear Adm. Toshiyuki Hirata filled the role of vice commander, and commanded the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief portion of the exercise that operated with local hospital personnel. This year’s RIMPAC included two Maritime Self-Defense Force escort ships and the Ground Self-Defense Force’s Western Army.

Hirata said in the current security environment, it is important for the international community to work together. “It is of great significance to deepen and strengthen the relationship of trust.”

For the first time, Republic of Korea Rear Adm. Sangmin An served as the commander of the exercise’s combined amphibious task force, with the Republic of Singapore Navy Col. Kwan Hon Chuong serving as the amphibious force’s Sea Combat Commander, and Royal Australian Navy Capt. Michael Osborn serving as the sea logistics commander.

RIMPAC's Deputy Commander, Royal Canadian Navy Rear Adm. Christopher Robinson, said the collaboration and cohesiveness between partner nations enhanced their operations.

"This exercise provides tremendous training value, enabling partners to build skills and refine procedures through working together. Part of this comes from seeing how other partners approach similar scenarios, offering new perspectives," Robinson said. "The value of this collaboration goes further, in that it also enables us to build and foster those relationships and networks that are so incredibly valuable as we operate together in future operations throughout the region."

A few of the first-time achievements included:

- Two U.S. Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey aircraft embarked in Australian amphibious ship HMAS Canberra for the whole duration of the exercise.
- While participating in RIMPAC for the first time, HMNZS Aotearoa conducted numerous replenishment at sea operations with partner nations including France, Australia, Canada, Malaysia and the U.S.
- Royal Malaysian Ship KD Leskir (F26) conducted its first live missile firing outside Malaysian waters.
- First embedded use of the MQ-9A and MQ-9B unmanned aerial vehicles, and the unmanned surface vessels Nomad, Ranger, Sea Hawk and Sea Hunter; with data and knowledge sharing among 13 countries, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Peru, India, France, Chile, Mexico, Singapore and Indonesia.
- Nine nations participated in the RIMPAC Amphibious Assault (Australia, Chile, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Tonga and the U.S.

This year's exercise included units and personnel from Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Malaysia,

Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Peru, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Ticonderoga-Class Cruiser USS Vella Gulf Decommissioned



Sailors and former shipmates stand in formation during the guided-missile cruiser USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) decommissioning ceremony, Aug. 4. Vella Gulf was commissioned on Sept. 18, 1993, at Naval Station Norfolk. Vella Gulf is the first of five cruisers set to be decommissioned this year. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jacob Milham*

NORFOLK, Va. – With plank owners and former crew members looking on, the crew of USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) decommissioned their ship at a Naval Station Norfolk, ceremony Aug. 4,

Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic said in a release.

The event comes just months before the ship's 29th commissioning anniversary. Hundreds gathered in the August heat to celebrate the ship's distinguished history and military service. Capt. Constantine Xefteris, Vella Gulf's first commanding officer, went back to the beginning, addressing the many plankowners on hand.

"In 1993, every officer, every chief, every Sailor wanted to be on an Aegis cruiser," said Xefteris. "It was the finest, most lethal ship in the world. Aegis cruisers set the standard for performance and everyone knew it."

Following several Xefteris sea stories illuminating the ship's early days, Rear Adm. Brendan McLane, commander, Naval Surface Forces Atlantic, lauded the crews, both current and former, for their hard work, dedication and setting the standard over the years.

"In 2020 the Vella Gulf crew completed perhaps the most challenging deployment of the ship's career, deploying to the Middle East and Europe with the USS Eisenhower Strike Group during Covid," said McLane.

"The crew spent 205 days underway," he continued. "Vella Gulf's crew proved their mettle on that deployment, embodying self-sufficiency, grit and warrior toughness by staying on station, despite the immense challenges. Nobody came out. Nobody left.

"As we enter an era of strategic competition, the example and lessons of Vella Gulf will guide us in meeting the challenges."

Vella Gulf's current Commanding Officer, Capt. Mike P. Desmond, spoke of the powerful bond between Sailors and their ships and the lives forged aboard. His words resonated with the audience as they bade farewell to the cruiser.

“Decommissioning conjures up a broad spectrum of emotions, as different as the backgrounds of the Sailors who have called Vella Gulf home away from home,” said Desmond. “Vella Gulf was as temperamental as can be, but when all systems were operating as designed, she was perhaps the most reliable, capable and lethal warship on the planet.”

Vella Gulf was built at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia, Sept. 18, 1993.

The ship was named in commemoration of the World War II Battle of Vella Gulf, which was fought in the area surrounding the Solomon Islands in the Pacific Ocean from Aug. 6-7, 1943. The battle saw six American destroyers successfully disrupt the Imperial Japanese Navy’s supply lines without taking a single casualty or damage from enemy fire. It was a decisive victory for the United States.

Over its 29 years of service, the cruiser has been an important part of America’s national defense strategy.

In 1999, the crew participated in NATO strikes against Serbia in an effort to stop government-sanctioned human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo region.

In 2001, Vella Gulf answered the call, taking part in the national effort to provide homeland defense for the country’s northeastern region immediately following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. The crew supported air traffic control efforts as the air defense commander, controlling protocols for an area spanning from Boston to Washington D.C.

In 2009, the ship led a task force responsible for curbing anti-piracy efforts off the Horn of Africa. During its mission, CG 72 responded to a distress call from the merchant vessel Polaris, a 420-foot tanker that was under attack. Vella Gulf’s intervention led to the pirates arrest and made the region safer for shipping.

In 2017, the Vella Gulf joined Carrier Strike Group 11. During its assignment, it supported strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

The ceremony marks the first of five cruisers set to be decommissioned this year. Inactivation is a normal part of a warship's lifecycle. After decommissioning, the ship is slated to be towed on Oct. 11 to the Navy's Inactive Ship's facility in Philadelphia, where it will be in a Logistical Support Asset status.

"She has served her crews and her nation well, and rightfully takes her place among the ships that, for well over 200 years, have played an indispensable role in protecting the United States of America and serving her strategic interests across the world." concluded Desmond.

"This ship and her crews will forever share a proud and lasting legacy."

Navy Orders Construction of Two Fleet Oilers, One Expeditionary Sea Base



General Dynamics NASSCO has been awarded two contracts for detailed design and construction for two fleet replenishment oilers and one expeditionary sea base ship. *GENERAL DYNAMICS NASSCO*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has awarded two contracts totaling \$1.4 billion for the detailed design and construction of three ships to be built by General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego: two fleet replenishment oilers and one expeditionary sea base ship.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded General Dynamics

National Steel and Shipbuilding Co. (NASSCO) an \$890 million contract modification for detailed design and construction of the seventh and eighth John Lewis-class fleet replenishment oilers T-AO 211 and 212, according to an Aug. 4 Defense Department contract announcement. The company also was awarded a \$535 million contract modification for detailed design and construction of Lewis B. Buller-class expeditionary sea base (ESB) 8, the sixth ship of the class.

The T-AO contract modification also includes an option for the detail design and construction of T-AO 213 which, if exercised would bring the cumulative value of that contract modification to \$1.63 billion.

In June, the Naval Sea Systems Command awarded NASSCO a \$500 million contract modification for long-lead-time material in support of the T-AO 211 and 212, according to a June 28 Defense Department contract announcement. The company also was awarded a \$100 million contract modification for long-lead-time material in support of ESB 8.

On July 27, NASSCO delivered to the Navy the lead ship of the new 742-foot-long, 49,850-ton fleet oiler class, the John Lewis (T-AO 205). Three more T-AOs are under construction – the future USNS Harvey Milk (T-AO 206), the future USNS Earl Warren (T-AO 207), and the future USNS Robert F. Kennedy (T-AO 208) – and four, T-AO 209 through 212, are under contract. The oilers each will have a fuel capacity of 157,000 barrels of oil as well as other dry stores to replenish ships at sea.

The Lewis B. Puller-class ESB is a development of the Montford Point-class mobile landing platform ship. The 784-foot-long ESB is equipped with a 52,000 square-foot flight deck that can handle H-1, H-53 and H-53 helicopters and V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft. The ship is a capable platform to support mine-countermeasures missions, special operations forces, patrol boat support and unmanned systems.

Three ESBs are serving in the fleet – USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3), USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) and the USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) – and two more, the future USNS John L. Canley and USNS Robert E. Simanek (ESB 7), are under construction.

NASSCO said the construction of the three newly contracted ships is planned for third quarter of 2023 and continue into 2027. The company sees the contracts as helpful in sustaining and growing its workforce.