

Navy to Christen Amphibious Assault Ship Bougainville



[Release from the U.S. Department of Defense](#)

Dec. 1, 2023

The Navy will christen its newest America-class amphibious assault ship, the future USS Bougainville (LHA 8), during a 9 a.m. CST ceremony Saturday, Dec. 2, in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Under Secretary of the Navy Eric Raven will deliver the christening ceremony's principal address. Remarks will also be provided by Vice Adm. Del Crandall Jr., Judge Advocate General of the Navy, Maj. Gen. James H. Adams III and Mrs. Kari Wilkinson, Executive Vice President of HII and President of Ingalls Shipbuilding. The ship's sponsor is Mrs. Ellyn Dunford, wife of Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., USMC (Ret.), 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and 36th Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Bougainville is the third ship of the America-class of amphibious assault ships built to facilitate forward presence and power projection. LHA 8 is the first Flight I ship of the America-class with a reincorporated well deck to increase operational flexibility while maximizing the aviation capability inherent on the Flight 0 ships, USS America (LHA 6) and USS Tripoli (LHA 7).

Designed to support the Marine Corps tenets of Operational Maneuver from the Sea and Ship to Objective Maneuver, America class ships are capable of rapid combat power buildup ashore. The America class also accommodates the Marine Corps' Air Combat Element including F-35B Joint Strike Fighter and MV-22 Osprey, essential to maintaining power projection, air superiority and theater logistics.

LHA 8 is the second Navy ship to be named Bougainville. The name honors and commemorates the site of a major World War II campaign during which Navy and Marine Corps forces captured the Island of Bougainville, isolating Japan's Rabaul air base and assisting in providing an advantage to the Allied forces.

The ceremony will be live streamed at: https://youtube.com/live/H-NPeY_NZ_I?feature=share and <https://fb.me/e/3QC53JWbD>. The links becomes active approximately 30 minutes prior to the event at 9:50 a.m. CST.

Media may direct queries to the Navy Office of Information at (703) 697-5342. More information on the amphibious assault ship program can be found at: <https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2169814/amphibious-assault-ships-lhdlhar/>

Combined Multinational Effort Averts Attempted Seizure in the Gulf of Aden



Release from U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs

By U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs | November 30, 2023

MANAMA, Bahrain – A combined naval effort between multiple nations thwarted an attempted seizure of an oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden, Nov. 26.

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mason (DDG 87) assigned to Task Force (TF) 55, a P8 patrol and reconnaissance aircraft from TF-57, a Japan Maritime Self-

Defense Force destroyer JS Akebono (DD 108), a JMSDF P-3C maritime surveillance aircraft, and the Republic of Korea Navy destroyer ROKS Yang Man-chun (DDH 973), all working with Combined Maritime Forces' Philippine-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 151, responded to reports of a seizure of the M/V Central Park, an oil tanker, as the ship was transiting in international waters.

Working in coordination with U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, the aircraft kept a watchful eye on events until surface units could converge on Central Park's location. After several hours the perpetrators, unable to gain control of the ship, abandoned the vessel and attempted to escape on their skiff.

Tracking their movements, the international force cornered the skiff and the individuals surrendered to Sailors from Mason and were taken into custody in accordance with international law.

"This was an international effort and the textbook definition of teamwork," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, NAVCENT commander. "We remain deeply committed to ensuring maritime security to support the free flow of commerce and safe navigation."

U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet's area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. This expanse, comprising 21 nations, includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb.

USCGC Frederick Hatch concludes historic patrol with engagements in the Philippines, fisheries enforcement in Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea



[Release from U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam](#)

SANTA RITA, Guam – The USCGC Frederick Hatch (WPC 1143) successfully concluded a routine 47-day expeditionary patrol covering more than 8,200 nautical miles under Operation Blue

Pacific, returning to Guam on Thanksgiving, distinguished by a series of historic and strategic engagements across the Western Pacific and Oceania.

“USCGC Frederick Hatch’s highly successful patrol is a testament to the diligence and expertise of the crew onboard, always remaining positive and overcoming numerous challenges to continually set the standard for Coast Guard operations in the Pacific. Their efforts to keep our equipment functioning properly, go over the rail regularly for boardings, and cook meals in heavy seas is what makes the U.S. Coast Guard’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific region so strong. Our people are the best at what they do and always ready to go above and beyond when asked, which is the basis for being a trusted partner and fostering strong international alliances,” said Lt. Patrick Dreiss, commanding officer of the Frederick Hatch.

Historic First Visit to Tacloban, Philippines

A highlight of the patrol was Frederick Hatch’s historic visit to Tacloban, Philippines, in mid-October, marking a significant milestone in U.S.-Philippines relations. The visit coincided with the 79th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. In addition to the commemoration observance, the crew engaged in various activities, including a maritime law enforcement exchange supported by U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Security and Response Team West, community interactions, including a visit with the mayor, and cultural immersion.

Maritime Security and Fisheries Patrol

The second half of the patrol focused on countering illegal fishing and enhancing partnerships in the Republic of Palau and Papua New Guinea. While en route to Palau, the crew conducted critical observation reports highlighting potential threats to maritime governance and fishery management. These reports included observations of four Philippine-flagged fishing vessels at the boundary of Palau’s Exclusive Economic

Zone (EEZ) and the high seas, with one vessel within the Palauan EEZ when detected. Notably, these vessels needed permits to operate under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) on the high seas or Palau EEZ, and their Philippine permits expired. Their presence and activities represent potential serious violations under the WCPFC regulations.

The following day, the crew reported two additional Philippine-flagged vessels fishing without permits in WCPFC-governed waters again near the Palau EEZ, adding to the count of serious violations. Following a port call in Palau on a subsequent patrol of the Palau EEZ, the crew identified only one vessel actively fishing, recently boarded, and detected no further unauthorized incursions. In response to a request from the Palau Joint Operations Center, the crew also disposed of two fish aggregating devices found within the Palau EEZ, addressing concerns over illegal local fishing practices.

While en route to Papua New Guinea (PNG), Frederick Hatch's crew conducted one boarding on the high seas under WCPFC authority, reporting three potential violations. The crew then welcomed two PNG boarding officers, one from the Customs Services and one from the National Fisheries Authority, and together, they conducted nine additional PNG-led boardings within their EEZ under the bilateral maritime law enforcement agreement. These boardings undertaken in the eastern EEZ resulted in 16 issued violations and two warnings, addressing a range of issues such as exceeding crew occupancy limits based on available berthing, improper crew compositions due to a lack of required PNG crew expired seafarers' credentials, and poor vessel markings. The vessels' flags include the People's Republic of China, Vanuatu, and the Philippines.

"This proactive enforcement and monitoring underscore the importance of upholding good maritime governance and preserving sustainable fishing practices, critical for the

ecological and economic health of the region,” said Capt. Nick Simmons. “The relationships we’re building in Oceania and the Western Pacific are crucial for our continued commitment to our allies. This patrol exemplifies our dedication to maintaining stability and security in these waters.”

Engagement and Cooperation in Papua New Guinea

Frederick Hatch’s visit to Papua New Guinea (PNG) exemplified increased bilateral defense and security cooperation, as highlighted by the recent signing and ratification of the Defense Cooperation Agreement. The crew’s interactions with PNG fisheries, customs officers, and the local community underscore the ongoing effort to strengthen regional relationships.

“This patrol was our crew’s first time working with PNG Customs and Fisheries, and we look forward to working with them again in the future. Thank you to our two shipriders, Mr. Roger Sivlanduo and Mr. Jeremy Nelson, both skilled professionals and great people to have onboard to enrich the relationship between our agencies. It was an important opportunity to learn from each other and develop new tactics to address the IUU-F threat throughout Melanesia in the future while also carrying out several very successful boardings counteracting those threats in the present,” said Dreiss.

Support from DOL-X Team

The U.S. Coast Guard’s newly created DOL-X team was pivotal in supporting the Frederick Hatch’s logistics, including repairs and maintenance, ensuring the cutter’s operational readiness throughout the patrol. The team met the cutter during two port calls, hand-carrying critical parts to address casualties and augmenting the cutter’s engineers to repair the issues.

About the U.S. Coast Guard in the Pacific Region:

The U.S. Coast Guard is vital to ensuring maritime safety, security, and stewardship across a vast Pacific expanse,

spanning six continents, 71 countries, and 74 million square miles of ocean. U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area leads coordination and integration efforts in this vast region, promoting collaboration with partners through the actions of the U.S. Coast Guard 14th District and U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam teams.

The Frederick Hatch is the 43rd 154-foot Sentinel-class fast response cutter named for a surfman and lighthouse keeper who was a two-time Gold Life Saving Medal recipient. They regularly patrol Oceania, fostering international cooperation and supporting maritime safety, security, and stewardship.

USCGC Alder returns to home port after conducting first high-seas boardings off the coast of Peru, under new SPRFMO measure



Release from U.S. Coast Guard District 11

Nov. 29, 2023

ALAMEDA, Calif. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Alder, along with the crews of the Terrell Horne and an HC-130 Hercules aircraft recently completed the first high-seas boardings and inspections, in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, under a newly adopted conservation and management measure to monitor and inspect fishing and supply vessel operations at-sea in the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) Convention Area.

The crew of the Alder performed many new operations that took them south of the equator, where they would participate in SPRFMO inspections, conducting boardings and overflights within the SPRFMO Convention Area on the high seas off the coast of Peru. For years, the Coast Guard has executed counter-illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing operations and participated in high seas boarding and inspections (HSBI) around the globe. This operation was significant as it was timed to implement newly adopted rules in the SPRFMO Convention Area, which comprises nearly a quarter of the Earth's high seas. The SPRFMO Commission consists of 17 members from Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania, as well as two cooperating non-contracting parties.

The Alder crew also conducted counter narcotics operations, trained two crew members for aerial drone missions launched from the cutter, and sailed with four small boats attached to maintain maximum operational capability during the patrol. The crew also hosted numerous high-level officials while in Paita and Lima, Peru.

The Alder crew participated in GALAPEX 2023, a recurring joint and multinational exercise hosted by Ecuador and executed in the vicinity of the Galapagos Islands. The crew conducted communications exercises, practiced counter-narcotics boarding

scenarios, and hosted observers from Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil. GALAPEX culminated with full-scale exercises focused on a coordinated multinational response to counter IUU fishing. At the conclusion of the exercise, the Coast Guard patrolled south to focus on high seas boarding inspections off the coast of Peru.

IUU fishing has replaced piracy as the leading global maritime security threat. Areas out on the high seas, beyond any country's exclusive economic zone, can be exploited by fishers engaged in IUU fishing, as they fish beyond the reach of most law enforcement entities. The Coast Guard's actions provide inspection presence on the high seas among a distant water fishing fleet made up of more than 400 fishing and transshipment vessels. Much of the fishing in the Eastern Pacific is accomplished by these distant water fishing vessels, some which remain at sea for years at a time, and many of which are supported by supply vessels. The Coast Guard's recent operation directly supported Central and South American partners and their desire to monitor and expand maritime domain awareness of fishing activity near their exclusive economic zones.

"Unprecedented missions like this give cutter crews purpose and meaning," said Lt. Cmdr. Paul Ledbetter, commanding officer U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Alder. "They help the Coast Guard's retention, and they give our sailors stories that they will carry with them forever. Suffice to say, our crew understood the importance of what we were doing, and we are proud of what we accomplished."

Iranian UAV Creates Safety-of-Flight Risk to IKE Carrier Strike Group in Arabian Gulf



U.S. Naval Forces Central Command public affairs

MANAMA, Bahrain – Statement from the commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, Vice Adm. Brad Cooper:

“Iranian unmanned aircraft took unsafe and unprofessional actions near USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) (IKE) during the course of routine flight operations in international waters, Nov. 28.

“The Dwight D. Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group (IKECSG) was conducting routine flight operations in the international waters of the Central Arabian Gulf when it detected an

unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). The UAV was visually identified as Iranian. Its closest point of approach to IKE was approximately 1,500 yards. Multiple hails and warnings were ignored by Iran.

“This Iranian action violated safety precautions outlined in a daily Notice to Airmen (NOTAM). The NOTAM directed manned and unmanned aircraft to remain greater than 10 nautical miles from the aircraft carrier in order to ensure safety of flight of military and civilian aviation.

“No injuries were reported and no aircraft was damaged.

“This unsafe, unprofessional, and irresponsible behavior by Iran risks U.S. and partner nation lives and needs to cease immediately.

“U.S. naval forces remain vigilant and will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows while promoting regional maritime security.”

Littoral Combat Ship, Unmanned Systems Pair Up to Advance Lethality in the Middle East



[Release from U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs](#)

By Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jacob Vernier |
November 29, 2023

MANAMA, Bahrain – U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) continues advancing lethality at sea, utilizing the Freedom-class littoral combat ship USS Indianapolis (LCS 17) as a staging base and command center for a host of unmanned systems during live weapons firing exercises in the international waters of the central Arabian Gulf, Nov. 27.

Digital Talon 2.0, the second exercise of its type in as many months, showcased “manned-unmanned teaming” by meshing together Indianapolis, three unmanned surface vehicles, and an unmanned aerial vehicle to create a single common operating picture and what is known as a “mesh network” providing targeting data to all stations taking part in the exercise.

NAVCENT’s Task Force 59 – the Navy’s first Unmanned and Artificial Intelligence Task Force – partnered with Indianapolis to demonstrate the ability of unmanned platforms

to pair with traditionally crewed ships. The manned and unmanned teams identified, targeted, engaged and then destroyed simulated hostile forces at sea, represented through the use of a target boat.

“This second iteration of Digital Talon continues building on our earlier successes,” said Capt. Colin Corridan, TF-59 commodore. “We keep progressing toward fulfilling NAVCENT’s priorities of deterrence and de-escalation by demonstrating live firing from a tight ‘manned-unmanned teaming’ model.”

In multiple firing events, a T-38 Devil Ray unmanned surface vessel (USV), equipped with a Lethal Miniature Aerial Missile System, and successfully scored direct hits on the target boat each time. As with the previous Digital Talon exercise, a human operator ashore at TF-59’s Robotics Operations Center made the engagement decisions.

The unmanned vehicles taking part in the exercise included a Flexrotor unmanned aerial vehicle; an Arabian Fox MAST-13 USV; and an additional T-38 Devil Ray USV.

Digital Talon 2.0 took a significant step forward, Collidan said, noting the results from this event, “have proven these unmanned platforms paired with our manned combat ships can enhance fleet lethality. In doing so, we are strengthening regional maritime security and enhancing deterrence against malign activity.”

U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet’s area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. This expanse, comprising 21 nations, includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb.

Kratos Supports Successful US Navy and MDA Intercept Test Against Multiple Ballistic Missile and Anti-Ship Cruise Missile Targets

Release from Kratos Defense & Security

November 27, 2023 at 8:00 AM EST

SAN DIEGO, Nov. 27, 2023 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) – Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, Inc. (NASDAQ: KTOS), a Technology Company in the Defense, National Security and Global Markets, announced today that its Defense & Rocket Systems business supported the successful [intercept test of two Short-Range Ballistic Missile \(SRBM\) targets](#), known as Aegis Readiness Assessment Vehicle (ARAV) by two Standard Missile 3 Block IA (SM-3 Blk IA) interceptors during the test event Vigilant Wyvern, also known as Flight Test Aegis Weapon System-48 (FTM-48). The successful test demonstrated the capability of a ballistic missile defense-configured Aegis ship to detect, track, engage and execute intercepts of two SRBM targets while concurrently demonstrating an Anti-Air Warfare (AAW) engagement of two subsonic anti-ship cruise missile drone targets. This live-fire, raid scenario represented one of the largest Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) events ever conducted in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility and demonstrated for the first time a concurrent Ballistic Missile Defense and Anti-Air Warfare

raid.

The successful intercepts by the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS CARL M. LEVIN (DDG 120) were the highlight of the Vigilant Wyvern/FTM-48 event and the culmination of a four-week campaign during which Kratos Rocket Systems business, along with its government and industry partners, integrated and launched the two SRBM targets from the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) in Hawaii. Both ARAV target systems, which have a long-standing, successful, flight-demonstrated heritage on test and intercept missions for the U.S. Navy and MDA, executed nominal trajectories while meeting target requirements.

“Our team works side-by-side with our government customers to deliver transformative and affordable target systems and vehicles from mission inception through successful launch operations. FTM-48, which was one of our largest recent mission campaigns, is just the latest example of this successful partnership,” said Dave Carter, President of Kratos Rocket Systems Division. “Kratos’ affordable systems allow our customers to cost effectively effect multi system raid scenarios like Vigilant Wyvern, and we are grateful to be able to continue supporting the U.S. DoD and its allies in this very important mission area.”

The BQM is a sub-sonic aerial target, capable of speeds greater than .09 Mach and minimum altitude of 6.6 feet, and has no equal when it comes to delivering realistic anti-ship missile threat emulation.

Kratos is a leading provider of products, solutions, and services supporting ballistic missile defense for Aegis Weapon System, hypersonic testing, atmospheric science research and technology maturation.

Vipers and Heavy Haulers Return Home from Indo-Pacific Deployment



MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR, UNITED STATES

11.27.2023

By [Maj. Natalie Batcheler, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing](#)

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION MIRAMAR, Calif. – The Marines and Sailors of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 169, and Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 462, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, returned from deployments in support of the

Unit Deployment Program and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, to their home stations of Marine Corps Air Station Camp Pendleton and MCAS Miramar, California, respectively, earlier this month.

The HMLA-169 “Vipers” and HMH-462 “Heavy Haulers” demonstrated adaptability and versatility by task-organizing their squadrons into elements for two different deployments each.

The Heavy Haulers also attached the remaining third of their squadron to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 163, yielding a reinforced assault support squadron, which supported a bilateral exercise and relief efforts in the Philippines this summer.

UDP enhances the United States’ forward presence and provides a consistent and rapid response capability. The program aims to maintain combat readiness, deter aggression, and strengthen alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region. UDP reinforces the Marine Corps’ ability to rapidly maneuver to key maritime terrain, establish resilient air command and control, and generate aviation combat power from distributed locations.

The 31st MEU is the Marine Corps’ only permanently forward-deployed MEU, and is the nation’s expeditionary force in readiness in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Vipers’ UH-1Y Venom and AH-1Z Viper aircraft, and the Heavy Haulers’ CH-53E Super Stallions operated across the Indo-Pacific, demonstrating the operational reach of Marine aviation.

They participated in exercises including Marine Aviation Support Activity, Talisman Sabre, Fuji Viper, Super Garuda Shield, and Korean Marine Exchange Program, and conducted training in Okinawa including a variety of flight operations

and qualifications; maritime integration; and joint and Marine Air-Ground Task Force integration.

“The Vipers executed an aggressive campaign that emphasized distributed operations across the Indo-Pacific theater,” said Lt. Col. Thomas Duff, commanding officer of HMLA-169. “We utilized strategic airlift, amphibious shipping, and self-deploying detachments to support five bilateral exercises and enhance interoperability with our partners in the region.”

The Vipers and Heavy Haulers played a key role in fostering relationships with allies and partners in the region, demonstrating a forward presence in the Indo-Pacific, and enhancing capabilities for mission sets across the range of military operations.

“Mobility is an identified challenge in the Western Pacific, specifically in the First Island Chain, that is crucial for the United States to promote regional stability and strengthen alliances with partner nations while in Great Power Competition,” said Lt. Col. Jonathan Bryant, commanding officer of HMM-462. “Over the past seven months, the Marines and Sailors of HMM-462 met this challenge head-on by continuously demonstrating the Marine Corps’ ability to conduct long range assault support and heavy lift operations for III MEF as the Stand-In-Force in INDOPACOM.”

Marines and assets from 3rd MAW, the largest wing in the Marine Corps, are constantly forward-deployed in support of operations and training around the globe. Ready to fight tonight and win, 3rd MAW is poised to respond when called upon.

Navy's Second Ford CVN to Join the U.S. Pacific Fleet



MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Oct. 11, 2023) The world's largest aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) refuels from the underway replenishment oiler USNS Laramie (T-AO 203) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Oct. 11, 2023. The second Ford-class CVN, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), will become a unit of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jacob Mattingly)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's second Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), will become a unit of the U.S. Pacific Fleet when it makes its first deployment.

Captain Brian Metcalf, the Navy's program manager for the Ford-class aircraft carriers, speaking Nov. 28 in a panel of the American Society of Naval Engineers' Technology Systems

and Ships seminar, said the Kennedy would be delivered to the Navy in 2025. After commissioning and training work ups, the carrier would make a deployment to the Indo-Pacific region and arrive at its new homeport on the U.S. West Coast, he said.

Metcalfe said the Kennedy is 90% complete at HII's Newport News shipyard.

He said that his program office plans to complete much of the Kennedy's Post-Shakedown Availability (PSA) work – that on the USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) was completed during its own PSA and added a year of delay to delivery to the fleet – would be completed on the Kennedy during its construction before commissioning and would enable the Kennedy to enter its basic training phase on time.

The lead ship, Gerald R. Ford, is deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea and has had its deployment extended twice because of the Israel-Hamas War. Metcalfe said the Ford's systems, including the Electro-Magnetic Aircraft Launch System and the ship's once-controversial weapon elevators were performing well.

He said that maintenance and modernization work on the Ford planned for early 2024 would have to wait, given the Ford's deployment extensions.

The next two Ford-class CVNs—Enterprise (CVN 80) and Doris Miller (CVN 81)—did not start as a two-ship procurement but since have been combined as a program to achieve cost reductions. Metcalfe said that his program office is working within the current Future Years Defense Plan to ensure that procurement of CVN 82 and CVN 83 is a two-ship procurement.

U.S., Partner Nation Task Force Respond to Commercial Vessel Distress Call



[Release from the U.S. Department of Defense](#)

Nov. 27, 2023 | By C. Todd Lopez

This weekend, the USS Mason and partner nation naval vessels responded to a distress call from the commercial shipping vessel M/V Central Park, which had been boarded by five armed individuals while in transit in the Gulf of Aden near Yemen, said the Pentagon press secretary.

“[The Central Park] was boarded by these five individuals. They attempted to access the crew cabin,” Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said this morning during a meeting with the Pentagon

press corps. "The crew, essentially, [was] able to lock themselves into a safe haven. These individuals attempted to access and take control of the ship."

The crew of the Central Park issued the distress call on the evening of Nov. 26. The distress call was responded to by the USS Mason, allied ships and associated aircraft which are part of Combined Task Force 151. That task force conducts counter-piracy missions.

After the arrival of the USS Mason and partners with CTF 151, task force personnel demanded the release of the Central Park, Ryder said. The five armed individuals then disembarked the vessel and fled in a small boat.

"After the five individuals fled, the Mason sent out a visit, board, search and seizure team on the water that stopped the small boat. They detained the individuals, and then ... the VBSS team boarded the Central Park and cleared the vessel," Ryder said, adding that the Central Park crew was found to be safe following the incident.

While the identity of the five armed attackers was not yet confirmed at the time of the morning news briefing, Ryder said initial indications are that the individuals are Somali. All five are currently being held aboard the USS Mason.

Hours later, early in the morning of Nov. 27, Yemen time, two ballistic missiles were fired toward the general location of the Mason and the Central Park.

"Initial indications were that two ballistic missiles were fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, toward the general location of the Mason and the Central Park," Ryder said. "The missiles landed in the Gulf of Aden, approximately 10 nautical miles from the ships. It is not clear at this time what they were targeting."

Ryder said that neither the USS Mason nor the Central Park

were damaged by the missiles and that the Central Park is now back under power and on its way.