Gerald R. Ford Crew Demonstrates Resilience, Readiness During Extended Deployment

Photo: U.S. Navy.
From U.S. Fleet Forces Command

NORFOLK, Va. – More than eight months into an extended deployment, the Sailors of USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) continue to demonstrate resilience, professionalism, and sustained morale while serving far from home.

Gerald R. Ford departed Naval Station Norfolk on June 24, 2025. Since that time, the ship and Carrier Strike Group 12 have continued to operate at a high state of readiness. Navy

leaders acknowledge that extended time away from families carries real and measurable sacrifice.

“Extended deployments demand endurance,” said Adm. Daryl Caudle, Chief of Naval Operations. “They ask Sailors to miss births, anniversaries, and everyday moments at home. They ask families to shoulder additional responsibility. That sacrifice is real, and we do not take it lightly. The nation relies on these Sailors to remain forward and ready, and they continue to meet that responsibility with professionalism and pride.” Caudle emphasized that sustained readiness begins with people and empowering them to succeed.

“The morale aboard Gerald R. Ford remains strong because leadership is engaged, systems are operating, and Sailors understand the importance of their mission,” he said. “This crew is experienced, disciplined, and committed to one another. That cohesion matters during long deployments.”

Caudle has been in constant contact with Rear Adm. Paul Lanzilotta, commander of Carrier Strike Group 12, who said maintaining morale requires deliberate daily attention and frequent communication.

“Long deployments are challenging,” Lanzilotta said. “Fatigue accumulates and time away from home weighs on Sailors. Our responsibility as leaders is to ensure they are supported — with reliable shipboard services, clear communication, and consistent engagement. I have walked the decks of Gerald R. Ford repeatedly during this deployment. What I see is a crew that remains focused, capable, and proud of the work they are doing.”

In recent weeks, media reports have raised concerns regarding shipboard systems, including sanitation. Navy officials state that Gerald R. Ford’s systems are operating within expected parameters for a Ford-class aircraft carrier with more than 4,000 personnel embarked.

During this deployment, Gerald R. Ford's vacuum collection, holding, and transfer (VCHT) system has processed more than six million toilet flushes. Ship leadership reports that clog incidents are addressed promptly by trained damage control and engineering personnel, with minimal downtime.

"On a ship this size, with this many Sailors, clogs will occur," said Capt. David Skarosi, commanding officer of USS Gerald R. Ford. "What matters is how quickly they are resolved. Our maintenance teams respond immediately, and the system continues to function as designed with no impact to operational readiness or our ability to meet our mission. I am engaged daily with any concerns regarding the health, wellbeing, and morale of the crew."

"In most instances," Skarosi added, "clogs are the result of items being flushed that should not be introduced into the system. When Sailors follow proper procedures, the system performs reliably. We continue to train new Sailors and reinforce those standards across the crew."

Beyond sanitation systems, Gerald R. Ford continues to emphasize and sustain quality of life conditions. The ship's reverse osmosis systems produce more than 400,000 gallons of potable water daily, supporting hot showers, laundry, food preparation, and drinking water requirements. The Supply Department has served more than four million meals since departure, supported by consistent underway replenishment operations delivering fresh produce, frozen goods, and dry stores.

Bandwidth availability for morale, welfare, and recreation internet access has expanded during the deployment through commercial satellite augmentation, including Starlink capability. That increased connectivity has improved Sailors' ability to communicate with families, access news, and utilize approved streaming services during off-duty hours.

“Connectivity and routine matter,” Lanzilotta said. “When Sailors can speak with their families, read trusted news sources, maintain physical fitness, and rely on stable shipboard systems, it strengthens resilience.” Command-sponsored initiatives throughout the deployment have included morale and holiday events when operationally feasible, physical fitness competitions, movie nights, educational advancement programs, and expanded chaplain and counseling availability. Leadership routinely inspects berthing and workspaces to identify and correct quality of life concerns early.

“Our Sailors understand the importance of their service,” Caudle said. “They are away from home longer than planned because the nation needs them forward and ready. I want them to take great pride in that calling. The American people should be confident that USS Gerald R. Ford remains ready, and they should be proud of the men and women serving aboard her.”

Gerald R. Ford recently completed a port call to Souda Bay, Crete for a routine, scheduled resupply of food, fuel, and ammunitions. While in port, Sailors had the opportunity to rest and enjoy recreational activities on the island, serving as a significant morale boost.

USS Gerald R. Ford is the lead ship of her class and incorporates an advanced flight deck design, state-of-the-art launch and recovery systems, enhanced electrical capacity, and quality of life features designed to support sustained operations at sea. The new systems incorporated into Ford-class ships, such as the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and advanced arresting gear (AAG), are designed to deliver greater lethality and joint interoperability. While the Navy is still analyzing the data, preliminary reports from the Sortie Generation Rate test program show that the flight deck design in conjunction with EMALS and AAG have contributed to an increased sortie generation rate compared to that of a

Nimitz-class carrier. As of today, these systems are operating as designed, and the Ford continues with scheduled mission tasking.

Carrier Strike Group 12 includes USS Gerald R. Ford, embarked Carrier Air Wing Eight, and assigned guided-missile destroyers. The strike group remains fully mission capable and committed to maintaining the highest standards of safety, professionalism, and Sailor well-being.

U.S. Navy to Christen Future USNS Robert Ballard

From Team Ships Public Affairs

PASCAGOULA, Ms. – The U.S. Navy will christen the future USNS Robert Ballard (T-AGS 67) during a ceremony at Bollinger Mississippi Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, Feb. 28 at 10:00 a.m. (CST).

The principal address will be delivered by Dr. Robert Ballard, the ship's namesake. Additional speakers will include the Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith, U.S. Senator, Mississippi; the Honorable Brendan Rogers, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment; Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson, commander, Military Sealift Command; Rear Adm. Erin Acosta, commander, Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command; and Mr. Ben Bordelon, president and CEO, Bollinger Shipyards.

In a time-honored tradition, ship sponsor Barbara Earle Ballard, spouse of the namesake and president of Odyssey Enterprises, will christen the ship by breaking a bottle of sparkling wine across the bow.

The ship is named in honor of Dr. Robert Ballard, a retired U.S Navy commander and a tenured professor of Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography. Ballard is also a National Geographic Explorer at Large. Ballard is renowned for discovering the final resting place of the RMS Titanic.

The christening of the future USNS Robert Ballard underscores the Navy's commitment to building America's Golden Fleet. For 250 years, American naval power has projected strength globally. That mission continues – and intensifies. We operate forward 24/7, 365 days a year. This operational tempo demands continuous capability delivery, and the Golden Fleet is our answer.

Oceanographic survey ships have two multipurpose cranes and five winches, plus a variety of oceanographic equipment including multibeam echo-sounders, towed sonars and expendable sensors.

For more on Oceanographic Survey Ships, visit: https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2222996/oceanographic-survey-ships-t-ags/

U.S. Coast Guard Accepts Delivery of 62nd Fast Response Cutter Named for 9/11 Hero

The USCGC Vincent Danz (WPC 1162), seen here moored in Key West, Florida, the day prior to its official acceptance as the U.S. Coast Guard's newest cutter on Feb. 26, 2026. The cutter is named for Vincent Danz, a New York City police officer and U.S. Coast Guard reservist who made the ultimate sacrifice on Sept. 11, 2001, while responding to the attacks on the World Trade Center. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)
[From U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia]

KEY WEST – The U.S. Coast Guard accepted delivery of the 62nd Fast Response Cutter, USCGC Vincent Danz (WPC 1162), on Thursday in Key West.

The Vincent Danz is the fourth FRC to be homeported to Guam.

"Accepting delivery of the Vincent Danz, Guam's newest Fast Response Cutter, demonstrates the Coast Guard's enduring commitment to the security of our Nation, the Pacific, and our partners throughout Oceania," said Capt. Jessica Worst, commander, Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam. "Vincent

Danz exemplified selfless service as a New York police officer and Coast Guard reservist. This cutter will honor his legacy by protecting lives, combating illicit activity, and ensuring maritime security of our coasts, across Micronesia and beyond."

The Sentinel-class FRCs replace the 1980s Island-class 110-foot patrol boats and possess 21st-century command, control, communications, computers, cyber, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance equipment, with improved habitability and seakeeping.

The U.S. Coast Guard ordered a total of 77 FRCs to date to perform a range of missions, including countering illicit maritime activities, search and rescue, bilateral and multilateral international operations, and the national defense of ports, waterways, and coastal areas.

Each FRC is named after an enlisted U.S. Coast Guard hero who performed extraordinary service in the line of duty. Vincent Danz was a New York City police officer and U.S. Coast Guard reservist who made the ultimate sacrifice on Sept. 11, 2001, while responding to the attacks on the World Trade Center. Danz was a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and joined the New York City Police Department in 1987, while continuing to serve in the Coast Guard Reserve as a Port Security Specialist 2nd Class.

Danz was serving in the New York City Police Department, Emergency Services Unit, ESU Truck 3, when he responded to the World Trade Center as part of a massive emergency response and was killed when the World Trade Center collapsed. He was posthumously awarded the New York City Police Department's Medal of Honor for his heroic deeds. His actions that day embodied the Coast Guard's core values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty.

"It's an honor, and we're all incredibly proud to carry on the

legacy of heroes like Vincent Danz," said Petty Officer David Somera, the engineering petty officer and a proud son of Guam. "This third time I've been part of such a commissioning crew, and there's a deeper appreciation for what it takes to bring a cutter to life. You start with this perfectly new ship, and it's our job as the first crew to turn it from a steel vessel into a living, breathing part of the Coast Guard. It's more than the mechanics; we're building a team and a home that will serve and protect the people of Guam and the Pacific."

The FRCs homeported in the U.S. territory of Guam extend the U.S. Coast Guard and Oceania District's operational reach across the Pacific, conducting maritime security operations, combating illegal fishing, supporting search and rescue missions, and strengthening partnerships with Pacific Island nations and Allies. These cutter crews are essential to maintaining a safe, secure, and prosperous Pacific in one of the world's most expansive maritime regions.

Vincent Danz will join the Myrtle Hazard (WPC 1139), Oliver Henry (WPC 1140), and Frederick Hatch (WPC 1143), commissioned in 2021 in Guam. Since their 2021 commissioning, Guam's FRC crews distinguished themselves across the region.

USCGC Myrtle Hazard became the first to operationalize the bilateral maritime law enforcement agreement with Papua New Guinea, conducting joint patrols and boardings in 2023. USCGC Oliver Henry saved mariners in the Federated States of Micronesia, delivered humanitarian assistance during the Yap drought, and towed the 500-ton yacht Black Pearl to Palau, rescuing 11 people in 2024. USCGC Frederick Hatch became the first FRC to visit numerous Pacific ports, including Tacloban, Philippines, for the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, and operationalized the enhanced bilateral agreement with Palau in 2024. In the Marianas, the crews of all three cutters saved multiple lives, delivered critical supplies, and suppressed asymmetric migration.

Sixty-one FRCs are in service: 13 in Florida; seven in Puerto Rico; six each in Bahrain and Massachusetts; five in Alaska; four in California; three each in Hawaii, Guam, Texas, New Jersey, and Mississippi; and two each in North Carolina and Oregon.

Coast Guard Interdicts Suspected Drug Smuggling Vessel, Seizes $1.3M in Narcotics

A suspected drug smuggling vessel tied to the pier following an interdiction by the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge 8 miles off Miami, Florida, Feb. 21, 2026. The Etheridge’s crew seized approximately 17 pounds of marijuana and 174 pounds of cocaine found aboard the vessel. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

From Coast Guard Southeast District, Feb. 27, 2026

MIAMI – Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge’s crew interdicted a suspected smuggling vessel, Saturday, at approximately 2:15 p.m., about 8 miles offshore of Miami.

During the boarding, the joint law enforcement crew found approximately 17 pounds of marijuana and 174 pounds of cocaine, later confirmed through laboratory testing, worth an

estimated $1.3 million.

The two suspected smugglers were taken into custody for further investigation by Homeland Security Investigations.

“Our crew is committed to keeping drugs off the streets and protecting America’s borders,” said Lt. Zane Carter, commanding officer, Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge. “I could not be prouder of my crew’s professionalism and their seamless integration with our partner agencies.”

Agencies involved in the interdiction:

- Coast Guard Southeast District
- Coast Guard Sector Miami
- Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge
- Coast Guard Investigative Service
- Homeland Security Investigations
- Customs and Border Protection Office of Field Operations K9 unit
- Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations

Secretary of War Announces Marine Corps General Officer Nominations

From the Department of War, Feb. 25, 2026

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced today that the president has made the following nominations:

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Robert B. Brodie for appointment to

the grade of major general. Brodie is currently serving as deputy commanding general, III Marine Expeditionary Force and commanding general, 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Okinawa, Japan.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Michael A. Brooks Jr. for appointment to the grade of major general. Brooks is currently serving as commanding general, Training Command, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Simon M. Doran for appointment to the grade of major general. Doran is currently serving as commanding general, Marine Corps Warfighting Lab, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Fridrik Fridriksson for appointment to the grade of major general. Fridriksson is currently serving as director, Manpower Management Division, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Headquarters, Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Garrett R. Hoffman for appointment to the grade of major general. Hoffman is currently serving as director, White House Military Office, Washington, D.C.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Stephen J. Lightfoot for appointment to the grade of major general. Lightfoot is currently serving as commander, Naval Amphibious Forces Task Force 51 and commanding general, 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, Al Jasra, Bahrain.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. Michael E. McWilliams for appointment to the grade of major general. McWilliams is currently serving as commander, Joint Enabling Capabilities Command, U.S. Transportation Command, Norfolk, Virginia.

Marine Corps Brig. Gen. David C. Walsh for appointment to the grade of major general. Walsh is currently serving as program

executive officer, Air Anti-Submarine Warfare, Assault, and Special Mission Programs, Naval Air Systems Command, Patuxent River, Maryland.

Austal USA Launches 2nd Navy T-ATS, the Future USNS Solomon Atkinson

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA successfully launched the company's first ship of the year and second Navy Towing, Salvage, and Rescue Ship (T-ATS), future USNS Solomon Atkinson (T-ATS 12), on February 23. Named after a Native American who was

a plankowner of the Navy SEAL teams and one of the service's most decorated Alaska Native sailors, Soloman Atkinson is one of three T-ATS under construction at Austal USA and the first of two ships launched at Austal USA's Mobile, Ala. ship manufacturing facility within less than a week.

"It's always exciting to see these giants we build roll out of the assembly bay," said Gene Miller, Austal USA's interim president. "The completion of this milestone is the result of the hard work and dedication of our talented workforce and the strength of our maritime industrial partnerships key to success in this proven launch process. I am so proud of all they have accomplished."

T-ATS will provide ocean-going towing, salvage and rescue capabilities to support fleet operations. T-ATS will be a multi-mission common hull platform capable of towing U.S. Navy ships and will have 6,000 square feet of deck space for embarked systems. The large, unobstructed deck allows for the embarkation of a variety of stand-alone and interchangeable systems. The T-ATS platform will combine the capabilities of the retiring Rescue and Salvage Ship (T-ARS 50) and Fleet Ocean Tug (T-ATF 166) platforms. T-ATS will be able to support current missions including towing, salvage, rescue, oil spill response, humanitarian assistance, and wide-area search and surveillance. The platform also enables future rapid capability initiatives such as supporting modular payloads with hotel services and appropriate interfaces.

With the ship over 75 percent complete at the time of launch, future USNS Solomon Atkinson will now prepare for her next major milestone, engine light off, as she gets ready for sea trials and delivery.

Secretary of War inducts Naval Aviator and Medal of Honor recipient into the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth hosts Medal of Honor Recipient U.S. Navy Capt. Royce William’s Hall of Heroes induction ceremony at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., Feb. 25, 2026. (DoW photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Madelyn Keech)
From The Office of the Navy Chief of Information. Feb. 25, 2026

Last night President Donald J. Trump awarded retired Navy Capt. Elmer Royce Williams the Medal of Honor at the State of the Union address at the U.S. Capitol. Today, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, Secretary of the Navy John Phelan, and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle inducted Williams into the

Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes for his heroic actions during the Korean War.

“Captain Royce Williams did what warriors are called to do when the moment comes – he stood his ground, took the fight to the enemy, and protected his fellow Americans. Outnumbered, outgunned, and alone in the sky, he prevailed through sheer skill, courage, and will,” said Hegseth. “Today, we honor not just a remarkable dogfight, but a lifetime of quiet strength and service. Captain Williams embodies the fighting spirit of the United States Navy and the warrior ethos that keeps this Nation free.”

Williams was joined by an audience of family, friends, fellow Naval Aviators, and senior Navy leaders.

“Captain E. Royce Williams represents the very best of the United States Navy,” said Phelan. “On November 18, 1952, flying from USS Oriskany and outnumbered in the skies over North Korea, he chose to engage to protect the ships of Task Force 77 and the Sailors aboard them. In a 35-minute dogfight, he shot down three MiG-15s and severely damaged a fourth one. For decades, much of this story remained classified, but the facts never changed. His courage, airmanship, and devotion to duty saved lives and upheld the highest traditions of the Naval Service. Today, we are proud to formally recognize a Naval Aviator whose example will endure for generations.”

Yet when reflecting on that historic day and the recognition it brought, Williams did not speak of skill or courage, but of humility and faith.

“I know how momentous this moment is, and I never imagined myself or allowed myself to think it was going to happen to me,” Williams said. “I imagined it as God reaching in and dipping His hand in to pick somebody up for the most unusual reasons and displaying him in front of his fellow citizens.”

He continued, emphasizing that the honor was never something

he expected or sought.

“And to be entirely amazed and appreciative for the accommodations and accolades. But that’s so unusual that you don’t fool around thinking that it’s ever going to come your way,” he said. “This is God doing something usual, with his finger in the pie, and with his influence. And what did I have to do with it? Well, I was the principal, in a way, that is receiving the recognition, but maybe some of that recognition misses the influence that really caused this special recognition.”

Williams was born in Wilmot, South Dakota and enlisted in the U.S. Army at 16 years old in Ortonville, Minnesota. Upon completion of basic training, he returned to Ortonville to train with his unit in a reserve status until he finished high school. Once he turned 17, Williams was eligible for the Naval Aviation Cadet program and joined the U.S. Navy where he began flight training in 1943. Among many other aviation platforms, Williams learned to fly the F9F-5 Panther jet and was assigned to active duty in the Korean War, during which he flew 70 missions. Williams went on to serve in the Vietnam War flying over 110 missions in the A-4 Skyhawk and F-4 Phantom from the USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63). Williams later served as the commanding officer of the command ship USS El Dorado (AGC-11) between September 1969 and January 1971. He retired from the U.S. Navy as a Captain in 1980.

His Medal of Honor is an upgrade of the Navy Cross he was previously awarded in January 2023, which was an upgrade to the Silver Star Medal he was previously awarded while assigned to the “Pacemakers” of Fighter Squadron 781 in 1953.

Joint Interagency Task Force Announces Counter-UAS Marketplace

Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Bryen Z. Martinez, a military police officer assigned to the counter-unmanned aerial system's counter-drone team, sets up a clay pigeon drone during a counter-UAS demo at The Basic School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., Jan. 15, 2026.

By Joint Interagency Task Force 401, Feb. 24, 2026

Joint Interagency Task Force 401 announced today that its revolutionary counter-unmanned aircraft systems marketplace has reached initial operational capability.

The online platform, hosted on the common hardware systems electronic catalog, will revolutionize how the War Department and its interagency partners acquire critical counter-UAS technology.

The marketplace streamlines the process for users to identify and procure the right equipment to meet their specific needs, featuring a growing catalog of validated counter-UAS systems and components, with plans to include performance data from the task force's authoritative test and evaluation repository. It allows customers to compare systems based on real-world performance against a variety of threats and in different environments.

"The JIATF 401 -UAS marketplace is a critical step forward in our whole-of-government approach to countering the threat of small drones," said Army Brig. Gen. Matthew Ross, JIATF 401 director. "Our goal is to integrate sensors, effectors and mission command systems into a responsive, interoperable network that protects service members and American citizens alike."

The marketplace is built on an established indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity contract, enabling customers to place orders immediately and significantly reducing the lengthy contracting process typically associated with defense procurement. The common hardware systems website provides an intuitive interface for users to browse available equipment, review technical specifications and compare pre-negotiated contract options.

"Building and maintaining the -UAS marketplace has been a collaborative effort focused on delivering a user-friendly and effective tool for the warfighter," said Army Maj. Matt Mellor, the lead acquisitions specialist assigned to JIATF 401. "We've worked to create a platform that not only simplifies the procurement process but also provides the crucial data and expert support necessary for our customers to make informed decisions. This is about getting the best technology into the hands of those who need it as quickly as possible."

The marketplace is actively expanding its inventory to include

all validated counter-UAS equipment not already designated as a program of record. The common hardware systems electronic catalog already lists over 1,600 items, demonstrating its capacity to support a comprehensive, growing selection of counter-UAS solutions.

Access to the marketplace is available to users throughout the War Department and interagency partners via a common access card or other government-issued smart card.

CACI's Spectral Program with the U.S. Navy Achieves Milestone C

RESTON, Va.–(BUSINESS WIRE)– CACI International Inc (NYSE: CACI) today announced the Spectral program has successfully completed rigorous review by the U.S. Navy's Program Executive Office for Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence (PEO C4I), achieving Milestone C. CACI partnered with PEO C4I's Program Manager Warfare Battlespace Awareness and Information Operations Program Office (PMW 120), to achieve this historic accomplishment, marking the start of the program's low-rate initial production (LRIP) and deployment phase, a defining step toward placing this critical electronic warfare (EW) technology in the hands of U.S. sailors.

"This recent milestone enables the delivery of modern, cutting-edge technologies that empower our warfighters to defend the nation from our adversaries and maintain decision superiority across every domain, especially the electromagnetic spectrum," said John Mengucci, CACI President and CEO. "Our bold investments in technology and our world-

class engineering team have led us to this critical milestone, a momentous leap forward for the Navy. I thank the Navy for entrusting CACI to strengthen their ability to defend the nation and prevail in contested environments, when it matters most – when the stakes are highest, and lives are on the line."

As part of Milestone C, CACI and PMW 120 have executed several Iterative Capability Tests proving the functionality of the system which led to this decision by Milestone Defense Authority. Under the Spectral program, CACI will rapidly, and at scale, develop and deploy the next generation of shipboard signals intelligence and electronic warfare capabilities, effectively protecting warfighters from electronic attacks and adversarial threats.

Through software-defined systems and open architectures, CACI optimizes platforms with advanced electromagnetic warfare technologies that detect and exploit signals across the spectrum – enabling sensing, communications, and information operations.

Topping Out Ceremony Marks Investment in Future of Submarine Readiness

Stakeholders, engineers, and construction crew members pose for a group photo in front of the new Nuclear Regional Maintenance Department facility at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga., Jan. 29, 2026. The group gathered to celebrate a topping out ceremony, marking a major construction milestone for the project. (U.S. Navy Photo by Yan Kennon)
From Jeffrey Hamlin, NAVFAC Public Affairs

A topping out ceremony was held Jan. 29 to mark a major milestone in the construction of a new facility for the Nuclear Regional Maintenance Department (NRMD) at Naval Submarine Base (NSB) Kings Bay, Georgia.

Hosted by Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) Southeast, the event celebrated the placement of the final steel beam on the structure, symbolizing significant progress toward completion of a centralized, state-of-the-art facility designed to support critical maintenance and repair operations for Trident-equipped submarines.

A topping out ceremony is a tradition that dates back centuries to celebrate when a structure reaches its final height. While some ceremonies involve hoisting a tree or flag, the focus here was on the final beam itself, which was signed by the project’s stakeholders, engineers, and construction

crews. Its placement serves as a powerful tribute to their hard work and signifies the successful completion of the structural phase.

“This topping out, just over a year after breaking ground, is a testament to the skill and dedication of our team,” said NAVFAC Southeast Executive Officer Capt. Elizabeth Durika. “This facility is a critical investment in our nation’s strategic deterrence, and this progress brings us one step closer to providing a state-of-the-art space to ensure our submarine force remains ready for decades to come.”

The construction has progressed rapidly since the project began. Lt. Cmdr. John Nurthen, construction management team leader, highlighted the significant accomplishments of the construction team.

“The sheer scale of work accomplished on this site is remarkable. Our partners have moved mountains, literally,” said Nurthen. “We removed and excavated over four feet of rock and soil from the entire project site, replacing nearly 35,000 cubic yards of unsuitable soils to create a stable foundation. We have erected over 530 tons of structural steel, drilled and placed nearly 3,000 concrete piles, and poured over 100,000 square feet of structural concrete. This milestone is a credit to the incredible effort of every worker on this project.”

The new $136 million facility was announced at a groundbreaking ceremony on Jan. 15, 2025. Its purpose is to consolidate NRMD operations, which are currently scattered across NSB Kings Bay in temporary locations and shared facilities. The centralized hub will include nuclear repair shops, ship services support areas, and applied instruction spaces, significantly enhancing communication and collaboration for the maintenance and repair of Trident-equipped submarines.

“Today’s milestone represents far more than the final beam being set in place; it marks a major step toward providing our skilled civilians and Sailors with a state-of-the-art workspace to support and sustain the nuclear propulsion plants that power our nation’s number one strategic deterrent,” said James Haas, director of the Nuclear Regional Maintenance Department. Haas emphasized the human element behind the achievement, adding, “This facility is an investment in our future and in the people who carry out this mission every day. We are grateful for the dedication of everyone in turning this dream into a reality.”

The project is being managed by NAVFAC Southeast with BL Harbert International as the primary contractor. It is scheduled for completion by December 2028.

Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Southeast, headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida, provides planning, design, construction, contracting, environmental services, public works, real estate and facility maintenance for the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, Space Force, and other federal agencies across the Southeast. Its area of responsibility covers installations from Charleston, South Carolina, to Corpus Christi, Texas, and extends south to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.