

Cruiser USS Vicksburg is Decommissioned



3 July 2024

NAVAL STATION NORFOLK – The crew of the guided-missile cruiser USS Vicksburg (CG 69) held a decommissioning ceremony on June 28, 2024.

Hundreds gathered to celebrate the ship's distinguished history of Naval service. Vicksburg's former Commanding Officer Capt. Chip Swicker, USN (Ret.), spoke of the powerful bond between Sailors and their ships and the lives shaped aboard. His words resonated with the audience as they bade farewell to the cruiser.

"These Sailors brought Vicksburg to life for 32 years under 17 commanding officers," said Swicker. "This ship was their schoolhouse, their training field, their home and their

powerful weapon as they stood fast between good people and bad things night and day, in good weather and bad, close to home and far over the horizon for more than three decades.”

Swicker added, “A ship is only as strong as her crew and Vicksburg has been an exceptionally lucky ship, the training ground for generations of exceptional Sailors led by commanding officers dedicated to the relentless pursuit of combat readiness.”

Vicksburg’s current Commanding Officer Cmdr. Christopher M. Stolle shared his admiration for the crew, both current and former, for their hard work, dedication and setting the standard over the years.

“To all former shipmates, you have been trailblazers in sensor integration, tactical development, the bolstering of regional partners, and prepping the battlefield to ensure that America’s Navy has a home field advantage anywhere in the world,” said Stolle. “Today we decommission Vicksburg, but the legacy of her crews will live on indefinitely. I am humbled to be a part of the final chapter and to join the prestigious ranks of Vicksburg Alumni.”

The ship was built at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Miss., and commissioned during a ceremony held there November 14, 1992. The ship was named in commemoration of both the land Battle of Vicksburg fought during the American Civil War and the city of Vicksburg, Miss.

Inactivation is a normal part of a warship’s lifecycle. After decommissioning, the ship is slated to be towed to the Navy’s Inactive Ship’s facility in Philadelphia, Pa., where it will be in a Logistical Support Asset status.

Over its 32 years of service, the cruiser has been an important part of America’s national defense strategy.

Under Secretary of the Navy Raven to Step Down

From SECNAV Public Affairs, July 3, 2024

Under Secretary of the Navy Erik Raven will step down from his position in August.

Below is Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro's statement on the upcoming departure of Under Secretary of the Navy Erik Raven:

"Erik Raven has been a true leader in executing the Department of the Navy's top priorities. He has demonstrated unfailing commitment to protecting our Nation, strengthening our Navy and Marine Corps Team, and building enduring warfighting advantages. His expertise ensured our naval forces are equipped with the capabilities to deter and, if necessary, prevail decisively in time of war, while also ensuring the welfare of our service members, civilians, and their families.

For the past two years his steadfast leadership has been a driving force for actions that will have long-lasting, positive impacts, not just for the United States but also for our Allies and partners. His efforts contributed significantly to the AUKUS trilateral security partnership, the largest-ever investment in shipbuilding, improving Guam's infrastructure to support defense in the INDOPACOM region, as well as improving the Department of Navy's business operations, optimizing information management and cyber operations while improving efficiency.

We have benefited from Erik's wise counsel and loyal service

to the Department and to our Nation. Our national security, Navy, and Marine Corps are stronger because of his service. We wish him the best in his future endeavors.”

Military Sealift Command Supporting Biennial Rim of the Pacific Exercise

3 July 2024

From Sarah Cannon, Military Sealift Command Pacific

Military Sealift Command will support the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024 maritime exercise through out the month of July in Hawaii.

✘ MSC fleet replenishment oilers USNS Pecos (T-AO 197) and the MSC dry cargo/ammunition ship USNS Washington Chambers (T-AKE 11) will provide logistics services including aviation fuel, diesel ship fuel, dry, fresh and frozen food equipment and supplies to the ships participating in the exercise.

MSC chartered tanker ships MT Overseas Mykonos and MT Allied Pacific will provide fuel to the MSC combat logistics ships during replenishment-at-sea events. With the closing of the Navy's The Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility, the tanker replenishment events will allow the CLF ships to receive fuel at sea, enabling them to provide logistic services to exercise participants as needed, without delay.

MSC rescue and salvage ship USNS Grasp (T-ARS 51) will deliver two decommissioned Navy ships to the designated target area in

preparation for sinking exercises (SINKEX); amphibious transport dock Ex-Dubuque (LPD 8) and amphibious assault ship Ex-Tarawa (LHA 1).

Five members of Military Sealift Command Pacific's (MSCPAC) Headquarters Unit are serving as watch standers, providing maritime logistics support to Commander, Task Group 173. These reservists, alongside will providing comprehensive planning and coordination for each replenishment-at-sea conducted during the exercise, including arranging and coordinating rendezvous locations and times for MSCs CLF ships and MSC chartered tankers. In addition, the Reservists will coordinate towing operations Grasp.

At sea, 24 members of MSC Cargo Afloat Rig Team (CART) will support at-sea logistics operations in support of the exercise, training and working hand-in-hand with the civil service mariner crews in order to meet the huge underway replenishment demands of keeping the ships of the 29 participating nations supplied and moving.

"MSC and our crews of highly professional civilian mariners are proud to be a part of RIMPAC 2024," said Leonard Bell, Deputy to the Commodore, Military Sealift Command Pacific. "This is a great opportunity for us to not only demonstrate our logistics capabilities, but to work and learn from our foreign Navy partners in an at-sea environment. In today's challenging environments, exercises such as RIMPAC allow us to foster goodwill and relationships with like-minded partners, ensuring safe seas for military and commercial sailing."

Hosted biennially by Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (PACFLT), and executed by Commander, U.S. 3rd Fleet (C3F), RIMPAC is a multinational maritime exercise that takes place in and around the Hawaiian Islands. This year marks the 29th iteration of RIMPAC, a series that began in 1971 and is scheduled to take place from June 26 to August 2. Approximately 29 nations, 40

surface ships, three submarines, 14 national land forces, over 150 aircraft and more than 25,000 personnel are scheduled to participate. This year's exercise will include units or personnel from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, 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. RIMPAC is a unique training opportunity designed to foster and sustain the cooperative relationships that are critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world's oceans.

U.S. Central Command Update

From U.S. Central Command

July 7, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. - In the past 24 hours, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) forces successfully destroyed two Iranian-backed Houthi uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Additionally, partner forces successfully destroyed two Houthi UAVs over the Gulf of Aden. There were no injuries or damage reported by U.S., coalition, or merchant vessels.

It was determined these systems presented an imminent threat to U.S., coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region. These actions were taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S., coalition, and merchant vessels.

July 4, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – In the past 24 hours U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) forces successfully destroyed two Iranian-backed Houthi uncrewed surface vessels (USV) in the Red Sea and one Houthi radar site in a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen.

It was determined the USVs and radar site presented an imminent threat to U.S. and coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region. These actions were taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure.

July 3, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – In the past 24 hours, U.S. Central Command forces successfully destroyed two Iranian-backed Houthi radar sites in Houthi controlled areas of Yemen and two uncrewed surface vessels (USV) in the Red Sea.

It was determined the radar sites and USVs presented imminent threats to U.S., coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region. This action was taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure.

USNS Burlington Departs for Continuing Promise 2024 Deployment



NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Fla. (July 3, 2024) The USNS Burlington (T-EPF 10) departs Naval Station Mayport for Continuing Promise 2024 on July 3, 2024. Continuing Promise 2024 marks the 14th mission to the region since 2007 and the second aboard USNS Burlington. The mission will foster goodwill, strengthen existing partnerships with partner nations, and encourage the establishment of new partnerships among countries, non-government organizations, and international organizations. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alexa Trafton)

[By USNAVSOUTH/4TH Fleet Public Affairs](#), 4 July 2024

MAYPORT, Fla. – The U.S. Navy Spearhead-class fast transport ship, USNS Burlington (T-EPF 10), departed from Naval Station Mayport for Latin America and the Caribbean in support of Continuing Promise 2024.

During this iteration of U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet's Continuing Promise mission, the 14th since 2007, Burlington will stop in Jamaica, Costa Rica, Honduras, Colombia, and Panama to share knowledge and provide

side-by-side professional expertise with international partners.

“One of the major benefits of being aboard the USNS Burlington for Continuing Promise 2024 is that this ship is incredibly versatile and has the ability to conduct a variety of mission types,” said Lt. Cmdr. Zachary Smith, mission commander for Continuing Promise 2024.

Christened in 2018, the USNS Burlington is the tenth Spearhead-class ship. It is also the first ship in service named to honor Burlington, Vermont, the state’s largest city. The ship has an off-load ramp for vehicles to move on and off the ship and a flight deck rated to be capable of receiving U.S. Navy helicopters. Operated by a crew of 22, it is capable of transporting over 300 personnel. Of the U.S. Navy personnel onboard, there are 18 unique enlisted job specialties and 10 unique officer specialties to support eight different mission areas.

“The better we can learn to work together during missions such as Continuing Promise the better we can work together as we respond to the real-world challenges that will inevitably come,” said Smith.

The first mission stop for Burlington will be Kingston, Jamaica. While there, embarked medical personnel will work with local medical practitioners to provide enhanced direct patient care, share knowledge and expertise, and strengthen partnership between the U.S. military and Jamaican civilian and military officials.

“It’s important to contribute to other countries... and help out any way we can,” said Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Ricardo Maldonado, a dental technician from Navy Medical Readiness Training Command Portsmouth. While providing assistance to the dental officer onboard, he expects to put smiles on people’s

faces by providing them with the medical attention they need.

Pharmacists, optometrists, nurses, biomedical technicians, optometrists, dentists, and general practitioners will be among the 30 U.S. Navy medical professionals sharing their expertise and working with local patients.

Just as in past iterations of Continuing Promise, an integral part of the mission is the United Nations' (UN) Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) initiative. WPS is derived from a UN resolution signed in 2000 that recognizes women are disproportionately affected by crisis and conflict and aims to provide better support and protection to provide a safer environment in their communities.

“Continuing Promise 2024 will feature at least two multi-day seminars in each location discussing the prevention of gender-based violence, in addition to discussions with the military forces of each partner nation regarding women in the military as it relates to the initiative,” said Smith. “WPS is a cornerstone of the USSOUTHCOM and U.S. 4th Fleet mission because they believe that societies are more peaceful and prosperous when women and men have equal rights, liberties, dignities, and access to resources.”

These seminars are an important way to share knowledge on and provide tools to prevent gender-based violence and improve cooperation on stopping gender inequality.

DoD Announces Modernization Plan for Tactical Aircraft Based in Japan

From the U.S. Department of Defense, July 3, 2024



U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 121 approach the amphibious assault carrier USS Tripoli while underway, June 11, 2022.

U.S. Marine Corps | Sgt. Jackson Ricker

The Department of Defense (DoD), in close coordination with the government of Japan, today announced a plan to upgrade U.S. tactical aircraft laydown across multiple military installations in Japan.

The modernization plan, which will be implemented over the next several years, reflects more than \$10 billion of capability investments to enhance the U.S.-Japan Alliance, bolster regional deterrence and strengthen peace and stability

in the Indo-Pacific region.

The U.S. Air Force will upgrade its presence at Kadena Air Base by deploying 36 F-15EX aircraft to replace 48 F-15C/D aircraft as part of a planned divestment and modernization. The Joint Force will continue to maintain a rotational presence of 4th and 5th generation tactical aircraft at Kadena Air Base throughout this transition.

The U.S. Air Force will also upgrade its presence at Misawa Air Base from 36 F-16 aircraft to 48 F-35A aircraft, leading to greater tactical aircraft capacity and capability.

At Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Iwakuni, the U.S. Marine Corps will modify the number of F-35B aircraft to support the service's force design modernization implementation. The U.S. Marine Corps will continue to maintain an enduring and rotational aircraft presence at MCAS Iwakuni to ensure the necessary capabilities to support the defense of Japan.

The department's plan to station the Joint Force's most advanced tactical aircraft in Japan demonstrates the ironclad U.S. commitment to the defense of Japan and both countries' shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

II Marine Expeditionary Force: Ready for a New Challenge as a Joint Task

Force Headquarters

From II Marine Expeditionary Force, 2 July 2024



U.S. Marines with 2nd Air-Naval Gunfire Liaison Company, II MEF Information Group, II Marine Expeditionary pull coordinates for the Swedish mechanized 120mm mortars to target during BALTOPS 24 on Gotland, Sweden, June 16, 2024. *U.S. Marine Corps | Captain Mark Andries*

MARINE CORPS BASE CAMP LEJEUNE, North Carolina – A key transformational step in the Marine Corps' journey of Force Design occurred in early July at the II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) headquarters in Camp Lejeune.

During a visit by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Eric M. Smith, II MEF was officially validated as a Joint Task Force – Capable (JTF-C) headquarters on June 10, 2024. This milestone means II MEF is now ready to lead and coordinate complex operations involving different branches of the U.S. military and allied forces.

Transitioning to a JTF-C headquarters involves integrating and coordinating forces across land, sea, air, space and cyber domains, preparing for any situation, from peacekeeping missions to full-scale military operations. To prepare for this new role, II MEF participated in several key exercises that tested their ability to plan, execute and sustain complex operations.

From Feb. 10-17, 2023, around 1,200 Marines and Sailors with II MEF and its four major subordinate commands—2nd Marine Division, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, 2nd Marine Air Wing, and 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade – conducted Marine Expeditionary Force Exercise (MEFEX) 23 at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. This exercise showcased II MEF's ability to command and control forces during a simulated peacekeeping operation in a challenging environment. It was a crucial step toward their JTF-C validation.

II MEF came together again in Camp Lejeune from Sept. 9-15, 2023, to exercise command and control capabilities with the subordinate commands as well as joint enablers during Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX) 23. JTFEX 23 simulated II MEF's ability to operate as a task force during large-scale all-domain operations. Various tools were employed to test the command-and-control capabilities of II MEF during JTFEX 23 including a simulated information environment that tested the real-time response capabilities of the MEF.

In March 2024, II MEF participated in Nordic Response 24 in Norway, assuming authority as the Land Component Command headquarters for a multinational force. This exercise involved 20,000 participants from NATO allies and Nordic partner nations, focusing on crisis response in northern Europe. II MEF worked closely with Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish forces, demonstrating their ability to lead in cold weather conditions.

The validation process involved rigorous assessments by higher

headquarters and independent evaluators, who verified II MEF's capabilities in command and control, intelligence integration, logistics and cyber defense. Colonel Matthew T. McSorley, II MEF G-37 Director of Training, praised II MEF's achievement.

"The validation of II MEF as a Joint Task Force – Capable headquarters is a significant milestone for the Marine Corps and our joint force capabilities. This transformation establishes II MEF as the service-retained JTF-C headquarters for assignment and tasking as an Immediate Response Force (IRF); enhancing our ability to respond to crises and underscores our commitment to maintaining a robust, adaptable, and ready force," McSorley said.

As a JTF-C headquarters, II MEF will continue to evolve, embracing new technologies and doctrines. This new role places them at the forefront of the Marine Corps' efforts to adapt to a complex global security environment. II MEF will play a crucial role in ensuring that the United States and its allies can face future conflicts with unity and strength.

Training Air Wing 2 Completes 1 Million Hours in T-45 Goshawk

By [Chief of Naval Air Training](#) Public Affairs, July 2, 2024



Captain Aaron Rybar, commander, Training Air Wing – 2, addresses the crowd during a commemorative ceremony onboard Naval Air Station Kingsville, July 2. *U.S. Navy | Ensign Alan Wang*

KINGSVILLE, Texas – Representatives from Boeing, Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA), Training Air Wing (TAW) 2, the city of Kingsville and more met onboard Naval Air Station Kingsville to commemorate one million hours cumulatively flown by the fleet of T-45 Goshawks assigned to TAW-2, July 2.

Three commemorative plaques were presented by Boeing to CNATRA, TAW-2 and the city of Kingsville during a short ceremony on the flightline. Capt. Aaron Rybar, Commander, Training Air Wing – 2, received one of the commemorative plaques on behalf of the local training wing. Notably, the one-million-hour milestone does not include flight time for T-45 Goshawks assigned to TAW-1, located in Meridian, Mississippi.

“On May 1st, 1992, the first class of flight instructors from VT-21 assigned to fly [train] the next generation of Naval

Aviators in the new T-45A Goshawk began their training in the T-45." said Rybar. "On 26 February, 2024, 30 years and one month after the Navy went full operational capability [with the] T-45 aircraft, Lt. Cmdr. Thomas 'Sock' Cruz, from VT-22, operating aircraft 267, BuNo 165067, on a basic fighter maneuver [training] event, crossed over the one-millionth flight hour in the T-45 here at NAS Kingsville Texas."

Rear Admiral Rich Brophy, Chief of Naval Air Training, commands all five naval air training wings and has led the Naval Air Training Command (NATRACOM) since July 2022. Brophy addressed the crowd after Rybar, discussing the importance of the T-45 in training Naval Aviators over the last three decades, said, "A strong national defense starts with how we project our power. From the United States Navy standpoint, we project power with carrier air wings. And our carrier air wings are trained right here in Kingsville. This is the heart, the heart of the United States Navy. And the number-one battering ram of the United States Navy is a carrier air wing," Brophy said. "So, when you reflect on the million-hour mark, think about that for a second, that's 114 years of continuous flying."

The ceremony tied together a community of men and women that have supported T-45 operations in South Texas for over three decades. Mayor Sam Fugate was present to receive recognition for the one millionth hour on behalf of the city of Kingsville, which has supported generations of Naval Aviators since the base was founded in 1942 as an auxiliary air station.

"There's nothing like feeling apart of the community, and this community does it to the Nth degree," said Brophy. "So, thank you mayor, thank you Dick [Dick Messbarger, Executive Director at Kingsville], and thank you all that have leaned in to keep Kingsville operating and to support our Navy family."

CNATRA's mission is to train, mentor and deliver the highest

quality Naval Aviators who prevail in competition, crisis, and conflict. Headquartered at NAS Corpus Christi, CNATRA comprises five training air wings in Florida, Mississippi and Texas, which are home to 17 training squadrons. In addition, CNATRA oversees the Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron the Blue Angels and the training curriculum for all fleet replacement squadrons.

HMLA-269 Reactivates After 18-Month Hiatus



U.S. Marine Corps Col. David Fitzsimmons, from Pennsylvania and commanding officer of Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 29, addresses the audience during the reactivation ceremony of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 269 at Marine Corps Air Station New River, North Carolina, July 1, 2024.

(U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. Theodore Bergan)

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION CHERRY POINT, N.C. – Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMLA) 269, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (MAW), reactivated during a ceremony this morning aboard Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) New River, North Carolina.

HMLA-269, known as “The Gunrunners,” previously deactivated on Dec. 9, 2022, in accordance with Force Design initiatives. Throughout the course of the squadron’s brief deactivation, the Marine Corps conducted analysis on force management in order to ensure that no operational commitments were left unfulfilled. This analysis identified the need for an additional HMLA squadron on the East Coast to provide sustained operational support to II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF). This change within 2nd MAW represents incremental change to Force Design to meet the conditions described in recent national security and defense strategies.

The reactivation ceremony featured remarks from Col. David Fitzsimmons, commanding officer, Marine Aircraft Group 29, who thanked the various advocates at 2nd MAW, II MEF, and Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, that made HMLA-269’s reactivation possible.

“It was a decidedly somber day when HMLA-269 deactivated,” said Fitzsimmons. “That was certainly reversed today.”

Also present was Lt. Col. Jens Gilbertson, commanding officer, HMLA-269, who highlighted Marine Attack Helicopter Squadron (HMA) 269’s legacy as the Marine Corps’ first attack helicopter squadron and recounted the multiple pilots and aircrew within HMA and HMLA-269’s history who received the Distinguished Flying Cross. He noted that HMA and HMLA-269 was recognized eight times by the Marine Corps Aviation Association as the Marine Corps’ Light Attack Helicopter Squadron of the Year, more so than any other Marine Corps light attack helicopter squadron in history. Gilbertson also recognized the Marines of HMLA-269 who enabled the squadron’s

reactivation.

“Ultimately, it was up to these Marines to get it done,” said Gilbertson. “They have discipline, and they have precision, and that’s the same discipline and precision they’re going to bring when they maintain and fly our aircraft.”

The squadron will resume operating the AH-1Z “Viper” attack helicopter and the UH-1Y “Venom” utility helicopter. Both aircraft are manned, trained, and equipped to fight from the sea into austere environments and confined littoral spaces, and support the Marine Air-Ground Task Force by providing offensive air support, utility support, armed escort, and airborne supporting arms coordination.

Shield AI’s V-BAT Tapped for \$198M Coast Guard Contract



WASHINGTON (July 1, 2024) – [Shield AI](#), the defense technology company building the world’s best AI pilot, announced today that the U.S. Coast Guard [has awarded](#) the company a \$198,106,876 indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity firm fixed-price contract to provide Contractor Owned Contractor Operated (COCO) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) services. This service will be implemented using the V-BAT unmanned aircraft system (UAS).

“We’re excited to support the U.S. Coast Guard with their ISR operations. All maritime vessels will become drone carriers as maritime forces move to deploy distributed, affordable, intelligent drones. V-BAT’s selection by the U.S. Coast Guard is indicative of a broader market movement where increasingly customers are recognizing they can accomplish the vast majority of their mission sets with affordable drones rather than exquisite, expensive crewed or uncrewed aircraft,” said Brandon Tseng, Shield AI’s President, Co-founder, and former Navy SEAL.

The [V-BAT](#) series aircraft is the only operationally deployed single-engine ducted fan vertical takeoff and land (VTOL) UAS

that can launch and recover from a hover and fly on wing in horizontal flight. With more than five years of persistent operational experience at sea, U.S. and international customers view the V-BAT as a flexible platform capable of performing Group 2 to Group 5 UAS missions and beyond.