

USS Theodore Roosevelt Returns from Deployment



Aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) returns to Naval Air Station North Island. Theodore Roosevelt, lead ship of the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group, returned to Naval Air Station North Island May 25 after a deployment to U.S. 7th Fleet in support of maritime security operations to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Natalie M. Byers*

SAN DIEGO – The Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) returned to San Diego, May 25, marking the completion of its deployment to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility, the U.S. 3rd Fleet's Public Affairs office said in a May 25 release.

Theodore Roosevelt, flagship of the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group (TRCSG), departed on deployment Dec. 23, 2020, to the U.S. 3rd Fleet and 7th Fleet areas of operation.

"Whether it was operating in the Indo-Pacific and the South China Sea or high northern latitudes in the Gulf of Alaska, Carrier Strike Group Nine demonstrated that the U.S. Navy is ready for anything," said Rear Adm. Doug Verissimo, commander, Carrier Strike Group Nine. "We met the challenges that COVID-19 brought head-on and successfully deployed forward to work with our allies and partners from Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea."

In U.S. 7th Fleet, Theodore Roosevelt's primary mission was conducting maritime security operations, ensuring freedom of navigation and economic trade in the Indo-Pacific region. In support of allies and partners, Theodore Roosevelt conducted bilateral exercises with the Indian navy and air force, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, Royal Australian Navy, Republic of Korea navy, and the Royal Malaysian Air Force, focusing on

building capabilities and increasing combat readiness to win the high-end fight. In May, Theodore Roosevelt participated in exercise Northern Edge 2021 in the Gulf of Alaska.

“I am incredibly proud of this crew for all their hard work and sacrifice throughout this deployment,” said Capt. Eric Anduze, commanding officer of Theodore Roosevelt. “Our presence in the Indo-Pacific had a significant impact on maintaining stability and security in the region that would not have been possible without every single Sailor aboard.”

Theodore Roosevelt joined forces with the Nimitz Carrier Strike Group to conduct dual-carrier operations and, on a later date, the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group in the South China Sea for expeditionary strike force operations, increasing interoperability as well as command and control capabilities.

The TRCSG consists of USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 11, the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Bunker Hill (CG 52), Destroyer Squadron 23, and the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Russell (DDG 59).

Theodore Roosevelt’s embarked air wing consists of the “Tomcatters” of Strike Fighter Squadrons (VFA) 31, “Golden Warriors” of VFA-87, “Blue Diamonds” of VFA-146, “Black Knights” of VFA-154, “Liberty Bells” of Airborne Command and Control Squadron (VAW) 115, “The Gray Wolves” of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 142, “Wolf Pack” of Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 75, “Eightballers” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 8 and “Providers” of Fleet Logistic Support Squadron (VRC) 30 Detachment 3.

Navy Commissions Littoral Combat Ship USS Mobile



The crew of USS Mobile (LCS 26), man the ship during the commissioning ceremony of Mobile. Mobile is the Navy's 13th Independence-variant littoral combat ship. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alex Millar*

MOBILE, Ala. – The U.S. Navy commissioned its newest Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Mobile (LCS 26) during a ceremony in Mobile, Alabama, May 22, said commander, Littoral Combat Ship Squadron One.

Due to COVID-19 limitations, 400 guests attended the socially distanced ceremony for the littoral combat ship named in honor of the city in which it was built. Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-Alabama), delivered the ceremony's principal address.

"The United States has been the greatest source of good in the history of the world and we will continue to be a force for good because of the brave men and women that we have here today," said Tuberville.

Guest speakers for the event also included Kay Ivey, governor of Alabama, Sandy Stimpson, mayor of Mobile, and James Geurts, performing the duties of the Undersecretary of the Navy.

"The ships that this city has built are literally sailing on every ocean right now," said Geurts, referencing ship manufacturer Austal USA, based in Mobile, Alabama.

Rebecca Byrne, president and CEO of The Community Foundation of South Alabama and wife of former Alabama U.S.

Representative Bradley Byrne, provided remarks as the ship's sponsor.

"We have the distinction of the USS Mobile being built and commissioned in its namesake city here in the historic port of Mobile," said Byrne. "We welcome the ship to the United States fleet that bears our great name and comes on great Navy tradition."

During the ceremony, Mobile's commanding officer, Cmdr. Christopher W. Wolff, reported the ship ready and Byrne gave the traditional order to "man our ship and bring her to life!

"The commissioning of the fleet's newest warship is an awesome occasion and with it comes the equally awesome responsibility to prepare ourselves to go forward and conduct our nation's business," said Wolff.

The ceremony completed a weeklong series of events celebrating the ship and its namesake city. USS Mobile is the fifth ship named in honor of the port city on Alabama's Gulf Coast.

Mobile will be homeported in San Diego with sister ships USS Independence (LCS 2), USS Coronado (LCS 4), USS Jackson (LCS 6), USS Montgomery (LCS 8), USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10), USS Omaha (LCS 12), USS Manchester (LCS 14), USS Tulsa (LCS 16), USS Charleston (LCS 18), USS Cincinnati (LCS 20), USS Kansas City (LCS 22), and USS Oakland (LCS 24).

The LCS is a fast, agile, mission-focused platform designed to operate in near-shore environments while capable of open-ocean tasking. The LCS can support forward presence, maritime security, sea control, and deterrence.

Makin Island ARG, 15th MEU Returns from 7-Month Deployment



The amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island (LHD 8) transits through the Gulf of Alaska, May 9, 2021. The Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group and the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit are conducting routine operations in the U.S. 3rd Fleet area of operations. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Aaron Sperle*

SAN DIEGO – More than 5,000 Sailors and Marines of the Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) returned to their San Diego homeport over the weekend, concluding a seven-month deployment to the U.S. 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th Fleet areas of operation, the Makin Island ARG Public Affairs/15th MEU Communication Strategy and Operations said.

Marines with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), embarked aboard the ships of the ready group, arrived off the coast of Southern California, May 21, to disembark at Camp Pendleton, California. USS Makin Island (LHD 8), USS San Diego (LPD 22) and USS Somerset (LPD 25) will return to port at Naval Base San Diego following the offload. A contingent of 15th MEU personnel will remain aboard ARG shipping for the pier side arrival.

“I am so proud of the resilience and strength of character our Sailors and Marines displayed while serving our nation across four different fleets,” said Capt. Henry Kim, Makin Island ARG commander. “Despite the additional challenges of protecting a COVID-free bubble within the ARG, our Blue-Green Team determinedly exemplified the mottos of all three ships, ‘Gung

Ho!' 'Stay Classy!' and 'Let's Roll!'"

The Makin Island ARG is comprised of the amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island, and amphibious transport dock ships USS San Diego and USS Somerset, and led by Commander, Amphibious Squadron Three. The 15th MEU consists of the Command Element; the Aviation Combat Element, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 164 (Reinforced); the Ground Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team 1/4; and the Logistics Combat Element, Combat Logistics Battalion 15.

The ARG-MEU team departed Nov. 10, after completing a pre-deployment sequester and back-to-back at-sea exercises in October.

"The 15th MEU and Makin Island ARG deployed during an unprecedented pandemic and demonstrated the ability of the Navy and Marine Corps team to successfully and safely execute operations in a COVID-19 environment," said Col. Fridrik Fridriksson, 15th MEU commanding officer. "I am so incredibly proud of the professionalism, toughness and mental resiliency demonstrated by our Marines and Sailors. They have accomplished great things during this deployment."

During the deployment, Sailors and Marines supported Operation Octave Quartz (00Q) in Somalia, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) in Iraq and Syria, Theater Amphibious Combat Rehearsals in Kuwait and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Exercise Northern Edge 2021 in Alaska.

Less than two months into deployment, the ARG-MEU team, operated under U.S. Naval Forces Africa, and supported repositioning efforts in the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility (AOR). From Dec. 20, 2020 to Jan. 31, 2021, the Makin Island ARG and 15th MEU conducted operations in Somalia and off the coast, as part of the Joint Force Maritime Component Command to Joint Task Force-Quartz, to provide

support to OOD in relocating Department of Defense forces in Somalia to other East Africa operating locations while maintaining pressure on violent extremists and supporting partner forces.

“From aboard the Makin Island ARG, the 15th MEU provided contingency response forces on a 24-hour alert status and security forces to facilitate the safe and expedient repositioning of troops from within Somalia,” said Lt. Col. George Flynn, commanding officer of BLT 1/4, 15th MEU. “Operation Octave Quartz demonstrated the 15th MEU’s ability to flex the entire Marine Air-Ground Task Force to meet combatant commander requirements.”

In U.S. 5th Fleet, from February to March 2021, the ARG-MEU team operated in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea, and conducted Theater Amphibious Combat Rehearsals in Kuwait, Ras Al-Khair and Tabuk in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to enhance proficiency and readiness while maintaining a tiered crisis response posture in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) AOR. Ships of the ARG also participated in Group Arabian Sea Warfare Exercise (GASWEX) 21 with the French Marine Nationale’s Charles de Gaulle carrier strike group. GASWEX 21 was a multilateral maritime exercise in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman with France, Belgium, and Japan, which allowed participating naval forces to effectively develop the necessary skills in maritime security, anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine warfare to address threats to regional security, freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce.

Additionally, Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II joint strike fighters with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 164 (Reinforced), 15th MEU, conducted nine OIR missions as part of broader counterterrorism operations.

While operating in U.S. 7th Fleet supporting U.S. Indo-Pacific

Command, VMM 164 conducted bilateral operations with the Republic of Singapore Air Force in international waters near Singapore. Somerset participated in La Perouse, a multinational exercise conducted with ships from the Royal Australian Navy, French Navy, and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. The exercise was designed to strengthen interoperability and enhance cooperation in maritime surveillance, maritime interdiction operations, and air operations amongst all participating nations.

The ARG conducted Expeditionary Strike Force (ESF) operations with the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group and the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Port Royal (CG 73) in the South China Sea. ESF operations demonstrate U.S. capability to quickly aggregate an integrated naval force to operate all-domain warfare anywhere international law allows.

After returning to U.S. 3rd Fleet, the ARG-MEU team supported Northern Edge 2021 (NE21) from May 3 to 14. Approximately 15,000 U.S. service members participated in a joint training exercise hosted by U.S. Pacific Air Forces on and above the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex, the Gulf of Alaska, and temporary maritime activities area. NE21 was one in a series of military exercises designed to sharpen the joint forces' skills; to practice tactics, techniques, and procedures; to improve command, control and communication relationships; and to develop cooperative plans and programs.

Makin Island, flagship of the ARG, supported every unit's operations and hosted five embarked units in addition to the MEU, while supporting a broad cross-section of mission areas.

"This deployment has been operationally diverse – from operating in the heat during Operation Octave Quartz to the cold weather for Northern Edge," said Capt. Tom Ulmer, Makin Island commanding officer. "We have sailed independently as

well as formed expeditionary strike forces with partners, allies, and other U.S. forces including the French carrier, Charles De Galle and USS Theodore Roosevelt strike groups. We have conducted operations in all warfare areas, while building a strong Makin Island / 15th MEU team – Team Raider – that excelled in all of our challenges – including overcoming COVID. I am very proud of all our Sailors and Marines for their hard work and dedication. We are excited to be home to reunite with family and friends.”

The ARG-MEU conducted more than 10,000 hours of flight operations, 6,800 launch and recoveries, and traveled more than 135,000 nautical miles of open ocean and restricted water transits.

The Makin Island ARG and 15th MEU provided numbered fleet and combatant commanders with a responsive, flexible and forward-deployed asset capable of maritime power projection, contingency operations and crisis response. Their capabilities enabled the shaping the operational environment to protect the United States and allied interests in any threat environment.

Construction Starts on Fleet Oiler Robert F. Kennedy



The Belgian navy Karel Doorman-class frigate Leopold I (F930), left, and the Portuguese navy frigate NRP Francisco de Almeida (F334), right, conduct a replenishment-at-sea with the Henry J. Kaiser-class underway replenishment oiler USNS Patuxent (T-AO 201), center. Construction has now begun on the USNS Robert F. Kennedy (T-AO 208). *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Cameron Stoner*

SAN DIEGO – Construction on the USNS Robert F. Kennedy (T-AO 208) began at the General Dynamics – National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (GD-NASSCO) shipyard, May 21, the Navy's Program Executive Office – Ships said in a release.

T-AO 208 will be operated by the Navy's Military Sealift Command and is the first ship named after the Navy veteran, former U.S. Attorney General and U.S. senator from New York.

"USNS Robert F. Kennedy will provide significant contributions to the fleet, serving as the primary fuel pipeline to refuel ships at sea. The building of the John Lewis-class ships marks an important milestone in enhancing our Navy's fleet capabilities and providing critical support to our Sailors," said John Lighthammer, Support Ships, Boats and Craft acting program manager, Program Executive Office, Ships.

The ships are based on commercial design standards and will recapitalize the current T-AO 187 Class Fleet Replenishment Oilers to provide underway replenishment of fuel to U.S. Navy ships and jet fuel for aircraft assigned to aircraft carriers. These ships are part of the Navy's Combat Logistics Force and will become the backbone of the fuel delivery system.

GD-NASSCO is also currently in production on USNS John Lewis (T-AO 205) USNS Harvey Milk (T-AO 206). USNS Lucy Stone (T-AO 209) and USNS Sojourner Truth (T-AO 210) are under contract.

USS Wichita Busts \$12 Million

Drugs in Caribbean Sea



The Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Wichita (LCS 13) fires at the floating training target during the bi-lateral live fire exercise with the Jamaica Defense Force Coast Guard patrol vessel HMJS Cornwall, April 9, 2021. Wichita is deployed to the U.S. 4th Fleet of operations to support Joint Interagency Task Force South's mission, which include counter illicit drug trafficking in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. *U.S. NAVY / Aerographer's Mate 1st Class Keith E. Mitchell*

CARIBBEAN SEA – The Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Wichita (LCS 13) with embarked U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) 402 has seized an estimated \$12 million in suspected drugs, the U.S. 4th Fleet Public Affairs said in a release.

While on routine patrol, Wichita's embarked helicopter, assigned to the "Sea Knights" of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 22, Detachment 8, located a go-fast vessel (GFV) in the central Caribbean. Upon intercepting the vessel, Wichita launched her small boat and subsequently fired warning shots from the helicopter to achieve control of the vessel. The vessel was searched and three suspected drug traffickers were detained.

Wichita and the embarked LEDET recovered an estimated 289 kilograms of suspected cocaine and one pound of suspected marijuana worth an estimated wholesale value of \$12 million.

"Once again the Wichita team performed exceptionally well in a challenging situation." said Cmdr. Eric Rolfs, Wichita's executive officer. "Working together, along with our partners and allies to keep these waters safe is what our mission out here is all about."

USS Wichita is deployed to the U.S. 4th Fleet area of operations to support Joint Interagency Task Force South's mission, which includes counter-illicit drug trafficking missions in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific.

MARAD Announces Funding Opportunity for Marine Highway Program



A map of America's Marine Highway routes. *MARITIME ADMINISTRATION*

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration (MARAD) announced on May 21 the availability of \$10.8 million in grant funding for the America's Marine Highway Program (AMHP). The AMHP's purpose is to encourage the use of America's 25,000 miles of navigable waterways. It provides an efficient, sustainable and cost-effective transportation system – alleviating road congestion, reducing carbon dioxide, and supporting job employment within local communities.

“The America's Marine Highway Program increases the use of environmentally sustainable practices to move freight across our transportation system.” said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. “These investments help local communities reduce congestion and create more economic opportunities.”

The AMHP supports the increased use of our inland waterways to relieve landside congestion, provide new and efficient

transportation options and increase the productivity of the surface transportation system.

Marine highways are all-water routes, often running alongside or near major highways. The AMHP helps to further integrate coastal and inland waterways into our transportation system, providing alternate options to traditional shipping methods. The increased movement of freight by water is also essential to achieving greenhouse gas reductions, as it requires less energy and releases fewer emissions than other options.

“The America’s Marine Highway Program provides essential funding to support the expanded movement of freight by water, while also supporting port communities on our coasts and inland waterways,” said Acting Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley. “By investing in these services, we are able to bolster local communities and generate American jobs.”

Since its inception, the AMHP has designated 45 marine highway projects, 21 of which are currently operating. Creating new Marine Highway “container on barge” services on commercially navigable waterways helps create American jobs in U.S. ports, vessels, shipyards and surrounding areas.

For example, since 2010, the Port of Virginia’s 64 Express service, connecting Hampton Roads and Richmond, Virginia via the James River, has removed more than 221,000 cargo containers that would otherwise be carried by trucks along the heavily congested I-64 corridor. This one marine highway service has saved approximately \$5.9 million in road maintenance and more than 17.5 thousand tons of carbon dioxide emissions while also supporting 1,100 direct and indirect jobs.

Through previous MARAD awards, an investment of over \$4 million in federal funding leveraged \$436 million in private investment in an economically distressed area near the Virginia Port Authority’s Richmond Marine Terminal.

Only Marine Highway Projects previously designated by the secretary of transportation are eligible to receive funding under the AMHP.

Applications for the grants are due by 5:00 P.M. EDT on June 4, 2021. Additional information is available in the Federal Register [here](#) or by contacting Fred Jones, Office of Ports and Waterways Planning, 1200 New Jersey Ave., SE, Washington, DC 20590, 202-366-1123 or Fred.Jones@dot.gov.

Navy to Commission Littoral Combat Ship USS Mobile



The future Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Mobile (LCS 26) conducts sea trials. USS Mobile is set to be commissioned on 22 May in Mobile, Alabama. *AUSTAL*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will commission its newest Independence-variant littoral combat ship, the future USS Mobile (LCS 26), at 10:00 a.m. CDT, Saturday, May 22 in Mobile, Alabama, the Defense Department said in a May 21 release.

Due to public health and safety concerns related to COVID-19, the commissioning ceremony is private with a limited audience.

Mr. James “Hondo” Geurts, performing the duties of under secretary of the Navy, and Vice Adm. John Mustin, chief of Naval Reserve, will provide remarks. Rebecca Byrne, president and CEO of The Community Foundation of South Alabama and wife of former Alabama U.S. Representative Bradley Byrne, is the ship’s sponsor. The ceremony will observe a time-honored Navy

tradition when Byrne gives the order to “man our ship and bring her to life!”

U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville of Alabama will deliver the commissioning ceremony’s principal address.

Cmdr. Christopher W. Wolff, a third-generation naval officer, is the ship’s commanding officer and leads a crew of 70 officers and enlisted Sailors.

“It has been an amazing experience to get to know our namesake city so well, while having the opportunity to live, work, and commission the ship right here in Mobile, where she was built,” said Wolff. “We have definitely felt welcomed into the community and have created a strong connection to the area that I am confident will last. Mobile bills itself as a city that is born to celebrate and the crew has really adopted that philosophy as we celebrate our shipmates every day.”

The ship is 421 feet in length, has a beam of 103 feet, and a navigational draft of 15 feet. It is powered by two gas turbine engines, two main propulsion diesel engines, and four waterjets to speeds up to 40-plus knots.

Built by Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama, Mobile was christened Dec. 7, 2019, and delivered to the Navy on Dec. 9, 2020.

Mobile, the fifth ship to bear the name, is a fast, agile, mission-focused platform designed to operate in near-shore environments while capable of open-ocean tasking and winning against 21st-century coastal threats such as submarines, mines, and swarming small craft. LCS are capable of supporting forward presence, maritime security, sea control, and deterrence.

USS Mobile will be homeported at Naval Base San Diego, California.

The event will be live streamed

at <https://allhands.navy.mil/Media/Live-Stream/> to offer viewing by the general public. The link becomes active approximately 10 minutes prior to the event (9:50 a.m. CDT).

U.S. Navy Exercises Option for Second Constellation-Class Guided Missile Frigate



An artist's rendering of the Constellation-class guided missile frigate. *U.S. NAVY*

WASHINGTON – The Navy awarded a contract option to Fincantieri Marinette Marine to build its second Constellation Class Guided Missile Frigate, the Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants (PEO USC) Public Affairs said in a May 20 release.

“The Navy Program Office is pleased to award the option for the USS Congress (FFG 63) to our industry partner Fincantieri Marinette Marine,” said Capt. Kevin Smith, major program manager for Constellation-Class Frigate (PMS 515). “As the second ship of the Constellation-Class Frigate Program, the USS Congress will provide a highly capable, next-generation surface combatant that our Navy and Nation needs.”

The future USS Congress (FFG 63) will be built at FMM's shipyard in Marinette, Wisc. where preparations are being made to begin construction on lead ship USS Constellation (FFG 62). Like its sister ship, FFG 63 will have multi-mission capability to conduct air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare, electronic warfare, and information operations. Shipboard systems will include an Enterprise Air

Surveillance Radar (EASR) radar, Baseline Ten (BL10) AEGIS Combat System, a Mk41 Vertical Launch System (VLS), communications systems, MK110 57mm Gun Weapon System (GWS) and added capability in the Electronic Warfare/Information Operations area with design flexibility for future growth.

The Constellation-Class Frigate will be an important part of the Navy's future Fleet. It represents the evolution of the Navy's small surface combatant force with increased lethality, survivability, and improved capability to support the National Defense Strategy across the full range of military operations. It will help conduct distributed maritime operations more effectively and improve the Navy's ability to fight both in contested blue-water and littoral environments.

The acquisition process for the Navy's Constellation Class Frigate began in 2017. Since then, the Navy has worked closely with industry to balance cost and capability.

Joint Force Command Norfolk Kicks off Part 1 of NATO's Steadfast Defender 2021



Gen. David H. Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, visited Her Majesty's Ship Queen Elizabeth at sea off the coast of Flamborough, United Kingdom, in October, 2020. The HMS Queen Elizabeth strike group is one of 20 ships participating in the NATO maritime live exercise Steadfast Defender. *U.S. MARINE CORPS*

ATLANTIC OCEAN – A dynamic NATO maritime live exercise (LIVEX)

has begun off the coast of Portugal with participation from 11 allied nations from North America and Europe as a part of Steadfast Defender 2021, May 20, Joint Force Command Norfolk said in a May 20 release.

The maritime LIVEX, led by Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFCNF), focuses on the rapid reinforcement of NATO's European allies by North American forces. Over 5,000 service members and 20 ships will be participating, including the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group HMS Queen Elizabeth; and 40 aircraft, including F-35B Joint Strike Fighters embarked.

"This challenging mission serves to demonstrate the unity of NATO allies and our readiness to deter conflict and aggression," said Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, Commander, JFCNF and U.S. 2nd Fleet. "It showcases our abilities, as an alliance, to maintain freedom of navigation, rule of law, and to effectively deter adversaries around the globe."

The size and scope of Steadfast Defender 2021 will test NATO's capability to secure the strategic and sea lines of communication and move large numbers of troops, equipment and supplies across the Atlantic and Europe in response to the exercise scenario. The prompt deployment of forces from North America, their movement across the European Continent, and the integration of multinational troops will strengthen the readiness and deterrence posture of Allied Command Operations.

"The 21st Century transatlantic link is complex and technologically advanced," said Royal Navy Rear Adm. Andrew Betton, deputy commander, JFCNF. "We will deter and defeat challenges to protect our economic prosperity and strategic lines of communication by keeping the arteries of commerce open on the world's interconnected oceans. This exercise will demonstrate alliance unity and the importance of the transatlantic bond to allied security."

There will be a serialized program over the course of two weeks that allows allied submarines, surface ships, and aircraft, to work together in a dynamic environment to prepare for challenging, high-end operations against near-peer competitors.

U.S. 2nd Fleet is acting as the Maritime Component Commander (MCC) for part one of Steadfast Defender 2021. Staff in support of the Maritime LIVEX embarked aboard the U.S. 6th Fleet command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20).

“The USS Mount Whitney plays a pivotal role with its communications capability,” said Rear Adm. Steve Waddell, Royal Canadian Navy and vice commander of U.S. 2nd Fleet, embarked aboard Mount Whitney as the leader of the MCC. “Second Fleet’s role as the MCC for the exercise demonstrates the United States’ ironclad commitment to NATO, and the U.S.’s dedication to further revitalize its relationship with the alliance.”

For added high-end complexity, the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group will integrate into the exercise as a testament to the seamlessness of our integration. USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7) and its ready group are providing reach to the MCC for the sea lines of communication protection mission.

This exercise is also part of the maiden deployment of the United Kingdom’s newest aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth. U.K. and U.S. F-35B Strike Fighters embarked, making it the world’s largest air group of fifth generation jets. It will also be the largest deployment of Fleet Air Arm helicopters in a decade.

Steadfast Defender 2021, NATO’s flagship exercise for 2021, is the first in a new series of long-planned NATO exercises to ensure that forces are trained, able to operate together and ready to respond to threats from any direction. This exercise will display the value of North America and Europe’s

interoperability and national security during challenging environments working together to keep nations safe in a more challenging security environment.

Steadfast Defender is comprised of three parts, made up of a series of linked exercises, taking place across the Atlantic and Europe. Part one is the maritime LIVEX focused on Transatlantic Reinforcement. Part two focuses on the enablement of Supreme Allied Commander Europe Area of Responsibility, Military Mobility and the Deployment of the NATO Response Force; and part three is when allies and partner nations will participate in various national exercises, including redeployment operations back to their home stations.

JFCNF is the only operational-level NATO command in North America and its establishment and location in Norfolk, Virginia, embodies the enduring trans-Atlantic commitment to collective security and defense of our allies and partners.

Participating units in the Maritime Live Exercise include: USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20) as the command and control platform, with the embarked U.S. 2nd Fleet Staff; the Royal Navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group with embarked U.S. Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, and cooperative deployers, the Dutch HNLMS Evertsen (F805), USS The Sullivans (DDG 68); the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group; Standing NATO Marine Groups 1 and 2; as well as surface ships and aircraft from Portugal, Spain, France, Canada, Turkey, Germany and Italy.

USS Ronald Reagan Carrier

Strike Group Departs Yokosuka for Spring Patrol



Sailors man the rails on the flight deck of the U.S. Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) as it departs Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan. Ronald Reagan, the flagship of Carrier Strike Group 5, provides a combat-ready force that protects and defends the United States, as well as the collective maritime interests of its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Dallas Snider*

YOKOSUKA, Japan – The U.S. Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) and its strike group, departed Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) May 19 to support security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, the ship's public affairs office said in a May 19 release.

During this routine at-sea period, Ronald Reagan, its strike group ships and the embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 5 are expected to work with allies and partners, promote adherence to a rules-based international order, as well as maintain presence and flexibility to meet the needs of the U.S. Department of Defense.

Ronald Reagan successfully completed sea trials in preparation for deployment on May 13.

“Ronald Reagan's flexible presence is a key element in helping assure our regional allies and partners that the United States remains committed to ensuring freedom of the seas,” said Capt. Fred Goldhammer, commanding officer of Ronald Reagan. “Across the globe, the crew aboard Ronald Reagan seeks to preserve ‘peace through strength’ and is ready to answer the call.”

Sailors manned the rails in summer white uniforms as the ship pulled away from the pier.

“The Ronald Reagan carrier strike group is excited to deploy and assume the watch during a time of unprecedented activity throughout the region,” said Rear Adm. Will Pennington, commander, Task Force 70, Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 5. “Our team has worked hard to prepare for this moment. Alongside our regional allies and partners, we are ready to respond to any contingency in any location to demonstrate our shared commitment to regional stability and adherence to international norms.”

The Ronald Reagan Strike Group also includes the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey (DDG 97) and the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh (CG 67).

The Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group is forward-deployed to the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. U.S. 7th Fleet is the largest numbered fleet in the world, and with the help of 35 other maritime-nation allies and partners, the U.S. Navy has operated in the Indo-Pacific region for more than 70 years, providing credible, ready forces to help preserve peace and prevent conflict.