

# Huntington Ingalls Industries Invests in Sea Machines

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Huntington Ingalls Industries' Technical Solutions division announced today that it has completed a strategic equity investment in Sea Machines Robotics Inc., a Boston-based autonomous technology company that specializes in advanced software for unmanned surface vessels (USVs).

"This investment represents our commitment to advanced innovation and competencies across the unmanned systems market," said Andy Green, HII executive vice president and president of Technical Solutions. "Sea Machines is making significant strides in the USV industry. We want to invest in their growth and continue to form complementary partnerships across this key domain."

Sea Machines was founded in 2015 and is an autonomous technology company that specializes in advanced control technology for workboats and other commercial surface vessels. They have installed their innovative autonomy software on vessels worldwide and support customers in the commercial, recreational and government market sectors. Their commercial, off-the-shelf technology can support remote controlled or fully autonomous command of vessels.

"Our partnership with Sea Machines gives us immediate access to state-of-the art solutions for U.S government work in the USV space," said Duane Fotheringham, president of Technical Solutions' Unmanned Systems. "Sea Machines' products align well with our existing autonomy capabilities, and we look forward to collaborating with their team on USV pursuits."

HII continues to expand in the rapidly growing autonomous and unmanned maritime systems industry. Earlier this year they added additional unmanned underwater vehicle capabilities –

with REMUS and Seaglider product lines through the March acquisition of Hydroid. While the company has worked on USVs in the past, this investment represents another milestone in their commitment to strengthen their leadership in unmanned systems.

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## **Coast Guard, CBP Interdict 23 Migrants Off Delray Beach**

MIAMI – Coast Guard and Customs and Border Patrol teams halted an illegal voyage, Thursday, about 8 miles east of Delray Beach, Florida, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a July 20 release.

Coast Guard Station Lake Worth Inlet, Coast Guard Cutter Ibis and CBP law enforcement teams stopped the 25-foot boat. The cutter crew safely embarked 23 Haitian migrants, two who were medically transported for symptoms of severe dehydration.

The interdicted migrants were turned over to Bahamian authorities for repatriation back to Haiti.

“These illegal ventures attempting to immigrate to the United States are extremely dangerous because weather and sea conditions can dramatically change and the vessels are not equipped with the required safety equipment for passenger operations putting lives at higher risk of being lost at sea,” said Lt. j.g. Karolina Del Hierro Vega, 7th Seventh District, Enforcement. “Migrants caught attempting to gain access into the U.S. through these illegal voyages will be repatriated to their country in accordance with existing U.S. immigration policy.”

The Coast Guard and CBP have interdicted approximately 2,500 Haitian migrants who have attempted to illegally enter the U.S via the maritime environment in fiscal year 2020, which began Oct. 1, 2019, compared to 3,499 Haitian migrants in fiscal year 2019. These numbers represent the total number of at-sea interdictions, landings and disruptions in the Florida Straits, the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean.

Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention. Throughout the interdiction Coast Guard crewmembers were equipped with personal protective equipment to minimize potential exposure to any possible case of COVID-19.

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## **Navy's Only Directed Energy Lab on a Sea Test Range Breaks Ground at NBVC Point Mugu**



NSWC PHD Technical Director Paul Mann, (far left); Cmdr. Andrew Olsen (back left) with NAVFAC/NBVC; Thomas Dowd, director, range department, NAWCWD/NAVAIR (front left); Jeff Harper (front center) of Harper Construction Co. Inc.; Marcos Gonzales (right back), NSWC PHD project lead for the Directed Energy Systems Integration Laboratory (DESIL); and NSWC PHD Commanding Officer Capt. Ray Acevedo (far right) at the DESIL groundbreaking, May 5. DANA WHITE

POINT MUGU, Calif. – Demonstrating that Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA) remains open for business despite the pandemic, Navy leaders and

private contractors have broken ground at Naval Base Ventura County's Point Mugu for what will become the fleet's only dedicated facility to test, fire and evaluate complete laser weapon systems in a maritime environment, the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD) said in a release.

The nearly 18,500-square-foot Directed Energy Systems Integration Laboratory (DESIL) will open in roughly a year along the Point Mugu Sea Range, enabling NSWC PHD to help accelerate delivery of laser lethality to the warfighter at sea, according to the release.

"Thank you to our partners who were able to join us today for this momentous occasion," said Capt. Ray Acevedo, NSWC PHD's commanding officer, at the small groundbreaking ceremony. "This lab is a great win for the Navy, and it further affirms that even during a crisis, the Navy and NAVSEA have been, and continue to be, open for business, executing our mission."

*"The combination of capabilities will be unlike that of any other facility, and will provide customers with a versatile venue for technology maturation and weapon system integration and test. This is a game-changer for the Navy, and will ensure this new technology is well-supported as it becomes a mainstay on naval combatants." – Robert Harriman, DESIL systems engineer with NSWC PHD*

Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, Naval Air Systems Command operates the 36,000-square-mile sea range, one of the reasons why NBVC was chosen for DESIL, said Thomas Dowd, director of the command's Range Department, during the ceremony.

"The value of the Point Mugu Sea Range is that you can put a facility of this nature right on the coastline, and it can operate in the sea range and take advantage of that testing capability," Dowd said. "The decision to build it here is a

recognition of the value of the partnership we have between location, geography, maritime environment and engineering talent at the two centers.”

Once operating, the facility recreates as realistically as possible how high-energy laser (HEL) weapons behave on a Navy ship platform – customers/users will test how HEL beams perform in sea conditions such as moisture, humidity, salt, fog, differing air densities and temperature changes will affect laser performance; how ships’ systems will power and cool the energy-intense weapons; and will test them by shooting at targets on the sea range and in the air over the sea range. Directed energy (DE) team members will support HEL weapons once installed on ships. DESIL will also serve as a laboratory for integrating, testing and evaluating developers’ new DE and HEL weapon prototypes.

Also attending the groundbreaking were Jeff Harper, owner and president of Harper Construction Co. Inc. of San Diego, which will build DESIL through a military construction contract, and Cmdr. Andrew Olson with Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC), DESIL design manager.

NAVFAC prepared DESIL’s request for proposal based on NSWC PHD’s requirements, awarded the design/build contract to Harper and will monitor the construction. The lab’s estimated cost is roughly \$23 million.

Navy In-Service Engineering Agents (ISEA) for ship-based combat and laser systems, will operate DESIL, enabling the lasers to support the fleet as crucial components of the Navy’s maritime superiority strategy.

“[At DESIL,] the ISEA engineers will recreate issues and investigate [engineering] issues for deployed DE-installed ships and use the lab as a test range asset,” said Marcos Gonzalez, NSWC PHD project lead for DESIL. “It [DESIL] could

[also] bring in industry-developed versions of lasers, and developers could perform firing exercises on the test range. We [also] want to make it open to others in the DE world, such as university researchers, because of its unique location, adjacent to the sea range.”

During the ceremony, NSWC PHD Technical Director Paul Mann discussed DE’s “enormous capability” for all warfighters across all military branches, and that DESIL’s ability to enable weapon systems integration is essential to the Navy’s delivery of that capability.

“Systems integration is going to allow government, military and industry professionals to come to this facility at Point Mugu and do extraordinary things for our United States and its citizens,” Mann said. “The amazing success that’s going to be hatched and inspired and born at this facility is something we haven’t yet totally imagined. When we are at our most lethal, we deter at our best, so this is an investment in the protection of our United States’ citizens.”

DESIL has also been designed to handle increasingly more powerful lasers.

The lab will include space to collaborate with Department of Defense, private industry and academia DE experts; a conference room; offices; and an area for high-velocity learning to potentially train Sailors.

“The combination of capabilities will be unlike that of any other facility, and will provide customers with a versatile venue for technology maturation and weapon system integration and test,” said Robert Harriman, DESIL systems engineer with NSWC PHD. “This is a game-changer for the Navy, and will ensure this new technology is well-supported as it becomes a mainstay on naval combatants.”

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# U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Mellon Completes Final Patrol



The Seattle-based Coast Guard Cutter Mellon (WHEC 717) moors at U.S. Coast Guard Base Kodiak's fuel pier in Kodiak, Alaska, July 10, 2020. Commissioned in 1968, the Mellon stopped in Kodiak during their final patrol before the cutter's scheduled Aug. 20, 2020, decommissioning. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 2nd Class John Arredondo

SEATTLE – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Mellon (WHEC 717) returned to their homeport July 7 after completing the final patrol for the 52-year-old ship, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a July 20 release.

The 150-person crew left Seattle April 17 to conduct missions throughout the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea.

During the patrol the crew conducted 38 law enforcement boardings, four search and rescue cases, and enforced federal regulations governing Alaska's \$13.9 billion commercial fishing industry.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mellon crew instituted protective measures to ensure crew safety and the safety of the commercial fishing fleet and Alaskan public.

The Mellon is one the last remaining 378-foot high-endurance cutters built for extended offshore patrols. Its capabilities span from helicopter operations to pursuit boat operations and served as a key asset for the Department of Homeland Security and humanitarian missions at sea.

The Mellon was the third of the 378-foot high-endurance class to be completed and the first cutter to be named after Andrew

W. Mellon, the 49th secretary of the treasury, who served between 1921 and 1932. The cutter's keel was laid July 25, 1966, and the ship was launched Feb. 11, 1967. It was commissioned 11 months after its launching on Jan. 9, 1968. The construction cost for the vessel totaled approximately \$14.5 million.

Its namesake, Andrew W. Mellon, was born in 1855 in Pittsburg and was a successful businessman and banker prior to his appointment as secretary of the treasury by President Warren G. Harding in 1921. Mellon actively worked for tax reform in order to reduce public debt and tax burden. The "Mellon Plan" became law as the Revenue Act of 1924 and successfully reduced public debt and taxes until 1930 when the depression caused debt to rise again. In addition to serving in the cabinet of President Harding, Mellon was secretary of the treasury under Presidents Coolidge and Hoover and served one year as the U.S. ambassador to Great Britain.

The Mellon was originally homeported in Honolulu and spent 12 years patrolling the Pacific Ocean from Hawaii to Alaska. It was then transferred to Seattle in 1981.

The Mellon returned to Hawaii after service in Vietnam. Many rescue efforts took place during its Hawaii patrol. In 1974, crew members of the Italian supertanker Giovanna Lolli-Ghetti survived an explosion, fire and subsequent sinking of the vessel off the coast of Hawaii. The Mellon responded and played a key role in rescuing the crew members.

The rescue was successful in two ways – first, it involved close cooperation between crews and vessels from Norway, Russia and the United States, and second, the rescue was a positive event that involved cooperation between Cold War nations.

The Mellon and its crew also experienced tragedy and damage while stationed in Hawaii.

The vessel was docked in the Dillingham Shipyard for repairs and maintenance on Sept. 7, 1971, when an explosion occurred aboard, which resulted in the death of a civilian who was installing insulation. Extensive damage to the vessel included buckling of the deck, hull and frame. More damage occurred in April 1972, while unmooring in Kodiak Harbor. The vessel touched bottom and sustained damage to the sonar dome and the bow thruster unit.

Awards that the Mellon and its crew members received include the Meritorious Unit Commendation for operations conducted between June 28, 1975, and Feb. 2, 1976.

The award was given to the Mellon crew for their response to four search-and-rescue cases, investigating and disproving allegations of violations of the Unimak Island Crab Sanctuary. Crew members of the vessel also reported the illegal discharge of oil into the sea by two Russian trawlers to authorities. Gunnery operations on the Mellon earned the unit the Commandant's Gunnery Award in October 1999.

The Mellon crew spent 1980 participating with the Coast Guard Cutter Boutwell (WHEC-719) in search-and-rescue operations.

Two notable rescue efforts were accomplished in 1982. The first rescue was conducted with the Boutwell crew, other military units and a merchant ship. The Mellon rescued passengers from the burning luxury liner Prindsendam off the Alaskan coast. The combined effort rescued a total of 510 passengers and crew members from lifeboats after they abandoned ship. The second rescue effort saved four crash survivors from a Coast Guard C-130 aircraft on Attu Island.

The Mellon operated in areas 150 miles from the Soviet Union to areas off the coast of California after it was recommissioned. It patrolled areas in the North Pacific from the Gulf of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands into the Bering Sea. It spent three months of the year engaged in extensive

training and exercises with the U.S. Navy off the coast of Southern California.

In January of 1990, the Mellon was the first of five Coast Guard cutters to become fitted with an anti-ship missile. The cutter also received an antisubmarine warfare suite that included the AN/SQS-38 sonar and Mark 46 torpedoes. The suite and anti-ship missile served as proof of capability for all Coast Guard cutters; however, they were later removed due to budget constraints.

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## **Navy's Newest Littoral Combat Ship Arrives in Mayport**



The future littoral combat ship USS St. Louis (LCS 19) launches sideways into the Menominee River in Marinette, Wisconsin, following its christening, Dec. 15, 2018, by ship's sponsor Barbara Taylor in December 2018. U.S. NAVY

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The newest littoral combat ship, the Freedom-variant the future USS St. Louis (LCS 19) arrived in Mayport, Florida, July 17, Naval Station Mayport Public Affairs said in a July 19 release.

After leaving from the shipyard in Marinette, Wisconsin, St. Louis will officially join the fleet in August when it is commissioned in Mayport.

“After a long journey from Marinette, we are excited to bring St. Louis home to Mayport. The crew’s skill, hard work and perseverance saw her safely through one of the most difficult navigational challenges any ship can experience,” said Cmdr. Kevin Hagan, commanding officer, St. Louis. “To say I am proud

of this crew would be an understatement!"

Homeported in Mayport as the Navy's 22nd littoral combat ship and the 10th Freedom-variant, St. Louis was designed for operation in near-shore environments yet capable of open-ocean operation, to defeat asymmetric "anti-access" threats such as mines, quiet diesel submarines and fast surface craft.

The St. Louis, designated LCS 19, honors Missouri's largest city. It is the seventh ship to bear the name.

The first St. Louis was a sloop of war commissioned in 1828. It spent the majority of its service patrolling the coasts of the Americas to secure interests and trade. In addition, it served as the flagship for the West Indies Squadron working to suppress piracy in the Caribbean Sea, the Antilles and the Gulf of Mexico region.

As part of the surface fleet, LCSs have the ability to counter and outpace evolving threats independently or within a network of surface combatants. Paired with advanced sonar and mine-hunting capabilities, LCSs provide a major contribution, as well as a more diverse set of options to commanders across the spectrum of operations, according to the Navy release.

As an LCS mine countermeasures (MCM) mission package (MP) ship, St. Louis will have MCM operations through the employment of aviation assets and unmanned surface, semi-submersible and submersible vehicles that are equipped with an array of sensors and systems to detect, localize and neutralize surface, near surface, in-volume and bottom mines. These systems are designed to be employed while the LCS remains outside the mine threat area. The MCM MP also provides the capability to sweep mines, detect beach zone and buried mines.

"The St. Louis crew has been working diligently with our LCS shipbuilding team and industry partners to deliver LCS 19 to the Navy and sail her from Wisconsin to Florida," said Capt.

David Miller, commodore of Littoral Combat Ship Squadron Two. "We are excited to add the ninth LCS to the Mayport waterfront and look forward to formally placing her in commission next month."

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## USS Carney Returns Home to Mayport After 5 Years in Europe



Sailors assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Carney (DDG 64) participate in a replenishment-at sea with the Henry J. Kaiser-class fleet replenishment oiler USNS Patuxent on March 23, 2020. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Fred Gray IV  
NORFOLK, Va. – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Carney (DDG 64) arrived at its new homeport, Naval Station Mayport, July 19. The ship has completed its five-year forward deployment to Rota, Spain, as part of Destroyer Squadron 60, the U.S. 2nd Fleet Public Affairs said in a July 20 release.

This marks a return for Carney as Naval Station Mayport served as the ship's original homeport before the ship departed to Rota, Sept. 25, 2015. While in U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, the ship played a vital role in strengthening U.S. relationships with NATO allies and regional partners through NATO missile defense, full spectrum maritime security operations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral training exercises, and other operations and deployments, according to a Navy release.

On the ship's seventh and final patrol in U.S. 6th Fleet in spring of 2020, Carney conducted a Tactical Control (TACON) shift from 6th to 5th Fleet in support of national tasking alongside the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group (ARG). While transiting back to Rota, Spain, Carney became the most recent ship in naval history to circumnavigate Africa instead of transiting north through the Suez Canal.

The ship began its transit back to Mayport last month, after it was replaced by the Mayport-based Arleigh Burke guided-missile destroyer, USS Roosevelt (DDG 80).

"I could not be more proud of the crew as we make our return to Mayport after five years forward deployed to Spain," said Carney's commanding officer, Cmdr. Chris Carroll. "The determination and professionalism of the crew during large-scale multinational exercises and maritime security operations with real-world strategic implications in the 6th and 5th Fleet areas of responsibilities is a clear demonstration of what it means to be a part of '505 Feet of American Fighting Steel.'"

Carney arrived in the U.S. 2nd Fleet area of operations after joining the Bataan ARG on its return transit from deployment. U.S. 2nd Fleet exercises operational authorities over assigned ships, aircraft and landing forces on the East Coast and the Atlantic.

"We are extremely happy to welcome Carney back to the Mayport Basin," said Capt. Jason Canfield, Naval Station Mayport's commanding officer. "The men and women onboard and their families have come back to the best base in the Navy, and I know Jacksonville and the surrounding beaches communities are happy to have them back as well."

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# NAVAIR Awards Leonardo DRS \$120M for DAIRCM Aircraft Protection Systems



A U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venom assigned to Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1 lands at Bull Attack Forward Arming and Refueling Point in support of Weapons and Tactics Instructor Course 2-18 at Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range, California, Aug. 2. U.S. MARINE CORPS / Lance Cpl. Cody Rowe

ARLINGTON, Va. – Leonardo DRS Inc. has received a contract from the U.S. Naval Air Systems Command to provide engineering design and test hardware for AN/AAQ-45 Distributed Aperture Infrared Countermeasure (DAIRCM) advanced aircraft protection systems, the company announced in a July 20 release. The mixed cost-plus-incentive-fee and firm-fixed-price, contract is worth \$120 million.

This contract follows the previous Joint Urgent Operational Needs program that resulted in the system being fielded on U.S. Air Force, Army and Navy platforms. This Engineering and Manufacturing Development program will continue to develop, integrate and test improved capabilities to keep pace with enhanced and future threats.

Under the newly awarded follow-on contract, Leonardo DRS will provide non-recurring engineering to design, develop, integrate and test engineering development models as well as production representative models of weapons replaceable assemblies for government testing. The system has an open and scalable architecture that allows it to be optimized for various type/model/series aircraft. The low size, weight and power design of the system supports a range of rotary and tilt-wing aircraft throughout the services, including application to the emerging future vertical lift programs.

“Leonardo DRS is proud to provide these state-of-the-art systems to enhance aircraft protection throughout the fleet,” said John Baylouny, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Leonardo DRS. “This continued strong partnership with our customer has produced technologies that will offer advanced capabilities, including combat survivability for flight crews while supporting their ability to accomplish diverse mission sets for years to come.”

The AN/AAQ-45 DAIRCM is at the forefront of aircraft defensive protection technology and was developed by Leonardo DRS through three of its business units: Airborne & Intelligence Systems, Daylight Solutions, and Electro-Optical & Infrared Systems. As missile and other anti-aircraft threats continue to evolve and expand around the world, frontline helicopters will require a small but capable system to defeat these threats.

Work on this contract will be performed in the Leonardo DRS facilities in Dallas, San Diego, and Fort Walton Beach and Melbourne, Florida, and is expected to be completed in 2024.

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## **NSWC Crane Partners with Purdue University to Offer Cybersecurity Apprenticeships**

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. – Purdue University’s Cyber Apprenticeship Program (P-CAP) has launched at Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division (NSWC Crane) to advance cybersecurity capabilities, the university said in a July 16 release.

The launch at NSWC Crane comes after months of collaboration between the Warfare Center Division and Purdue to design and develop learning outcomes for the apprenticeship program that align with Department of Defense guidelines for cybersecurity staff. The alignment with the DoD will allow for implementation across Naval Sea Systems Command's Warfare centers.

The P-CAP-registered apprenticeship program supported by the U.S. Department of Labor is being launched to support the rapidly expanding demand for cybersecurity professionals across the nation.

The Labor Department's Employment and Training Administration awarded the job-training grant to Purdue to develop a pathway to higher education for at least 5,000 cybersecurity apprentices by 2023.

The program offers online degree programs through Purdue and its education partners, along with industry-recognized certifications, a leadership academy, and on-the-job-training for U.S. citizens and green card holders who are at least 18 years old.

By leveraging the P-CAP program, NSWC Crane will train its current and future workforce for critical cybersecurity jobs. The apprenticeship program model uses Purdue's highly ranked education, faculty, and academic rigor.

"By becoming a Department of Labor-registered apprenticeship provider, NSWC Crane will have access to P-CAP candidates from across the nation," said Patricia Herndon, department director, Expeditionary Warfare, NSWC Crane. "I am also pleased to serve on the Women and Minority Advisory Council for the program to support the advancement of underrepresented individuals in cybersecurity."

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# Bataan Amphibious Ready Group Returns from Deployment



The dock landing ship USS Oak Hill transits the Strait of Hormuz on April 3 as part of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Andrew Waters

NORFOLK, Va. – The Bataan Amphibious Ready Group and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit are returning from deployment this month, marking the end of seven months attached to the U.S. 2nd, 5th and 6th Fleets.

The first of the ARG ships, the Harpers Ferry-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Oak Hill, returned to Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia Beach, Virginia, on July 15.

“I am tremendously proud of what the Sailors and Marines of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group and 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit accomplished during this deployment. Our team worked tirelessly to remain fully mission ready during the unprecedented challenge of a global pandemic,” said Capt. Lance Leshner, who was commander of Amphibious Squadron 8 through its pre-deployment workup cycle and deployment until conducting a change of command at sea on July 12.

The Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan and San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS New York are expected to return to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, and Naval Station Mayport, Florida, respectively, in the coming days. The MEU departed the ARG ships and returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, over the weekend.

“As a ‘certain force in an uncertain world’ the 26th MEU was flexible, resilient, and adaptable while forward deployed to the U.S. 5th Fleet and 6th Fleet areas of operation,” said Col. Trevor Hall, commanding officer of the 26th MEU. “This deployment presented unique challenges, but the Navy-Marine Corps team prevailed and incessantly provided our fleet commanders with a responsive, sea-based Marine air-ground task force – even during the global novel coronavirus pandemic.”

The ARG ships and MEU departed for deployment from their respective home bases in December and remained at sea for more than 150 straight days before returning home.

“The crews onboard USS Bataan, USS New York and USS Oak Hill should feel great satisfaction and fulfillment knowing that, during this deployment, they played a crucial role as part of a premier crisis response team across the U.S. 2nd Fleet, 5th Fleet and 6th Fleet,” said Lesher. “The daily actions of our Sailors and Marines over the past seven months have made a positive impact on the world, and I’m pleased they will now be reunited with their friends, families and loved ones.”

Lesher turned over command of PHIBRON 8 to Capt. Jason Rimmer during a change-of-command ceremony at sea onboard Bataan in the Atlantic Ocean.

While in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, the Bataan ARG and 26th MEU remained healthy and fully mission ready while working with regional partners. The Blue-Green team worked with partners from Saudi Arabia to coordinate multiple complex training evolutions on the uninhabited Karan and Kurayn islands in the Arabian Gulf as well as with partners from the United Arab Emirates to hold training in an isolated location within that country.

While in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations, the ARG-MEU increased interoperability with regional allies and partners

by conducting maneuvering operations and at-sea exercises with navy and coast guard ships from Bulgaria, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania and Turkey in the Black Sea. The crew additionally worked with allied ships from France and Italy during their time in the Mediterranean Sea.

U.S. Marine Corps UH-1Y Venoms and AH-1W Super Cobras assigned to the 26th MEU additionally participated in a live-fire training exercise in Bize, Albania.

The Sailors and Marines of the ARG-MEU also strengthened international partnerships by hosting the head of the Royal Jordanian Navy and deputy commander of Kuwait Naval Forces aboard Bataan in separate visits that reinforced shared goals and fostered personal relationships.

There are more than 4,000 Sailors and Marines assigned to the units of the ARG-MEU, nearly 2,500 of which were aboard the Bataan. Also embarked on the ships of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group were the staff of Amphibious Squadron 8 and personnel from Tactical Air Control Squadron 22, Fleet Surgical Team 4, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28, Naval Beach Group 2, Assault Craft Unit 4 and Assault Craft Unit 2.

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## **USS Ralph Johnson Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea**



The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson steams near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class

Anthony Collier

PEARL HARBOR, Hawaii – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson operated in the Spratly Islands on July 14 in a freedom of navigation operation that upheld the rights, freedoms and lawful uses of the sea, recognized in international law, by challenging restrictions on innocent passage imposed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan, U.S. Pacific Fleet public affairs said in a release.

Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea threaten the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations.

The U.S. challenges excessive maritime claims around the world regardless of the identity of the claimant. The international community has an enduring role in preserving the freedom of the seas, which is critical to global security, stability, and prosperity.

U.S. forces continue to operate in the South China Sea daily as they have for more than a century. U.S. 7th Fleet conducts forward-deployed naval operations in support of U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific area of operations. As the Navy's largest numbered fleet, 7th Fleet interacts with 35 other maritime nations to build partnerships that foster maritime security, promote stability and prevent conflict.