Blue Blasters Hornet Sundown Ceremony Marks the End of an Era

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 34 hosted a sundown ceremony and fly-over for the legacy F/A-18C Hornet aircraft at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Virginia, Feb. 1.

Active-duty service members, aviation leadership, local media and visitors were in attendance to commemorate the aircraft's 35 years of active service in the fleet.

"Today our VFA-34 family and the operational farewells an old friend," said Cmdr. William Mathis, commanding officer of VFA-34. "Born more than 40 years ago, the Hornet entered operational service for the U.S. Navy in 1984, and for the next 35 years she proudly served the nation from the flight deck of aircraft carriers in all the seas across the globe."

The Blue Blasters of VFA-34 were the last fleet squadron in the Navy flying the Hornet, most recently joining USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) to conduct freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea in 2018.

"First, it's a great feeling being the last squadron to take these hornets into combat because we made history," said Master Chief Gene Garland, command master chief of VFA-34. "Secondly, this represents the ending of an era because these jets have been around for a long time, and the professionals you see all around you in this squadron maintained our Hornets and kept them flying. I thank God for the mindset of my Sailors. They are hard-workers, dedicated and they truly are a reflection of the culture of our squadron. This final flight means we and the legacy Hornets have accomplished the mission."

Lt. Frank McGurk, who piloted one of the three hornets that were part of the ceremony alongside the squadron's Commanding Officer and Operations Officer, shared some details of the historical experience.

"We went out to one of our working areas over the ocean about 80-100 miles out," said McGurk. "From there, we left the area and flew northbound along the coast up past the [Wright Brothers] First Flight Memorial around Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, where we took a few photos over the area then made our way back to Oceana for the fly-over."

Lt. McGurk also spoke on how he felt regarding the Hornet's last flight.

"This aircraft has been super reliable for us and has proven itself over the years," he said. "I believe there are many aviators out there who know how good of an airplane this is to fly. Although I've only had a taste of it, I can feel the history and lineage of that. There were a lot of people who came here to this base to see this old bird take her last flight, and I think that's pretty cool."

The F/A-18C Hornet is being replaced by the F/A-18E Super Hornet, which is capable of executing the same missions as the Hornet, but with significant advancements in mission systems that will dramatically enhance its effectiveness.

"The Hornet is known as many things," said Cmdr. Mathis. "Legacy, highly reliable, multirole attack fighter … but to us, she will always be an old friend. The Hornet will continue to serve with the Marine Corps and Navy support units but for the operational Navy, it is time to say goodbye. So from the men and women who flew and maintained the legendary F-18 Hornet, we say thank you for your service and job well done."

Coast Guard Cutter Diligence Returns Home Following Counter-Drug Interdictions

Wilmington, N.C. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Diligence returned to Wilmington, North Carolina, Feb. 2 following a 42-day patrol in the Caribbean, the Coast Guard 5th District said in a Feb. 3 release.

The crew of the Diligence performed counter-drug operations and participated in international engagements in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South.

In concert with JIATF South, the crew of the Diligence worked alongside interagency and international partners to prevent and respond to illegal maritime migration and narcotic smuggling from Central and South America. The crew of the Diligence facilitated the transport of six suspected drug smugglers, 1,200 pounds of marijuana and 50 kilograms of cocaine apprehended by other Coast Guard assets.

The crewmembers of the Diligence also conducted an engagement coincidental to operations with the Honduran Navy in Roatán, Honduras. The crew shared their expertise in engineering and law enforcement with the Honduran Navy.

“The crew of Diligence adapted and worked together to achieve operational success while enhancing key partnerships in Central America,” said Comdr. Robert S. Mohr, commanding officer of the Diligence. “I am extremely proud and truly impressed with the crew’s unwavering devotion to duty throughout this dynamic patrol.”

Coast Guard Cutter Diligence is a 54-year-old, 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Wilmington. The Diligence's primary missions consist of counter-drug and migrant interdiction, federal fisheries enforcement, and search and rescue.

USS South Dakota Commissioned

NEW LONDON, Conn. – USS South Dakota (SSN 790) became the newest and 17th Virginia-class fast-attack submarine in the U.S. Navy during her commissioning ceremony at Naval Submarine Base New London, Feb. 2, Submarine Force Public affairs said in a release of the same date.

The U.S. Navy, with assistance from Deanie Dempsey, the ship's sponsor, gave the command, "Man our ship and bring her to life!" spurring the crew into action and all ship's systems to be tested, including alarms, bells, radars and scopes.

USS South Dakota's commanding officer, Cmdr. Craig Litty, highlighted South Dakota's capability to dominate the undersea domain and enable military success in any engagement.

"South Dakota was built to be on scene and unseen, forward-deployed and ready to take the fight to our adversaries and protect our shores here," said Litty. "We do that through executing the seven mission areas that the United States Submarine Force, which focus primarily on antisubmarine warfare and antisurface warfare, but we are also very capable of reconnaissance operations and operations in littoral waters. As the commissioning crew, we've developed a special bond with the ship itself, which we will use to maximize our capability on our first deployment."

“South Dakota will soon enter the fleet with stealth, flexibility and endurance,” said Vice Adm. Chas Richard, commander, addressing the crew and attendees. “Traveling silently through the world’s oceans undetected, collecting information, preparing for battle and, if necessary, striking from the deep swiftly without warning; answering the nation’s call. To the South Dakota crew, as your motto attests, ‘Under the Sea, We Rule,’ because the nation the Navy and the Mount Rushmore state are depending on you.”

Dempsey expressed what the moment and her role as the ship’s sponsor means to her.

“It is my privilege to be the sponsor of USS South Dakota,” said Dempsey. “I’ve been here from the very beginning, watching both the boat and her crew grow, and that gives me a tremendous sense of pride. When I said those words and the Sailors responded ‘Aye, aye, ma’am!’ it gave me goosebumps.”

The first South Dakota (ACR 9), a U.S. Navy Pennsylvania-class armored cruiser, laid down on Sept. 30, 1902, by the Union Iron Works, San Francisco and launched

on July 21, 1904, was sponsored by Grace Herreid, daughter of Charles N. Herreid, governor of South Dakota.

The second South Dakota’s (BB 57) keel was laid down on July 5, 1939, at Camden, New Jersey, by the New York Shipbuilding Corp. She was launched on June 7, 1941, sponsored by Harlan J. Bushfield, wife of the governor of South Dakota. The lead ship of her class, South Dakota was considered to be the most efficient battleship designed under the limitations of the Washington Naval Treaty during World War II.

Though in their nineties, some of the Sailors from the submarine’s namesake made it out to the event to see that the history and traditions were passed on to the next generation.

“It is very impressive, and I am very honored to be a part of

this," said Richard Hackley, a Seaman 1st Class (Radar Striker) aboard the battleship USS South Dakota during World War II. "I've got fond memories from serving on South Dakota, and to be included in the new South Dakota is quite an honor for me."

South Dakota is the seventh of eight Block III Virginia-class submarines to be built. The Block III submarines are made with the new Virginia Payload Tubes designed to lower costs and increase missile-firing payload possibilities.

The first 10 Block I and Block II Virginia-class submarines have 12 individual 21-inch diameter vertical launch tubes able to fire Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (TLAMS). The Block III submarines are built with two-larger 87-inch diameter tubes able to house six TLAMS each. "It is flattering to be chosen to a part of this tradition," said Sonar Technician (Submarines) 2nd Class Casey Strickland, a South Dakota plankowner. "It sets us aside from other boat crews, and I think it is an honor to be part of this."

South Dakota is a flexible, multimission platform designed to carry out the seven core competencies of the submarine force: antisubmarine warfare; antisurface warfare; delivery of special operations forces; strike warfare; irregular warfare; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; and mine warfare.

The submarine is 377 feet long, has a 34-foot beam, and will be able to dive to depths greater than 800 feet and operate at speeds in excess of 25 knots submerged. It will operate for over 30 years without ever refueling. Construction on South Dakota began 2013; the submarine's keel was authenticated during a ceremony on April 4, 2016; and the submarine was christened during a ceremony Oct. 14, 2017.

General Atomics Awarded Contract for Prototype LiFT Battery System for LDUUV

SAN DIEGO – General Atomics Electromagnetic Systems (GA-EMS) announced today that it has been awarded a contract from Advanced Technology International (ATI) to develop and demonstrate a prototype Lithium-ion Fault Tolerant (LiFT) battery system for the U.S. Navy's prototype "Snakehead" Large-Displacement Unmanned Undersea Vehicle (LDUUV), GA-EMS announced in a Feb. 4 release.

The LiFT battery system will power the LDUUV's propulsion and support systems. The Snakehead LDUUV is intended to increase endurance, range, and payload hosting capabilities to support a variety of future mission and operations requirements.

"Our LiFT battery systems are designed to withstand the rugged marine environment and provide safe, reliable power that is critical to keeping propulsion and support systems operating throughout a mission cycle," said Scott Forney, president of GA-EMS. "We look forward to expanding our efforts to develop and demonstrate prototype LiFT battery systems to support the LDUUV as we continue to provide LiFT systems for various other critical manned and unmanned underwater platforms used by the Department of Defense."

"LiFT batteries are designed with passive safety features not found in other solutions," stated Rolf Ziesing, vice president of programs at GA-EMS. "Some lithium-ion battery systems rely on an active forced water cooling system to cool batteries and mitigate thermal events. Active systems add more equipment,

weight and certification requirements to qualify a platform for use in a maritime environment. LiFT battery systems eliminate those complexities, simplifying installation, operation, and maintenance without compromising safety and reliability.”

The LiFT battery system’s modular design and single cell fault tolerance is designed to prevent uncontrolled and catastrophic cascading lithium-ion cell failure, improving the safety of personnel and platforms while keeping power available for high mission assurance. The flexible architecture of the high-energy-density LiFT battery system can be configured to meet the most demanding needs of manned and unmanned underwater vehicles. LiFT battery systems have undergone at-sea testing, including use in other undersea vehicles that have been classified by Det Norske Veritas Germanischer Lloyd, an international accredited registrar and classification society for the maritime industry.

Navy Secretary Names Independence-Variant Littoral Combat Ship USS Kingsville

WASHINGTON — Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer announced that the next Independence-variant Littoral Combat Ship will be named USS Kingsville (LCS 36), the secretary’s public affairs officer said in a Feb. 4 release.

The future USS Kingsville (LCS 36) is named in honor of the city of Kingsville, Texas, and is the first ship to bear the name.

“I am pleased to name a future Independence-variant LCS USS Kingsville,” said Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer. “The citizens of Kingsville have been steadfast partners to the Navy and Marine Corps team, and their enduring support of our future strike fighter pilots have helped make the city of Kingsville the gateway for naval aviators. I am confident this ship will continue that legacy of service for decades to come.”

The future USS Kingsville will be built by Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama. This ship will be 419 feet long with a beam length of 104 feet and be capable of operating at speeds in excess of 40 knots.

The Navy has accepted delivery of 17 littoral combat ships (LCS). Including the recent contract modifications, a total of 35 LCSs have been procured with 11 ships under construction (LCS 17, 19-26) and seven more ships in preconstruction (LCS 29 – 32, 34, 36, 38).

Coast Guard Cutter Alert Returns Home Following Counter-Drug Patrol, $83 Million Worth of Cocaine Seized

ASTORIA, Ore. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Alert returned home Feb. 1 following a 60-day counter-drug patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, seizing more than $83 million worth of cocaine during the deployment, the Coast Guard Pacific area

said in a Feb. 4 release.

The crew interdicted two suspected drug smuggling vessels, yielding more than 5,700 pounds of seized cocaine while patrolling international waters in support of Joint Interagency Task Force-South. Seven suspected drug traffickers were apprehended during the two interdictions.

The Alert crew received support from the U.S. Navy, Customs and Border Protection and Coast Guard maritime patrol aircrews, who provided the cutter with reconnaissance and over watch leading up to and during the interdictions.

“Coast Guard men and women operating under Joint Interagency Task Force-South, a U.S. Southern Command component, use military hardware and law enforcement authority to interdict smuggling vessels and bring the suspects to justice,” said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz. “This disrupts key funding sources for these dangerous criminal networks and diminishes their influence in the Western Hemisphere. Aviation forces from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and others all support this crucial effort.”

A Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) aircrew and an MH-65 dolphin helicopter from Jacksonville, Florida, deployed aboard Alert throughout the patrol to assist the cutter’s boarding teams during the interdictions. When not in pursuit of suspect vessels, the HITRON team helped qualify multiple Alert crewmembers during training evolutions launching and landing helicopters from the cutter’s flight deck while underway.

Deployed since early December, Alert’s crew spent the holidays at sea. Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Jason M. Vanderhaden called the cutter to speak with crew members.

“We are fortunate to have such a high-spirited crew, happily celebrating Christmas and New Year’s Eve together, at sea for

32 days between liberty stops," said Cmdr. Tobias Reid, Alert's commanding officer. "Between the holidays, two very interesting smuggling cases and our equator crossing ceremony, we had a very full and satisfying patrol. But, above all, we are thankful for the incredible generosity from the Astoria, Warrenton/Hammond and Seaside communities, who provide such tremendous support to our families while we were on patrol."

Commissioned in 1969, Alert is one of 14 remaining 210-foot reliance-class medium-endurance cutters built for the Coast Guard and one of three reliance-class cutters stationed on the West Coast. The cutter and crew perform search and rescue, living marine resource and environmental protection, and counter-drug missions throughout the Pacific Ocean from the U.S.-Canadian border to south of the Galapagos Islands. The fleet of aging medium-endurance cutters are operating beyond the original service lifespan and are becoming increasingly more expensive to maintain and operate.

The Coast Guard will be phasing out medium-endurance cutters with the addition of the 360-foot offshore patrol cutter (OPC). Acquisition of OPCs is one of the Coast Guard's highest investment priorities. The OPC will provide a capability bridge between the 418-foot national security cutter, which patrols the open ocean, and the 154-foot fast response cutter, which serves closer to shore. The OPCs will feature state-of-the-art technology to meet the service's long-term need for cutters capable of deploying independently or as part of task groups to conduct law enforcement, search and rescue, homeland security, and defense missions. The first OPC is scheduled for delivery in 2021.

The OPC will provide the tools to effectively enforce federal laws, secure our maritime borders, disrupt transnational criminal organizations and respond to 21st century threats," said Schultz. "OPCs will be the backbone of the Coast Guard's strategy to project and maintain an offshore presence."

Navy Accepts Delivery of Future USS Billings

MARINETTE, Wis. – The Navy accepted delivery of the future littoral combat ship USS Billings (LCS 15) during a ceremony at the Fincantieri Marinette Marine (FMM), shipyard, Marinette, Wisconsin, Feb. 1, the Naval Sea Systems Command said in a Feb. 4 release.

The future USS Billings is the 17th littoral combat ship (LCS) to be delivered to the Navy and the eighth of the Freedom variant to join the fleet. Delivery marks the official transfer of the ship from the shipbuilder, part of a Lockheed Martin-led team, to the Navy. It is the final milestone prior to commissioning, which is planned for later this year.

“Today marks a significant milestone in the life of the future USS Billings,” said Capt. Mike Taylor, LCS program manager. “I look forward to celebrating the commissioning of this fine ship alongside the crew later this year, where she will play an essential role in the new fleet of warships that will carry out our nation’s future maritime strategy.”

Several additional Freedom-variant ships are under construction at FMM. The future USS Indianapolis (LCS 17) is preparing for trials this summer. The future USS St. Louis (LCS 19) was christened and launched in December. The future ships Minneapolis-Saint Paul (LCS 21), Cooperstown (LCS 23), Marinette (LCS 25), Nantucket (LCS 27) and Beloit (LCS 29) are also in various stages of production, with yet-to-be-named LCS 31 awarded last month.

LCS is a highly maneuverable, lethal and adaptable ship designed to support focused mine countermeasures,

antisubmarine warfare and surface warfare missions.

The LCS class consists of two variants, the Freedom variant and the Independence variant, designed and built by two industry teams. The Lockheed Martin-led team builds the odd-numbered hulls. The Independence variant team is led by Austal USA, Mobile, Alabama, (for LCS 6 and the subsequent even-numbered hulls).

LCS is now the second-largest surface ship class in the U.S. Navy. In 2018, five LCSs were delivered to the fleet, and three are scheduled for delivery in 2019.

Coast Guard Interdicts 2 Suspected Drug Smugglers, 132 Pounds of Cocaine

MIAMI – The Coast Guard interdicted two suspected smugglers and approximately 132 pounds of cocaine Thursday 5 miles east of Haulover Inlet, Florida, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Feb. 1 release.

The Coast Guard Cutter Paul Clark (WPC 1106) crew initially detected a westbound 35-foot pleasure craft approximately 30 miles east of Haulover Inlet.

The Paul Clark boarding team discovered a Bahamian national, hidden under a blanket, along with approximately 132 pounds of cocaine in the vessel’s engine room. Initial background checks identified that the Bahamian individual has multiple previous narcotics smuggling convictions and an active United States arrest warrant.

“This successful interdiction is the result of a diligent boarding team who safely stopped two criminals seeking to bring contraband to the streets of South Florida,” said Capt. Megan Dean, commander of Coast Guard Sector Miami. “Our crews continue to maintain a constant presence and work daily with our DHS partner agencies to stop and stem this flow of illicit drugs and human smuggling that threaten our national security.”

The case was turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). HSI is the principle investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, responsible for investigating transnational crime and threats. HSI special agents investigate, disrupt and dismantle terrorist, transnational and other criminal organizations that threaten or seek to exploit the customs and immigration laws of the United States.

HII Awarded $15.2 Billion Block Contract For Two Ford-Class Aircraft Carriers

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – For the first time in more than three decades, Huntington Ingalls Industries’ (HII’s) Newport News Shipbuilding division was awarded a multi-ship contract from the U.S. Navy to build two aircraft carriers. The company announced on Jan. 31 that it received a contract modification valued at $15.2 billion for the detail design and construction of the Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers Enterprise (CVN 80) and CVN 81, which has not yet been named.

The Navy’s decision to partner with HII to create the best

acquisition approach will save more than $4 billion across the program.

“Today’s announcement is a triumphant step toward returning to a 12-ship aircraft carrier fleet and building the 355-ship Navy our nation needs,” said Jennifer Boykin, president of Newport Shipbuilding. “Most importantly for us, it provides stability into the year 2032 for our workforce and for our supplier businesses across the United States.”

The construction of Enterprise, which began in 2017, and CVN 81 will be completed at the company’s Newport News Shipbuilding division. The ships are scheduled to be delivered in 2028 and 2032, respectively.

Buying two aircraft carriers will stimulate Newport News’ aircraft carrier supplier base of more than 2,000 suppliers in 46 states, allowing businesses to phase in work more efficiently. These benefits will help accelerate production, enabling the company to build aircraft carriers every three to four years.

To support the contract, the company is making investment in facilities and will continue its digital transformation efforts.

“This contract award is something we should celebrate, and it is also something we should never take for granted,” Boykin said. “We have the responsibility to leverage the investments we are making in our workforce, the facility and in digital shipbuilding to become smarter, better, stronger. It is more important than ever that we execute efficiently and transform our business operations so that we leave a lasting legacy of our own.”

The strategy comes as a result of extensive collaboration with the Navy to reduce cost and drive efficiencies. The approach is not new, however. The Navy achieved substantial cost savings in 1980s when it used the procurement strategy to

purchase the Nimitz-class aircraft carriers USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74), USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) and USS George Washington (CVN 73). The four ships were built by Newport News.

This contract modification comes after previous contract awards for the advance procurement and advance fabrication of Enterprise, starting in May 2016.

“History has its eyes on Newport News Shipbuilding, and today is a great reminder that we are all part of something much greater than ourselves,” Boykin said. “I could not be more proud of our shipbuilders and excited for our future.”

Vigor Selects Vancouver, Washington, Site for a State-of-the-art, All-Aluminum Fabrication Facility

PORTLAND, Ore. – Vigor has entered an agreement to take over the former home of Christensen Yachts in Vancouver, Washington, following a search for the best location to build the U.S. Army’s new landing craft, Maneuver Support Vessel (Light) or MSV(L), the company announced in a Feb. 1 release. The MSV(L) contract represents the largest award in Vigor’s history, with a total value of nearly $1 billion over 10 years and hundreds of family-wage jobs.

Vigor expects to eventually employ approximately 400 workers at the site and will be investing millions in capital upgrades and equipment.

In addition to the Army landing craft production, other programs to be constructed at the site will include ongoing production of the Combatant Craft Medium (CCM) for the U.S. Navy as well as for U.S. allies, the Response Boat-Medium (RB-M) for the U.S. Coast Guard and export market, Vigor' Fast Interceptor, aluminum fast ferries and commercial workboats. Vigor's aluminum marine work is currently performed primarily in Seattle (Ballard), Washington, and Clackamas, Oregon. Aluminum marine work in these locations will phase out as work is moved to the Vancouver site over the coming year.

Vigor looked in both Oregon and Washington state at building and buying options for this facility. Local, state and federal leaders in both states showed support throughout the process, demonstrating their commitment to the economic benefits and jobs created by strong manufacturing and maritime sectors in the Pacific Northwest.

"Vigor's decision to keep and grow jobs in Washington state is a testament to the great quality of life and workforce we have available here," said Gov. Jay Inslee. "Our team worked intently with Vigor to find a competitive solution to keep these jobs in Washington, and I'm glad to see the continued success of one of our great corporate citizens contributing to our economy by creating living wage jobs in Vancouver."

The Vancouver site was selected for a number of factors. The opportunity to bring its entire aluminum fabrication team together in one location was a primary driver, coupled with the livability of the community, its proximity to existing Vigor facilities and the suitability of the Christensen facility for Vigor's production needs.

"The synergies we will achieve by bringing these amazing builders together in one location strengthens our competitive advantage and builds upon our long-term goals as an outstanding industrial company," said Frank Foti, Vigor president and CEO. "While we've had operations in Vancouver

since 1980, this move represents a substantial increase in the number of Vigor employees who will be living and working here. Our Vigor team looks forward to getting to know the Vancouver community better and being a force for good through our remarkable people and the economic activity associated with our work.”

The approximate timeline is to begin production at the facility in May with existing work followed by the beginning of construction of the MSV(L) prototype in the summer. Once the MSV(L) prototype is completed and testing and refinements have occurred, the schedule calls for four vessels in the Low-Rate Production phase, followed by 32 vessels once Full Rate Production is underway.