Coast Guard Cutter Seneca Returns Home After 86-Day Atlantic Patrol

BOSTON – Coast Guard Cutter Seneca returned to its homeport in Boston on March 30 after an 86-day patrol in the northern Atlantic Ocean, the Coast Guard 5th District said in a release.

During the patrol, Seneca's crew responded to four search-and-rescue cases. One notable case involved a disabled fishing boat taking on water 100 miles offshore during blizzard conditions. The crew rescued four fishermen and put the fishing boat in tow. The tow was later transferred to a 47-foot motor lifeboat crew from Station Rockland, Maine, for escort to shore.

Seneca boarding teams completed 31 living marine resource boardings to ensure safety and environmental regulations are being followed. The Coast Guard is the primary agency for at-sea enforcement of federal laws concerning U.S. aquatic food resources.

"I am incredibly proud of this crew's accomplishments during this patrol," said Cmdr. John J. Christensen, Seneca's commanding officer. "Their efforts ensured the continued preservation of our national fisheries, the safety of our offshore fishermen and the security of sea lanes to some of our largest marine transportation hubs. They did this all while keeping our 34-year-old cutter fully operational, enabling us to meet every mission, every time."

Seneca is a 270-foot medium endurance cutter with a crew of 14 officers and 86 enlisted personnel.

Navy Secretary Names Destroyer in Honor of Korean War Helicopter Crewman

WASHINGTON – Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer named a future Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer (DDG-131) in honor of a Korean War veteran and Navy Cross recipient, Aviation Machinist's Mate 3rd Class George M. Neal, the secretary's public affairs officer said in a March 26 release.

Neal, a Springfield, Ohio, native, served with Helicopter Utility Squadron One (HU-1), a Navy helicopter rescue unit embarked from Australian light cruiser HMAS Sydney during the Korean War.

"At significant risk to his personal safety, Petty Officer Neal distinguished himself by volunteering to go into harm's way into North Korea to rescue a fellow service member," Spencer said. "He was a hero, and I am proud his legacy will live on in the future USS George M. Neal."

Neal was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions on July 3, 1951, when while serving with HU-1, he and pilot Lt. j.g. John Koelsch attempted to rescue Marine Corps Capt. James Wilkins. Wilkins crashed near Yondong in North Korea after his Corsair took antiaircraft fire.

Koelsch and Neal located Wilkins and, under increased enemy fire, lowered the rescue sling. However, the helicopter was disabled and crashed. For nine days, Neal assisted Koelsch and Wilkins in evading enemy forces before being captured and held as a prisoner of war. Koelsch died during captivity but

Wilkins and Neal were released and returned to the United States in 1952 with more than 320 fellow POWs. Koelsch was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Arleigh Burke-class destroyers conduct a variety of operations from peacetime presence and crisis response to sea control and power projection. The future USS George M. Neal will be a Flight III destroyer capable of fighting air, surface and subsurface battles simultaneously and will contain a combination of offensive and defensive weapons systems designed to support maritime warfare, including integrated air and missile defense and vertical launch capabilities.

The ship will be built at Huntington Ingalls in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The ship will be 509 feet long, have a beam length of 59 feet and be capable of operating at speeds in excess of 30 knots.

Marines Perform 'Arduous' Evaluation of New Grenade Launcher

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Virginia –The Marine Corps plans to introduce a new weapon intended to enhance the lethality of infantry Marines on the battlefield, the Marine corps Systems Command said in a March 26 release.

The M320A1 is a grenade launcher that can be employed as a stand-alone weapon or mounted onto another, such as the M27 Infantry Automatic Rifle. Scheduled to be fielded in fiscal year 2020, the system will give fleet Marines the ability to

engage with enemies near and far, day or night.

“The M320A1 will provide good range and accuracy, making the infantry squad more lethal,” said Lt. Col. Tim Hough, program manager for infantry weapons in Marine Corps Systems Command’s Ground Combat Element Systems.

The functionality of the M320A1 makes it unique, Hough said. Its ability to be used as a stand-alone or in conjunction with a firearm should help warfighters combat enemy forces. The weapon will replace the M203 grenade launcher that is currently employed by Marines.

“The mounted version of the M320A1 is a capability we’re currently working on so that Marines have that option should they want it,” Hough added.

Before the Marine Air-Ground Task Force receives the M320A1, the Corps must draft technical documents for the weapon. These publications provide Marines with further information about the system.

In early March, Ground Combat Elements Systems collaborated with fleet maintenance Marines and logisticians from Albany, Georgia, to conduct various analyses to determine provisioning, sustainment and new equipment training requirements for the system.

The first evaluation was a Level of Repair Analysis, or LORA. A LORA determines when a system component will be replaced, repaired or discarded. This process provides information that helps operational forces fix the weapon should it break.

The LORA establishes the tools required to perform a task, test equipment needed to fix the product and the facilities to house the operation.

“It’s important to do the LORA now in a deliberate fashion so that we don’t do our work in front of the customer,” Hough

said. “And it ensures the system they get is ready to go, helping them understand the maintenance that must be done.”

The second evaluation was a Job Training Analysis, which provides the operational forces with a training package that instructs them on proper use of the system to efficiently engage adversaries on the battlefield.

“This process helps us ensure this weapon is both sustainable and maintainable at the operator and Marine Corps-wide level,” said Capt. Nick Berger, project officer in infantry weapons at MCSC. “It sets conditions for us to field the weapon.”

Sustainability is key in any systems-acquisition process. The goal of the LORA and Job Training Analysis is to ensure the operator and maintenance technical publications of a system are accurate, which reduces operational ambivalence and improves the grenade launcher’s sustainability.

The LORA is an ongoing process that continues throughout the lifecycle of the M320A1 to establish sustainability, Hough said. After fielding the M320A1, the Corps will monitor the system to ensure it is functioning properly.

During this time, the program office will make any adjustments and updates necessary.

“We’re looking to have the new equipment training and fielding complete prior to fourth quarter of [fiscal 2019] to ensure they can be used and maintained properly once they hit the fleet,” said Berger.

The analyses, which occurred over the course of a week, were no easy task.

“This was an extensive and arduous process,” Hough said. “We scheduled three days for the LORA – all day – so you’re looking at about 24 hours of work for the LORA. And that doesn’t include reviews, briefs and refinements to the

package.”

However, at the end of the week, Hough expressed gratitude for all parties involved in the M320A1 analyses, which he called a success. He said the tasks could not have been completed without the help of several key individuals.

“I will tell you what’s noteworthy is working with our contract support, the outside agencies and the deliberate efforts by our team – specifically Capt. Nick Berger and Steve Fetherolf, who is a logistician,” Hough said. “Those two have made a significant effort to get this together and move forward.”

Berger also expressed pride about the accomplishments of the analyses.

“This week has been a success,” he said. “We got the system in Marines’ hands, worked out the kinks and began to understand how we’re going to use this moving forward.”

Coast Guard Demobilizes Two Alaska Forward Operating Locations

KODIAK, Alaska – Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak aircrews demobilized forward operating locations (FOLs) in St. Paul and Cold Bay on March 15, concluding the supplemental coverage of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Chain, the Coast Guard 17th District said in a March 25 release.

The aircrews deployed on two-week rotations to increase

readiness and decrease response times to the Bering Sea fishing fleet during periods of increased maritime activity.

Air Station Kodiak MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter aircrews deployed to Cold Bay from Oct. 20 to Nov. 20, 2018, and then again from Jan. 15 to Feb. 19, 2019. Aircrews later deployed to St. Paul from Feb. 17 to March 15 in support of Coast Guard operations in the Bering Sea to provide search-and-rescue and maritime law-enforcement coverage.

In addition to the deployed Jayhawk aircrew, the Coast Guard Cutter Alex Haley, the Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Munro and the Coast Guard Cutter John Midgett, with an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter aircrew embarked, provided supplemental SAR support and maritime law-enforcement coverage in the Bering Sea.

Throughout the three-month season, Coast Guard assets and crews conducted 24 SAR cases and provided more than 114 SAR hours, resulting in 19 lives saved and 29 assisted.

Due to the fishing fleet moving further north in the Bering Sea and to augment the cutter presence, Air Station Kodiak increased its readiness by deploying crews to St. Paul. Before re-opening the St. Paul FOL, it had been without a deployed crew since 2014.

To meet mission requirements, aircrews performed 15 HC-130 Hercules airplane logistics flights, totaling more than 90 flight hours from Kodiak to St. Paul. While forward-deployed, St. Paul MH-60 aircrews responded to two cases, resulting in one life saved and five assisted.

“This has been a great Bering Sea deployment season, and as the fleet shifted further north, it was an all-hands-on-deck evolution to mobilize our crews and reopen our facility in St. Paul mid-season,” said Lt. Cmdr. Tom Huntley, Air Station Kodiak Jayhawk assistant operations officer. “This shift allowed us to maintain our search-and-rescue posture and protect our critical fishing industry, and it allowed us to be

ready and responsive when called upon.”

Both FOLs are part of the Coast Guard’s mobile presence and as such are focused on performing the services’ statutory missions to ensure maritime safety, security and stewardship throughout Alaska.

To follow the fishing fleet and to prepare for the projected increased summer maritime activity, Jayhawk aircrews are scheduled to deploy to FOLs in both Cordova and Kotzebue.

Navy Awards New Contract to Austal for Expeditionary Fast Transport Ships 13 and 14

Mobile, Alabama – The U.S. Navy awarded Austal USA a $261.8 million contract for the 13th and 14th Expeditionary Fast Transport ships (EPFs) on March 25, Austal said in a release.

The new contract not only expands Austal’s current 12-ship EPF program but sets the company and the Navy up for a potential transition to more medically based variants of the high-speed transport.

The now slightly over $2 billion 14-ship total value of the EPF program underscores the ability of Austal to build highly capable ships at an affordable cost in its state-of-the-art manufacturing facility, according to Austal. As Austal prepares to execute these latest contracts, the company’s advanced ship design division is looking at revolutionary designs for future warfighting capability and support from the

EPF.

“This contract reflects the confidence the U.S. Navy has in Austal’s talented workforce to build these highly capable, cost-effective ships,” Austal USA President Craig Perciavalle said. “It’s exciting to see how the EPF ships are supporting the MSC fleet in so many different capacities. We look forward to continuing to strengthen the fleet with the addition of EPF 13 and 14 and beyond.”

The EPF’s large, open-mission deck and large habitability spaces allow it to conduct a wide range of missions – from engagement and humanitarian assistance to disaster relief and from maritime security support operations to intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

With a draft of only 13 feet and a unique propulsion system, the EPF’s ability to access austere and degraded ports with minimal external assistance provides an overabundance of options to fleet and combatant commanders, Austal USA said. With their draft, propulsion system, large mission bay and speed above 40 knots, these ships have the potential to support future requirements in special operations, command and control and medical support.

Austal’s EPF program has delivered 10 ships, and two more under construction at its headquarters and ship manufacturing facility in Mobile.

SECNAV Names Future Destroyer

in Honor of U.S. Navy Medal of Honor Awardee

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WASHINGTON (March 18, 2019) An artist rendering of the future Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS William Charette (DDG 131). (U.S. Navy photo illustration/Released)
WASHINGTON – Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer has named a future Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, DDG 130, in honor of a Medal of Honor recipient, Hospital Corpsman Master Chief William Charette, the secretary's public affairs office said in a March 18 release.

Charette, a native of Ludington, Michigan, joined the Navy in 1951 and served in the Korean War in the Fleet Marine Force as a hospital corpsman attached to Company F, Third Platoon, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division.

"The actions of Hospital Corpsman William Charette will neither be forgotten or diminished," Spencer said. "Charette put himself at extreme risk during intense combat to render aid to Marines in need. His efforts saved lives, and I am honored that his legacy will live on in the future USS William Charette [DDG 130]."

Charette was presented the Medal of Honor for his actions on March 27, 1953, when Chinese soldiers in North Korea attacked and overran two of three hill outposts that Marines held. During a counterattack, an enemy grenade landed near Charette, who was helping a wounded Marine. Charette placed himself on top of the Marine to shield him from the explosion. The blast rendered Charette unconscious, but when he awoke he continued to aid Marines, including using torn parts of his uniform to dress battle wounds, his own battle vest to shield a wounded Marine, and exposing himself to incoming rounds to carry wounded Marines to safety.

All five enlisted Sailors who received the Medal of Honor for actions during the Korean War were Navy hospital corpsmen attached to the Marine Corps. Charette was the only living recipient. Charette passed on March 18, 2012, due to complications from heart surgery.

Arleigh-Burke class destroyers conduct a variety of operations from peacetime presence and crisis response to sea control and power projection. The future USS William Charette will be a Flight III destroyer, capable of fighting air, surface and subsurface battles simultaneously, and will contain a combination of offensive and defensive weapon systems designed to support maritime warfare, including integrated air and missile defense and vertical launch capabilities.

The ship will be constructed at Bath Iron Works, a division of General Dynamics in Bath, Maine. The ship will be 509 feet long, have a beam length of 59 feet and be capable of operating at speeds in excess of 30 knots.

Fire Aboard USS Devastator; No Injuries

NSA BAHRAIN – A fire broke out aboard the mine countermeasures ship USS Devastator (MCM 6) while the ship was pierside at Naval Support Activity (NSA) Bahrain on March 14, U.S. 5th Fleet Public Affairs said in a release.

There were no injuries in the fire, which broke out about 8 p.m. local time. The extent of the damage is being assessed, and the cause of the fire is under investigation, according to the release from the 5th Fleet.

Sailors aboard Devastator, USS Sentry (MCM 3), USS Gladiator (MCM 11), USS Dextrous (MCM 13) and USS Whirlwind (PC 11), as well as the NSA Bahrain Fire Department, responded to the fire. The ship declared the fire out at about 9 p.m. local time, and crew continued to cool hot spots to prevent a reflash.

Devastator is one of 21 forward-deployed ships to the U.S. 5th Fleet, whose area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The expanse is made up of 20 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab el Mandeb at the southern tip of Yemen.

HII Completes Installation of Main Mast on USS George Washington

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. –Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News Shipbuilding division has reached new heights in the refueling and complex overhaul (RCOH) of the aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), the company announced in a March 15 release. The shipyard installed the final piece of the ship's new main mast – the 34-foot upper mast section – that raises the ship's distinctive profile 123 feet above the flight deck. The RCOH is now 50 percent complete.

"Landing the upper mast is one of the most visible construction milestones in the mid-life refueling overhaul and maintenance availability of an aircraft carrier," said Chris

Miner, Newport News' vice president, in-service aircraft carrier programs. "We are making significant progress with George Washington and look forward to returning a fully recapitalized, mission-ready ship to the fleet for another 25 years of service."

To commemorate the milestone, George Washington sailors on March 15 held a brief mast-stepping ceremony that recognizes an ancient maritime custom of placing a coin underneath the ship's mast to bring good fortune. A time capsule containing photos, a piece of the old mast, several coins and other artifacts was attached to a metal plate, which later will be welded under the mast.

"Mast-stepping is a way to link the past with the future," said Capt. Glenn Jamison, the ship's commanding officer. "It is a way to honor the heritage of this ship and our namesake. George Washington once said that 'without a decisive naval force we can do nothing definitive, and with it, everything honorable and glorious.' Now, with this new mast signifying the progress we're making during RCOH, USS George Washington is ready to carry on the mantle of representing the Navy as only Gen. George Washington could have imagined and wanted."

The ship arrived at Newport News in August 2017 to begin the complex engineering and construction project and is in dry dock for hull and freeboard blasting and painting; repairs to its propellers, sea chests, shafts and rudders; and defueling and refueling of its power plant.

George Washington, the sixth Nimitz-class aircraft carrier to undergo this major life-cycle milestone, is on track for delivery in 2021.

Video here

Keel Laid on Future USS Bougainville

PASCAGOULA, Miss. – The keel-laying and authentication ceremony for the future USS Bougainville (LHA 8) was held March 14 at the Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII) Pascagoula shipyard, the Naval Sea Systems command said in a release.

The ship's sponsor, Ellyn Dunford, authenticated the keel by having her initials welded into the keel plate.

Traditionally, keel laying marks the first step in ship construction. However, with today's advanced modular shipbuilding, the keel-laying ceremony now recognizes the joining together of a ship's components and is a major milestone in the ship's construction. Fabrication of Bougainville began in October.

"We are honored to have Ellyn Dunford with us today to commemorate this milestone," said Tom Rivers, Amphibious Warfare program manager, PEO Ships. "The production team has made steady progress and we look forward to bringing the next generation of amphibious capabilities to Navy and Marine Corps warfighters."

The future USS Bougainville is the third ship of the America (LHA 6) class of amphibious assault ships built to facilitate forward presence and power projection. LHA 8 is the first Flight I ship of the America class with a reincorporated well deck to increase operational flexibility while maximizing the aviation capability inherent on the Flight 0 ships, USS America and the future USS Tripoli.

Designed to support the Marine Corps tenets of Operational Maneuver from the Sea and Ship-to-Objective Maneuver, America class ships are capable of rapid combat power buildup ashore the America class accommodates the Marine Corps' Air Combat Element, including F-35B Joint Strike Fighter and MV-22 Osprey, essential to maintaining power projection, air superiority and theater logistics.

HII's Pascagoula shipyard also is in production on Tripoli (LHA 7), the guided-missile destroyers Delbert D. Black (DDG 119), Lenah H. Sutcliffe Higbee (DDG 123), Jack H. Lucas (DDG 125), and amphibious transport dock ships, Fort Lauderdale (LPD 28) and Richard M. McCool Jr. (LPD 29). The shipyard also is

under contract for six Flight III Arleigh Burke class destroyers awarded as part of the fiscal 2018-2022 multiyear procurement.

Navy Secretary Names New Class of Towing, Salvage and Rescue Ship Navajo

WASHINGTON (Jan. 29, 2019) An artist rendering of the future USNS Navajo (T-TATS 6). (U.S. Navy photo illustration/Released)

WASHINGTON – Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said the new class of towing, salvage and rescue ship will be named Navajo in honor of the major contributions the Navajo people have made to the armed forces, the secretary's public affairs office said in a March 12 release.

The new class of vessels will be based on existing commercial towing offshore vessel designs and will replace the current T-ATF 166 and T-ARS 50 class ships. The first ship of this class will be named USNS Navajo and designated T-ATS 6.

“The Navajo people have fought and served our armed forces with honor and valor in nearly every major conflict since the birth of our nation, so it is fitting and right to name a new class of ship in their honor,” Spencer said. “The Navajo class of towing, salvage and rescue ships will serve our nation and continue the legacy of the Navajo people, and all Native Americans.”

The contract includes options for potentially seven additional vessels, and each additional ship will be named in honor of prominent Native Americans or Native American tribes.

Gulf Island Shipyards was awarded a $63.5 million contract for the detail design and construction of the new towing, salvage and rescue ship, which will be based on existing commercial towing offshore vessel designs and will replace the current T-ATF 166 and T-ARS 50 class ships in service with the U.S. Military Sealift Command.

The T-ATS will serve as open ocean towing vessels and will additionally support salvage operations and submarine rescue missions. The first ship in the class will be built at the company’s shipyard in Houma, La., and is expected to be completed in March 2021.