

Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, U.S. complete exercise Sea Dragon 2026



Sea Dragon anti-submarine warfare (ASW) competition participants pose for a group photo at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, March 18, 2026. Participating nations include Royal Australian Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force, Indian Navy, Japan Maritime Self Defense Force, and the United States Navy. Sea Dragon is a U.S.-led, multinational exercise designed to train anti-submarine warfare tactics and to operate together in response to maritime security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist First Class Ryan A. LeCompte)

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam – Exercise Sea Dragon 2026 successfully concluded at Andersen Air Force Base, marking the completion of 20 days of intensive multinational anti-submarine warfare (ASW) training, March 28.

Hosted by U.S. Navy Commander, Task Force (CTF) 72, two U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon aircraft from Patrol and Reconnaissance Squadron (VP) 4 and VP-45, joined a multilateral force of P-8A aircraft from the Indian Navy (IN), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF).

Sea Dragon 2026 continues to enhance the shared maritime domain awareness interoperability developed during previous iterations. This iteration improved on participating nations' ability to conduct multinational ASW operations inside a complex and dynamic exercise environment.

"What we do in Sea Dragon builds more than skill—it establishes a ASW team across nations. The shared experience empowers us to fight together more effectively," said Lt. Paolo Aguilar, assigned to VP-4.

VP-45 naval aviator Lt. Caitlin Tucker stated, "Exercises like Sea Dragon highlight the strength of our partnerships and alliances. They show that together, we're stronger, more capable, and ready to deter any aggressor in the Indo-Pacific."

Sea Dragon 2026 featured a structured training format to include a mobile ASW training target, referred to as the MK-30 "Sled", for tracking drills. The exercise also featured a U.S. Navy anti-submarine warfare exercise (ASWEX), where exercise participants engaged in a hunt to locate an active U.S. Navy submarine in the area. This year, forces operated in the vicinity of Saipan to employ recoverable exercise torpedoes, and demonstrate expansion of capabilities trained among the five nations.

As with previous years, Sea Dragon 2026 included a competitive component in which each nation's performance was assessed and graded to earn the Dragon Belt award, testing each nation's ASW tactics and response effectiveness in a

realistic scenario.

This year, VP-3 of the JMSDF emerged victoriously, securing the Dragon Belt for 2026. The Dragon Belt was previously held by the RAAF since their victory in 2025.

Exercises like Sea Dragon 2026 demonstrate the U.S. Navy's commitment to regional security and strengthening maritime partnerships with allied and partner nations. Exercise Sea Dragon has been held annually since 2019.

VP-4, part of CTF-72, is stationed in Whidbey Island, Washington, and is currently deployed to Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan. VP-45, also part of CTF-72, is stationed in Jacksonville, Florida, and is currently deployed to Misawa Air Base in Misawa, Japan. Throughout the deployments, both squadrons will be conducting maritime patrol and reconnaissance and theater outreach operations within the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations.

U.S. 7th Fleet, the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

Navy Commissions Submarine USS Massachusetts



March 30, 2026 | By [Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Kaitlin Young, Submarine Readiness Squadron 32](#) | ___

The Navy commissioned the submarine USS Massachusetts in a traditional ceremony held March 28 at Boston Harbor.

The ceremony culminated a yearslong process to bring the Massachusetts into service. It is the fifth Navy vessel named after the commonwealth of Massachusetts, following the most recent, USS Massachusetts, a battleship that participated in nearly every major Pacific campaign from 1943 to 1945 and earned 11 battle stars for its [World War II](#) service.

Navy Cmdr. Michael Siedsma, the Massachusetts' commanding officer, spoke proudly of his crew's efforts.

"To the crew, the plank owners, the 'Iron Patriots' of the USS Massachusetts, we did it," he said. "Your hard work and unshakable dedication [are] evident. I am amazed and humbled by what we have accomplished."

Sheryl Sandberg, the ship's sponsor, gave the traditional order to "man our ship and bring her to life." The crew responded, "Aye, aye, ma'am," before ceremonially running aboard the submarine.

Sandberg spoke about the Navy's enduring legacy.

"In three months, our nation will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. But as many of you here know, the Navy already celebrated this milestone last October. What does that tell us? It tells us: We don't have a Navy because we have a country; we have a country because we had a Navy!"

Following the hoisting of the colors and commissioning pennant, Navy Adm. William Houston, director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, highlighted the crew's hard work and the unit's role in national defense.

"[The] Massachusetts is playing an incredible role in our security," he said. "Your crew represents the best that our Navy and our nation [have to offer]. You train relentlessly to bring this warship to life and earned the trust placed on you."

The Massachusetts is the 12th Virginia-class submarine and was christened at the Newport News Shipbuilding yard in Newport News, Virginia, May 6, 2023.

As it joins the fleet, the Massachusetts brings significant warfighting capability, underscoring the nation's asymmetrical advantage at sea. Virginia-class submarines have enhanced stealth, sophisticated surveillance capabilities and special warfare enhancements that enable them to meet the Navy's multimission requirements.

Each Virginia-class submarine is 7,800 tons, 377 feet in length and has a beam of 34 feet. It is designed with a reactor plant that does not require refueling during the

planned life of the ship, reducing life-cycle costs while increasing underway time.

Coast Guard Cutter Stratton returns to California following 3-month deployment



The Legend-class USCGC Stratton (WMSL 752) assumed escort duties of motor tanker Sophia and escorted the vessel from an anchorage south of Puerto Rico to an at-sea transfer with Venezuela for further disposition, Jan. 27, 2026. (U.S. Coast Guard courtesy photo.)

From U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area, March 29, 2026

ALAMEDA, Calif. – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Stratton (WMSL

752) returned to their home port in Alameda, Monday after sailing more than 16,000 nautical miles and completing a 79-day patrol in the Caribbean.

Stratton departed Alameda Jan. 4 and transited through the Panama Canal to support ongoing operations in the Caribbean, preventing the illicit trade of crude oil in violation of international sanctions. On Jan. 25, Stratton assumed escort duties of motor tanker Sophia and escorted the vessel from anchorage south of Puerto Rico to an at-sea transfer with Venezuela for further disposition.

Additionally, while transiting in the Eastern Pacific, Stratton's crew operated in support of Joint Interagency Task Force-South to detect, monitor, and intercept illicit narcotics. Stratton's crew interdicted one fishing vessel at sea, exercising the North American Maritime Security Initiative (NAMSI) standard operating procedures. Enacting NAMSI and boarding the vessel at sea allowed for the transfer of the vessel to the Mexican Navy for further disposition.

During the patrol, Stratton conducted a fueling-at-sea evolution with USNS Supply (T-AOE 6) and helicopter vertical replenishments with Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen crews to resupply the cutter while deployed in the Caribbean. Additionally, the crew exercised helicopter deck landing operations with an MH-60 aircrew from the USS Lake Erie (CG 70) and Coast Guard Air Station Ventura, displaying Stratton's interoperability across different agencies and platforms.

"The Stratton crew looks forward to returning to Alameda to reunite with our friends and family," said Capt. Dorothy Hernaez, Stratton's commanding officer. "This was a demanding and dynamic patrol that tested our resilience and capabilities across a wide spectrum of operations. This patrol demonstrated Stratton's essential role as a multi-

mission platform capable of adapting to an evolving operational environment.”

Commissioned in 2012, Stratton is one of ten Legend-class national security cutters, and one of four homeported in Alameda. National security cutters are 418-feet long, 54-feet wide, and have a 4,600 long-ton displacement. They have a top speed of 28 knots, a range of 12,000 nautical miles, and can hold a crew of up to 170. National security cutters routinely conduct operations throughout the world, where their unmatched combination of range, speed, and ability to operate in extreme weather provides the mission flexibility necessary to conduct vital strategic missions.

The namesake of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Stratton is Capt. Dorothy Stratton, who led the service’s all-female reserve force during World War II. Dorothy Stratton was the first female commissioned officer in the Coast Guard and commanded more than 10,000 personnel. The ship’s motto is “We Can’t Afford Not To.”

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Undocks USS Albany Ahead of Schedule at Naval Submarine Base New London



GROTON, Conn. (March 26, 2026) – The Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Albany (SSN 753) undocks from the floating dry dock, Auxiliary Repair Dry Dock (RDM 4), on Wednesday, March 26, 2026 at Submarine Base New London in Groton, Conn. (U.S. Navy photo by Neil Boorjian)

From Hanna Lanoie, March 30, 2026

GROTON, Conn. – Portsmouth Naval Shipyard safely undocked Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Albany (SSN 753) March 26 at Naval Submarine Base (SUBASE) New London, marking a significant milestone in its maintenance and modernization availability.

Albany arrived at SUBASE New London in summer 2025, and has since undergone repairs, structural inspections, and replacements of mechanical and electrical systems. This extensive work enhances the submarine's capabilities, modernizes critical systems and equips Sailors – the engine that powers the fleet – with the most advanced undersea platform possible, ready to meet operational demands.

To support the availability, an advanced team of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard personnel spent much of 2025 coordinating with SUBASE New London to prepare facilities and support a large temporary duty workforce. At peak manning, more than 400 PNSY personnel were deployed to New London to execute the effort.

“Despite the inherent challenges of executing an off-yard availability, compounded by multiple winter storms, the teaming demonstrated by the crew of Albany and the shipyard workforce drove through every obstacle, completing Albany’s docking period ahead of schedule,” said Capt. Jesse Nice, shipyard commander. “This speaks to the resilience of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard team and the impact that a focused team of experts can have to safely accomplish great things at the pace the nation needs.”

Completion of a submarine’s docking period is a critical first step in its return to the fleet and directly supports the Navy’s focus on combat-ready platforms, increasing operational availability and contributing to credible, sustained deterrence.

“The early undocking of Albany is a significant accomplishment and a direct result of the one team, one fight mentality of my crew and our Portsmouth teammates,” said Cmdr. Adam Nebenzahl, commanding officer. “This milestone puts us one step closer to rejoining the fleet. We are eager to get back to sea and contribute to our nation’s defense.”

As America’s leader in attack submarine maintenance, repair, and modernization, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard delivers the decisive edge required to master an era of evolving threats. It stands at the forefront of America’s commitment to peace through strength, delivering combat-ready submarines that are lethal, resilient, and prepared to win. Through a focus on innovation, accountability, and fostering a culture of warfighting excellence, PNSY strengthens the maritime industrial base and invests in its highly-skilled workforce.

The work done at the shipyard is a direct contribution to national security. Submarines leave the shipyard more capable than ever before, ensuring the U.S. Navy remains the most dominant maritime force and that the nation's warfighters are prepared for any mission, anywhere in the world.

**MARAD Invests Over \$13 to
Bolster U.S. Marine
Highway Infrastructure Across
America**



From the U.S. Maritime Administration, Friday, March 27, 2026

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration (MARAD) today invested \$13,280,351 million in 11 marine highway projects across seven states through the U.S. Marine Highway Program.

The funding will support public and private partners in developing supply chains on marine highway routes—including the transportation of waste in Oregon and the improvement of barge docks in Pennsylvania—to ensure resiliency.

“Investing in marine highways will strengthen the Great Lakes

economy and other regional communities,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy. “We’ll deliver jobs, boost provide a boost for local industries, and strengthen infrastructure our economy relies on.”

“The marine highway program is a vital opportunity to expand the nation’s freight capacity,” said MARAD Administrator Steve Carmel. “By fully integrating our navigable waterways into the national transportation system, we keep the American economy moving forward.”

Additional Information:

U.S. Marine Highways are a vital component of America’s transportation infrastructure, offering a reliable way to move goods while easing congestion on our nation’s busy road and rail systems. The network spans 27,139 miles across 41 states, Washington, D.C., and all five U.S. territories. The 35 designated routes underpin U.S. supply chains, critical infrastructure, and maritime workforce development.

Under the Trump Administration’s America First agenda, all Marine Highway Grants award recipients must apply, comply with, and implement all requirements of the “Buy America, Build America” provisions.

**CNO completes multi-stop
Indo-Pacific engagement,
reinforcing partnerships and**

forward presence



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle visited the USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) while the ship was in port in Sydney, Australia, March 21, 2026. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Joe Cardona Gonzalez)

[From the Chief of Naval Operations Public Affairs, March 27, 2029](#)

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Daryl Caudle traveled more than 18,000 miles across the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility during a multi-stop visit to Australia and Singapore, underscoring the U.S. Navy's enduring commitment to allies, partners and forward-deployed forces in the region.

The trip began in Sydney, Australia, on March 19, where Caudle joined dozens of naval leaders from around the world in celebrating the 125th birthday of the Royal Australian Navy.

During the visit, he met with Australia's chief of navy, Vice Adm. Mark Hammond, to discuss deepening maritime cooperation and enhancing interoperability between the two navies.

"Our alliance with Australia is built on more than shared interests, it's built on shared values, trust and decades of operating side by side," Caudle said. "As we look to the future, our ability to integrate seamlessly across domains ensures we remain ready to meet any challenge together."

In Singapore, Caudle attended a senior leader engagement with the Republic of Singapore's chief of navy, Rear Adm. Sean Wat, reinforcing the importance of regional partnerships in maintaining stability and security in the Indo-Pacific.

"Singapore is a vital maritime partner at the crossroads of global commerce," Caudle said. "Our partnership reflects a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, where the rule of law prevails and all nations can prosper."

While in Perth, Australia, Caudle met with U.S. Consul General Colleen Altstock, highlighting the critical role of diplomatic and military coordination in advancing U.S. interests abroad.

During his travels, Caudle also engaged directly with Sailors assigned to USS Fitzgerald (DDG-62) and USS Tulsa (LCS-16), recognizing their professionalism and the essential role they play in maintaining a forward presence.

"Our forward-deployed Sailors are the backbone of our Navy's ability to operate where it matters, when it matters," Caudle said. "Their dedication, resilience and warfighting readiness send a clear message of commitment to our allies and deterrence to potential adversaries."

Caudle also toured HMAS Stirling, where he received updates on infrastructure upgrades, quality-of-service improvements and

maintenance enhancements designed to support continued port visits by U.S. Navy submarines. The changes observed since Caudle's last visit in 2024 were impressive and represent a significant step forward in achieving the milestones of the AUKUS agreement.

"The investments being made at HMAS Stirling demonstrate our shared resolve to ensure maritime security and stability across the Indo-Pacific," Caudle said. "Together, we are building a more integrated and capable force that can respond to evolving challenges and meet emerging threats head on."

Production facilities operated by Anduril Industries and Saronic Technologies were also on Caudle's itinerary, where he was briefed on ongoing development in autonomous surface and subsurface platforms.

The engagements highlighted the growing interest in advanced technologies in enhancing maritime awareness, expanding operational reach and accelerating the ability to integrate unmanned systems into the future fleet.

"Autonomous systems are rapidly changing the character of naval warfare," Caudle said. "Our partnerships with innovative industry partners help us move faster, think differently and deliver the capabilities our Sailors need to maintain a decisive advantage at sea." These technologies are examples of the tailored offsets described in Caudle's recently released U.S. Navy Fighting Instructions.

The 10-day trip highlighted the U.S. Navy's differentiated value to the Joint Force and the nation through ongoing efforts to strengthen alliances and partnerships, enhance interoperability and maintain a credible forward presence across the Indo-Pacific region.

The U.S. Navy, forward-deployed and globally

integrated, operates alongside allies and partners to ensure security, deter aggression and uphold the free flow of commerce that underpins global prosperity.

NAVAIR Selects Near Earth Autonomy to Enable Uncrewed Ship-to-Shore Operations in Contested Maritime Environments

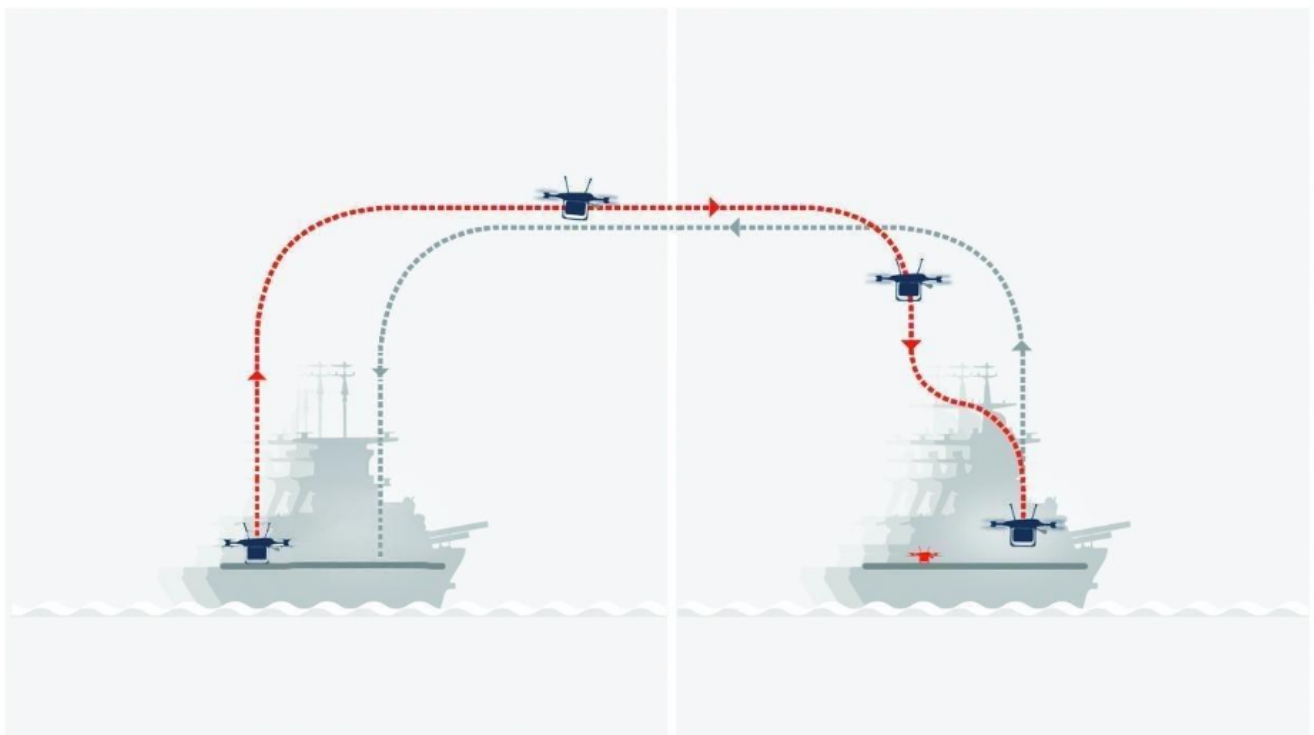


Illustration of UAS with Near Earth's Compact Firefly System
Conducting Maritime Logistics

*Resilient Uncrewed Logistics in GPS-Denied Maritime
Environments*

PITTSBURGH, Pa. – March 27, 2026 / The [Naval Air Systems Command](#) has awarded [Near Earth Autonomy](#) (Near Earth) a contract to develop an aircraft-agnostic autonomy solution for ship-to-shore and shore-to-ship operations through an Other Transaction Agreement (OTA) under the Naval Aviation Systems Consortium (NASC). The work will advance the U.S. Marine Corps' capabilities for uncrewed logistics missions in contested maritime environments.

Most uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) operations rely on infrastructure, including GPS and continuous data. When these are unavailable or denied, it becomes more difficult, or outright impossible, to complete missions. Near Earth directly addresses these challenges by enabling UAS to conduct complex maritime logistics, in shore-to-ship, ship-to-ship, and ship-to-shore transfers, without reliance on external infrastructure. This capability significantly increases operational resilience for naval forces.

[Near Earth's Firefly compact autonomy system](#) is designed for integration with a wide variety of aircraft. Weighing just 2 pounds, Firefly is light enough to be incorporated into a broad range of Class 3 and Class 4 aircraft, greatly expanding its applicability across the uncrewed aviation ecosystem. It has been successfully integrated on platforms including BAE, L3 Harris, and Pterodynamics. Multiple capabilities will be matured under the contract, including autonomous confined area operations, ship recovery in emissions-controlled (EMCON) environments, and GPS-free navigation.

This contract with the Navy is a key next step, maturing our autonomous systems performance for maritime missions," said Sanjiv Singh, CEO of Near Earth Autonomy. "We will build upon our past work on compact systems for uncrewed aerial logistics. This effort supports the Navy's ability to perform resilient, reliable maritime operations across aircraft."

This development will build on Near Earth's 13+ years of innovation for defense programs. The progression began with [Autonomous Aerial Cargo/Utility System \(AACUS\)](#), which pioneered rotorcraft autonomy for Marine Corps resupply. Building on this, Near Earth miniaturized the [Joint Capability Technology Demonstration \(JCTD\) system for Unmanned Logistics Systems Air \(ULS-A\)](#), proving autonomy for small UAS in confined areas. NAVAIR selected Near Earth Autonomy for the USMC [Aerial Logistics Connector Program](#) to demonstrate optimized logistics using rotorcraft. The Firefly system represents the latest advancement, enabling small cargo UAS operations for programs like the [Marine Corps' Tactical Resupply Unmanned Aircraft System \(TRUAS\)](#).

This contract will be validated through a series of test events to validate requirements, refine operational procedures, and systematically verify system performance. These tests will culminate in a final demonstration with the [Naval Air Systems Command](#) at Patuxent River in September 2026, showcasing a full range of capabilities, including ship searching, deck tracking, night operations, and autonomous flights between moving vessels.

U.S. Coast Guard, CNMI partners strengthen maritime security presence in Saipan's waters



Members of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Boarding Team conduct a joint patrol with the CNMI Department of Public Safety – Marine Unit personnel on March 20, 2026, in Saipan. From March 18-22, conducted joint underway and shoreside operations alongside the CNMI Department of Public Safety, Saipan Marine Unit, and Saipan Customs and Biosecurity, reinforcing direct lines of communication and cooperation that strengthen maritime domain awareness across the CNMI’s waters and surrounding exclusive economic zone. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Chris Farrell)

From U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia, March 26, 2026

SAIPAN, CNMI – Federal and local maritime law enforcement agencies patrolled Saipan’s waters and port together in mid-March, boarding six small vessels and launching new coordination channels that expand the CNMI’s ability to monitor and respond to threats in its surrounding waters.

From March 18-22, the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Boarding Team conducted joint underway and shoreside operations alongside

the CNMI Department of Public Safety Saipan Marine Unit and CNMI Customs and Biosecurity. Teams engaged 12 vessel contacts and completed six small vessel security boardings, while a joint patrol of the Port of Saipan marked the first combined shoreside operation between the U.S. Coast Guard and Customs and Biosecurity.

The operation also brought together key agency leaders for the first time. SBT members met with an ICE Homeland Security Investigations representative, the assistant director of the CNMI Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the newly appointed chief of the DPS's Saipan Marine Unit – reinforcing direct lines of communication and cooperation that strengthen maritime domain awareness across the CNMI's waters and surrounding exclusive economic zone.

“The Marianas sit at the center of Western Pacific maritime activity: commercial traffic, fishing, small vessels moving between islands,” said Lt. j.g. Thomas Forames-Su, supervisor of the SBT. “These operations are about more than boardings. We're strengthening the relationships and shared awareness that let us and our partners act faster and more cohesively.”

Maritime domain awareness is a shared responsibility across federal, local, and community stakeholders. The CNMI's economy depends heavily on the free flow of maritime commerce, fishing, and tourism, all of which require safe and well-monitored waters. Joint operations, like this one, strengthen the network of agencies and protect those interests every day.

Building on the momentum from this week's operations, the U.S. Coast Guard and CNMI partners are planning additional joint patrols, dockside security boardings, and coordinated cutter operations, like the USCGC Frederick Hatch's recent patrol, in the waters around Saipan and to the north. Agencies are also working to deepen communication protocols and formalize interagency coordination agreements to expand joint response

capabilities across the region.

USS Ross Departs Norfolk for Deployment



From [by Commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet Public Affairs](#), March 25, 2026

NORFOLK, Va. – Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Ross (DDG 71) got underway from Naval Station Norfolk March 25, 2026, to begin operations in support of its scheduled deployment.

The ship's anticipated departure comes after months of training, maintenance, and certification events as part of the George H. W. Bush Carrier Strike Group.

“The Ross crew is ready in all respects to deter aggression, protect freedom of the seas, and respond to any challenge,”

emphasized Capt. John Benfield, commodore of Destroyer Squadron 22. "They are part of the readiness engine of our great Navy, and they know that fortune favors valor."

Ross, stationed in Norfolk, Va, with a crew of approximately 300 Sailors, is a multi-mission guided-missile destroyer with air warfare, anti-submarine warfare, naval surface fire support, and surface warfare capability.

"Thank you to our families for all the continued support as we head out to sea. Because of them, the Sailors of USS Ross can fully embody our ship motto "Fortune Favors Valor" in every way," said Cmdr. Pia M. Chapman, commanding officer, USS Ross. "We've conducted extensive training, maintenance, and certification events as part of the George H. W. Bush Carrier Strike Group, and we are trained and ready for national tasking."

Ross is named for Medal of Honor recipient and retired Navy Captain Donald Kirby Ross, recognized for his bravery and refusal to abandon his duty during the December 1941 Pearl Harbor attacks. The ship's keel was laid on April 10, 1995, in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and her christening was held one year later.

U.S. 2nd Fleet, reestablished in 2018 in response to the changing global security environment, develops and employs maritime ready forces to fight across multiple domains in the Atlantic and Arctic in order to ensure access, deter aggression and defend U.S., allied, and partner interests.

For more U.S. 2nd Fleet news and photos, visit [facebook.com/US2ndFleet](https://www.facebook.com/US2ndFleet), <https://www.c2f.usff.navy.mil/>, X – @US2ndFleet, and <https://www.linkedin.com/company/commander-u-s-2nd-fleet>.

Naval Postgraduate School Alumni Lead NASA's Artemis II Moon Mission



From Dan Linehan, March 24, 2026

Two [Naval Postgraduate School](#) (NPS) alumni will lead the historic Artemis II mission on a 10-day space flight around the Moon – mission commander retired U.S. Navy Capt. Reid Wiseman and spacecraft pilot U.S. Navy Capt. Victor Glover. The target launch window opens on April 1, 2026, the first of seven possible launch days in April. Artemis II will be the first crewed lunar fly-by in more than 50 years.

Americans first orbited the Moon during the Apollo 8 mission

in 1968, which was piloted by James Lovell, also a U.S. Navy captain, naval aviator, and test pilot, in preparation for the Apollo 11 lunar landing. Now, 58 years later, this modern mission will similarly take the four-person crew around the Moon to test their modern spacecraft at a maximum distance of nearly 250,000 miles away from Earth. The Artemis II mission “will carry astronauts farther from Earth and closer to the Moon than any human has been in over half a century,” [according to NASA’s website](#).

“U.S. Navy Capt. Gene Cernan was the last astronaut to set foot on the Moon. He commanded the Apollo 17 mission in 1972 and was also an NPS alumnus. So, it’s exciting to see us headed back,” said retired U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau, NPS president. “Since NASA’s inception, NPS and our Navy have had a very strong history in space, from educating future astronauts to record-setting efforts and cutting-edge research. We continue to break boundaries today.”

Both naval aviators and test pilots, Wiseman and Glover received NPS certificates in Space Systems Fundamentals. And Glover also earned a Master of Science in Systems Engineering from NPS. These programs and others are offered by NPS’ [Space Systems Academic Group](#) (SSAG).

[Jim Newman, former SSAG chair and NPS provost](#), flew aboard four Space Shuttle missions as a mission specialist to the *International Space Station (ISS)* and made six spacewalks. He understands the magnitude of returning to the Moon and believes extensive education is fundamental to preparing astronauts for the out-of-this-world challenges faced during spaceflight.

“It’s very exciting for NPS alumni to be so involved in NASA’s return to the Moon,” said Newman. “Not only on this upcoming Artemis II spaceflight but on others as well, continuing a long tradition of exceptional service and contribution to our country.”

Having a graduate degree is a requirement for becoming a NASA astronaut. Back in 2013 after Glover's selection, he reflected on the importance of having an advanced education that integrated real-world problems and solutions.

"I was a test pilot, working in the systems engineering field, actually doing test and evaluation under the umbrella of weapons systems acquisition," Glover said of his Navy duties back while concurrently studying for his master's from NPS. "My work product bolstered my school product, and, likewise, my school product improved my work quality."

Two mission specialists make up the remaining Artemis II crew. Researcher Christina Koch specializes in space science instrument development and remote scientific field engineering, and Canadian Space Agency's Jeremy Hansen is a Royal Canadian Air Force colonel and fighter pilot with NASA and European Space Agency mission operations experience.

Wiseman, Glover, and Koch have each previously completed one spaceflight mission. For Hansen, it will be his first trip into space.

The astronauts will blast off aboard the crew capsule of an Orion spacecraft that's mounted atop a NASA Space Launch System (SLS) super heavy-lift rocket. Like the Space Shuttle, SLS uses liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen propellants for its main engines and has two solid rocket boosters at opposite sides.

After liftoff from Kennedy Space Center's Launch Complex 39B, Orion will orbit Earth twice as it conducts thorough tests that ensure the spacecraft is ready to safely trek across the vacuum of space to the Moon and back. While still in Earth's orbit, CubeSats from international space agencies are planned for deployment. Though none are from NPS this time around, the institution has a [long history of developing CubeSats—and other types of satellites—and putting them into space.](#)

Interest in NPS' CubeSats helped draw former director of the science directorate at NASA's Ames Research Center Michael Hesse to his new position of Vice Provost of Research and Innovation at NPS. Hesse is a physicist, specializing in space science and space weather.

"Particularly as someone who has worked at NASA for so many years, it's wonderful to see this mission led by two NPS alumni," said Hesse. "For a school that has educated so many astronauts and so many others who are involved in the science, technology, and applications of space programs across the globe, it's a tremendous honor to have this connection as humankind finally returns to the Moon."

Blasts from rocket thrusters will break Orion free of Earth's orbit and put the spacecraft on trajectories to the Moon, around it, and back to Earth. The roundtrip mission will cover approximately 500,000 miles. During this time, astronauts will test equipment and procedures required for future long duration and Moon landing missions and use the Deep Space Network to stay in communication with Earth.

The Artemis space program started exploration spaceflights in 2022 with Artemis 1, which was a successful uncrewed mission that orbited the Moon. Future Artemis missions will be Moon landings with astronauts and lunar surface exploration.

[NPS' tradition of graduating astronauts](#) stretches back to Project Mercury, which was NASA's very first human spaceflight program. U.S. Navy Cmdr. Scott Carpenter was one of the Mercury Seven and, in 1962, the second American to orbit Earth. And a decade later, Cernan's Apollo 17 made the last lunar landing.

Including Carpenter, Cernan, Wiseman, and Glover, [NPS has 44 NASA astronaut alumni](#). And this figure doesn't even include its non-alumni astronauts, such as current NPS student U.S. Army CW3 Ben Bailey, who was selected to the most recent NASA

astronaut class in 2025, and faculty like Space Shuttle astronaut Newman.

Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Skylab, Soyuz, Space Shuttle, SpaceX, ISS, and now Artemis are all missions and spacecraft that NPS astronauts have flown. Even former naval aviator and test pilot retired Cmdr. Brian Binnie, who helped usher in the era of commercial space travel when he captured the X-Prize in *SpaceShipOne*, was an NPS alum.

It's hard to escape the gravity of the moment as these 21st century space voyagers head back to the Moon. And as they do, Rondeau gives her wishes, "Godspeed Reid, Victor, Christina, and Jeremy!"

Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) is located in Monterey, California, provides defense-focused graduate education, including classified studies and interdisciplinary research, to advance the operational effectiveness, technological leadership, and warfighting advantage of the naval service. Established in 1909, NPS offers master's and doctorate programs to Department of War military and civilians, along with international partners, to deliver transformative solutions and innovative leaders through advanced education and research.