

Hegseth Draws Distinction Between Epic Fury, Previous Conflicts

March 19, 2026 | By Matthew Olay, DoW News

During a Pentagon briefing today on Operation Epic Fury, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth said the current conflict with Iran differs from the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“[Some people] want you [the American people] to think, just 19 days into this conflict, that we’re somehow spinning toward an endless abyss, or a ‘forever war,’ or a quagmire. Nothing could be further from the truth,” Hegseth said.

“Hear it from me, one of hundreds of thousands who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, who watched previous [administrations] squander American credibility – this is not those wars,” he continued.

The secretary went on to say the current campaign in Iran is laser-focused and decisive, and the U.S. objectives of destroying Iran’s missiles and missile launchers, eradicating the country’s navy and ensuring Iran never gets a nuclear weapon remain unchanged.

As evidence of the progress being made over close to three weeks, Hegseth said all Iranian ballistic missile and one-way drone attacks are down 90% since combat operations began Feb. 28.

Additionally, he said U.S. Central Command forces have damaged or sunk more than 120 Iranian naval vessels, including all 11 of the regime’s submarines.

Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, joined Hegseth at the briefing and provided an update

on battle damage.

“Centcom remains on plan to achieve our military objectives, and [we] remain unrelenting in our pursuit of Iranian missile capabilities, [drone] capabilities ... [Iran’s] navy and ... their industrial base,” Caine said.

In the air, Caine said the U.S. military yesterday dropped 5,000-pound penetrator bombs into underground Iranian storage facilities housing coastal defense cruise missiles and other additional support equipment.

He also said that Centcom forces are flying further to the east and penetrating deeper into Iranian airspace to hunt and kill one-way attack aircraft, limiting Iran’s ability to project power outside its borders.

Additionally, Caine said A-10 Thunderbolt II attack aircraft are hunting and killing fast attack watercraft in the Strait of Hormuz, and AH-64 Apache helicopters have joined the fight on the battlespace’s southern flank.

During the briefing, both Hegseth and Caine paid tribute to the U.S. airmen who lost their lives in a KC-135 Stratotanker crash in Iraq, March 12.

Both leaders were at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware yesterday for the return of the six fallen service members’ remains.

Hegseth said the overwhelming sentiment he and Caine heard from the family members of the fallen was that the campaign in Iran must be completed to honor the ultimate sacrifice those airmen made.

“My response, along with that of [President Donald J. Trump], was simple: Of course, we will finish this. We will honor their sacrifice. Their sacrifice only [hardens] our commitment,” Hegseth said.

Navy Reshapes Warfighting Acquisition System



Establishes 5 Portfolio Acquisition Executive Organizations
From the Navy Office of Information, March 16, 2026

Washington, DC – The Department of the Navy (DON) today announced the establishment of five Portfolio Acquisition Executive organizations: PAE Industrial Operations, PAE Marine Corps, PAE Maritime, PAE Strategic Systems Programs and PAE Undersea. With these directives, the Navy is fully engaged in making the PAE model the new operational standard for the acquisition enterprise, injecting urgency and a ruthless focus on accelerated delivery.

The organizational changes are key initiatives of Secretary Hegseth's directive to transform to a warfighting acquisition system and a key tenet of Secretary Phelan's Golden Fleet initiative to change how the Navy is doing business to drive

accountability and performance.

“In a time where our warfighters are on the frontline and the nature of warfare is changing at a rapid pace, the Department of the Navy needs a warfighting acquisition system that better responds to those at the tip of the spear,” said Secretary of the Navy John C. Phelan. “Every acquisition decision ties directly to deterrence, and if deterrence fails, decisive victory. With the establishment of PAEs, we are instilling a war-fighting mindset to accelerate delivery to the fight.”

Under the PAE model, leaders are empowered –and expected– to make disciplined, data-driven trade-offs across cost, schedule, and performance, with a clear priority on time to field. Additionally, each PAE is responsible for understanding and actively managing the industrial base supporting their portfolio, including production capacity, supply chain risk, and opportunities to expand or diversify suppliers.

The Department of the Navy has empowered five senior acquisition leaders as the interim Portfolio Acquisition Executives, making them the single accountable official for key portfolios:

PAE Industrial Operations: Vice Adm. James P. Downey

PAE Marine Corps: Lt. Gen. Eric Austin

PAE Maritime: Mr. Christopher Miller

PAE / DPRM Strategic Systems Programs: Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe

PAE Undersea / DRPM Submarines: Vice Adm. Robert Gaucher

These reforms will create a warfighting acquisition system that aligns authority with responsibility, reduces unnecessary bureaucracy, empowers program managers, and delivers capability to the Navy and Marine Corps at speed and scale.

“PAEs will have direct authority not only for program offices

but also over associated technical, contracting, and sustainment functions, providing true cradle-to-grave control to deliver fully integrated capability,” said Mr. Jason Potter, Performing the Duties of Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (ASN RDA). “We are moving from a compliance-based bureaucracy to having outcome-focused organizations, fundamentally changing how we do business.”

Department of the Navy acquisition reform efforts have progressed aggressively since the establishment of the DON Rapid Capabilities Office (DON-RCO) and establishment of PAE Robotics and Autonomous Systems in December 2025, which Vice Adm. Seiko Okano, Principal Military Deputy to ASN(RDA), says is helping to establish a culture of speed and measured risk across the warfighting acquisition system.

“Our acquisition workforce is critical to our warfighting capability, and not being deployed does not excuse us from having a warfighting ethos,” said Vice Adm. Seiko Okano. “Each PAE will operate with a digital first mind-set – we will align on data and eliminate non-value-added layers of program reviews and bureaucracy to identify risks earlier and enable faster and more informed decision making.”

Additionally, each PAE will operate with a dedicated Rapid Capability Cell, closely linked to the Department of the Navy’s Rapid Capabilities Office. These cells will focus on rapidly identifying opportunities to adopt commercial technology, conduct rapid prototyping, and accelerate fielding when urgent operational needs arise.

Transition study efforts continue across the aviation, industrial infrastructure, mission systems, and munitions programs. These efforts are progressing and will be announced as they are formally established.

Coast Guard interdicts 11 aliens near Imperial Beach



The Coast Guard interdicted 11 suspected aliens approximately 7 miles west of Imperial Beach, Sunday. At approximately 12:57 p.m., crew members aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Sea Otter (WPB-87362) observed a vessel transiting into U.S. waters and dispatched a boarding team to intercept.

U.S. Coast Guard Southwest District, March 16, 2026

SAN DIEGO – The Coast Guard interdicted 11 suspected aliens approximately 7 miles west of Imperial Beach, Sunday.

At approximately 12:57 p.m., crew members aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Sea Otter (WPB-87362) observed a vessel transiting into U.S. waters and dispatched a boarding team to intercept.

The Sea Otter's boarding team interdicted the vessel and identified 11 suspected aliens aboard, all claiming Mexican nationality.

A Coast Guard Station San Diego boat crew assisted by transporting the vessel and all 11 suspected aliens to Border Patrol at Ballast Point.

USS Gonzalez Departs Norfolk for Deployment



NAVAL STATION NORFOLK, Va. (March 16, 2026) – Cmdr. Michael Shenk, commanding officer of the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gonzalez (DDG 66), speaks to local news

media outlets prior to the ship's departure from Naval Station Norfolk to begin operations in support of its scheduled deployment. The ship's departure comes after months of training, maintenance, and certification events. (U.S. Navy photo by Chief Mass Communication Specialist Matthew Jackson)

From U.S. 2nd Fleet, 17 March 2026

NORFOLK, Va. – Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Gonzalez (DDG 66) got underway from Naval Station Norfolk March 16, 2026, to begin operations in support of its scheduled deployment.

The ship's departure comes after months of training, maintenance, and certification events.

"The crew is ready and this ship brings significant combat capabilities to the fight," emphasized Capt. John Benfield, commodore of Destroyer Squadron 22. "They are prepared to act at a moment's notice to deter or defeat any threat as necessary."

Gonzalez, 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.

"A truly incredible amount of training and energy went into ensuring our crew was prepared for this deployment," said Cmdr. Michael Schenk, commanding officer, USS Gonzalez. "Additionally, the guidance and assistance provided by Surface Force Atlantic, Carrier Strike Groups Four and Ten, Surface Group Mid-Atlantic, Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Two, and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center exemplified the full team support behind this ship being ready for any challenge we may face. Thank you to our families and the Norfolk community for your continued support as we head out to sea."

Gonzalez is the U.S. Navy's 16th Arleigh Burke-class destroyer. The ship was named for Marine Sgt. Alfredo Cantu

Gonzalez, a Medal of Honor recipient in the Vietnam War. The keel was laid down on Feb. 3, 1994, at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, and christened on Feb. 18, 1995.

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.c2f.usff.navy.mil/), <https://www.c2f.usff.navy.mil/>, X – @US2ndFleet, and <https://www.linkedin.com/company/commander-u-s-2nd-fleet>.

Bell Completes SPINE Upgrades on First Two H-1 Aircraft



The first AH-1Z and UH-1Y to be completed under the Structural and Power Improvements for NextGen Effects (SPINE) program, formerly SIEPU, have left the Amarillo Assembly Center From Bell Textron

AMARILLO, Texas. (March, 17 2026) – [Bell Textron Inc.](#), a Textron Inc. (NYSE: TXT) company, has announced the completion of the first AH-1Z and UH-1Y aircraft to receive full upgrades to their structure and power delivery mechanisms under the US Marine Corps’ SPINE program. The program was recently renamed from Structural Improvement and Electrical Power Upgrade (SIEPU) to the Structural and Power Improvements for NextGen Effects (SPINE) program to emphasize the importance of this essential modernization effort and to highlight the increased survivability and lethality SPINE will enable throughout the lifetime of the H-1 fleet.

The completed aircraft departed the Amarillo Assembly Center and are now at Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River for continued flight testing. These tests will determine the final SPINE configuration to be modified in Amarillo and fielded to the USMC in future contracted

efforts.□

The SPINE program will enable the H-1 fleet to utilize enhanced weapons systems and other future capabilities and is part of the H-1 program's modernization plan to increase lethality and enhance survivability by improving modern warfighting capabilities.

"To have these first two aircraft completed under the SPINE program is a huge moment for us," said Scott Sims, H-1 program director, Bell. "At Bell, crew safety and aircraft effectiveness remain the number one priority on everything we do. These upgrades will ensure that our H-1 aircraft remain the most capable aircraft available, while operating at the forefront of modern missions. They will continue to excel at the job they were designed to do for many years to come."

Bell's effort to modify these first two aircraft began at the company's Drives System Center (DSC) and Repair and Overhaul Center (ROC) and culminated in the aircraft electrical and structural modifications that took place over the last 19 months at the Amarillo Assembly Center. Successful execution has been a result of years of work between U.S. Government, Bell, and industry partners. The completion of the first modification effort at the Amarillo Assembly Center sets the stage for future growth as Bell looks to support modification of the Marine H-1 fleet over the next decade.

"In the competitive world that the H-1 lives and thrives in, it's vital to remain competitive with current and future capabilities and to excel in every environment where these aircraft are deployed," said Danielle Markham, program manager, Bell.

"The SPINE program represents the next step in the H-1 evolution, ensuring the platform has structural strength,

electrical capacity, and digital foundation needed to operate as a fully interoperable member of the modern joint force.”

13th MEU Forms Complete Marine Air-Ground Task Force with Full F-35 Squadron



A U.S. Marine Corps F-35B Lightning II aircraft assigned to Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, Marine Aircraft Group 13, 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, conducts a vertical landing on the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli (LHA 7) as part of Steel Knight 24 while underway in the Pacific Ocean, Dec. 3, 2024. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by

Sgt. Luc Boatman)

From the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, March 16, 2026

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. – The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) has officially formed as a complete Marine Air-Ground Task Force with the addition of its major subordinate elements, bringing the MEU's full capability together under one command.

The 13th MEU Command Element welcomed Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 2/4, which will serve as the Ground Combat Element; Combat Logistics Battalion (CLB) 13, which will serve as the Logistics Combat Element; and Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 364 (Reinforced) and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211, which together form the Aviation Combat Element. VMFA-211 will provide a full squadron of F-35B Lightning II aircraft, significantly expanding the aviation capabilities of the unit.

Together, these units form a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), enabling command and control of ground, aviation, and logistics capabilities and forming a single, rapidly deployable force capable of executing a wide range of missions from the sea.

"Compositing the 13th MEU brings together the full capabilities of a Marine Air-Ground Task Force," said Col. Richard Alvarez, commanding officer of the 13th MEU. "That integration gives national leaders another flexible, lethal, sea-based force ready to respond when needed."

As the Ground Combat Element, BLT 2/4, provides the infantry forces of the MEU and serves as the principal ground maneuver element of the MAGTF.

The Aviation Combat Element, comprised of VMM-364 (Rein.) and VMFA-211, provides the MEU with a full spectrum of Marine Corps aviation capabilities in support of MAGTF operations.

CLB-13, the Logistics Combat Element, provides a broad range of sustainment capabilities that allow the MEU to operate and sustain itself in any environment.

“The strength of The Fighting 13th has always been its Marines and Sailors,” said Sgt. Maj. Gerald Furnari, the senior enlisted advisor of the 13th MEU. “Every generation that serves in this unit adds to its legacy, and today’s team stands ready to answer the nation’s call.”

The composite of the MEU marks the beginning of an intensive training cycle during which the command, ground, aviation, and logistics elements will train together before deploying aboard U.S. Navy amphibious ships as part of an Amphibious Ready Group.

The 13th MEU was established at Camp Pendleton on Feb. 1, 1985, as the 13th Marine Amphibious Unit, and was redesignated as the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit on Feb. 5, 1988. Known as “The Fighting 13th,” the unit has deployed around the world in support of combat operations, crisis response missions, and humanitarian assistance efforts.

NIWC Pacific AI Program to Guide Next-Generation Chip Development



From Darian Wilson, Naval Information Warfare Center, March 16, 2026

SAN DIEGO – A Naval Information Warfare Center (NIWC) Pacific artificial intelligence program is poised to help guide the development of a new generation of American-made microchips, following a high-level summit hosted by the University of Arizona on Feb. 18.

A new coalition of leaders from academia, venture capital, and the semiconductor industry has identified a NIWC Pacific AI program as a lead use case for developing revolutionary chips

that would merge electronics and photonics. The effort aims to create processors that could dramatically reduce power consumption and heat while increasing processing power, a critical need for deploying advanced AI in resource-constrained military environments.

The “Summit on Photonics Heterogeneous Integration” brought together approximately 25 experts from top universities and tech companies to rally behind a national security imperative. A presentation on a NIWC Pacific AI initiative was given by John Wood, lead systems engineer for the NIWC Pacific Command and Control Department. “Bringing together this ecosystem of academic and industry leaders is a pivotal moment,” said Wood. “When we presented the vision for our in-house AI program, it helped crystallize the national security imperative driving this innovation. We’re not just talking about faster chips; we’re talking about securing a technological advantage for the nation.”

The NIWC Pacific program, which is developing a future AI commander-assist system, was seen as an ideal testbed. According to Wood, its near-term development goals and low initial production volume make it a perfect springboard for demonstrating the new chip technology.

The proposed hybrid chips are designed to solve two major hurdles for AI adoption on military platforms: high power draw and immense heat dissipation. By integrating light-based photonics directly with electronics, these new designs are expected to run faster and far more efficiently. This could make it feasible to run complex AI applications aboard ships and other platforms where power and cooling are inherently limited. A key goal of the coalition is to design and fabricate the new chips entirely in the United States, strengthening supply chain security for critical defense components.

“For the Navy, this is another exciting step toward making

heavy AI processing a reality aboard our ships,” said Wood. “These new chips could be the key to deploying advanced AI capabilities directly to the fleet, right where they’re needed most.”

The group plans to hold semi-annual summits, alternating between the University of Arizona and Stanford, to track progress and tackle challenges, according to Wood. The long-term goal is to mature the technology through the NIWC Pacific use case before scaling it for widespread adoption in both military and mainstream AI processors.

NOTICE: AI tools were used to improve readability of this information. Factual accuracy of all content was verified by relevant DoD personnel in compliance with DoD policies.

HII’S Ingalls Shipbuilding Celebrates Apprentice School Graduates



From HII

PASCAGOULA, Miss., March 14, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) – HII’s (NYSE: HII) Ingalls Shipbuilding division celebrated 70 apprentice school graduates during a ceremony at the shipyard today. The event honored the newest class to complete the Department of Labor-registered program, which combines classroom instruction, paid on-the-job training and industry-recognized credentials.

“The future of shipbuilding depends on skilled craftsmen and women who care deeply about their work, and today’s graduates should wear that responsibility with pride,” said Ingalls Shipbuilding President Brian Blanchette. “What they have learned is more than a trade, it is the discipline to do what’s right even when no one is watching. And the timing could not be more important; Our Navy is counting on the commitment and capability they bring to the ships our nation depends on.”

Since its founding in 1952, the Ingalls Apprentice School has graduated more than 4,000 shipbuilders and today supports more than 750 students who contribute directly to Ingalls’ operations. The school provides specialized training in 15

U.S. Department of Labor-registered trades, equipping apprentices with the technical skills, strong work ethic and hands-on experience needed to advance into journeyman roles. Apprentices earn competitive wages and receive a comprehensive benefits package beginning 30 days after starting the program.

Annually, Ingalls recognizes apprentices who excel in academics, craftsmanship, leadership and dedication. This year, joiner apprentice Sawyer Briggs set the standard for his class and was named Overall Apprentice of the Year.

“I’m proud of the journey that has brought me to this point in my career at Ingalls,” said Briggs. “This program prepared me with the skills and confidence needed to build the ships that support our Navy and our nation, and I take great pride in the craftsmanship we deliver every day.”

Ingalls Shipbuilding, the largest manufacturing employer in Mississippi, has designed, built and maintained amphibious ships and destroyers for the U.S. Navy for more than 87 years. The apprentice school is widely regarded as the backbone of Ingalls’ workforce, with many graduates advancing from craft roles into leadership positions and senior management throughout their careers at the shipyard.

Learn more about the Ingalls Apprentice School at: www.hii.com/careers/ingalls-apprentice-school/

Dismantling Iran Threat,

Protecting Homeland, Sharpening Arctic Readiness



March 13, 2026 | By David Vergun, DoW News

More than 50,000 service members are supporting Operation Epic Fury, which started Feb. 28, said Pentagon Press Secretary Kingsley Wilson today in the War Department's Weekly Sitrep video.

Those forces have established control over air and sea domains

and struck thousands of identified Iranian targets, demonstrating operational dominance, she said.

This is what we did this week at the WAR DEPARTMENT: pic.twitter.com/hRyK3iUWmC

– DOW Rapid Response (@DOWResponse) [March 13, 2026](#)

“We continue to deliver devastating combat power. Every day our resolve increases and the regime’s ability to threaten our forces, our partners and the American people, is being systematically dismantled,” Wilson said.

Yesterday, U.S. Central Command reported about 6,000 targets struck, with more than 60 ships and 30 minelayers damaged or destroyed to date, reflecting substantial progress in diminishing hostile capabilities.

Weapons employed in the operation, per the fact sheet, include a wide range of bombers, fighter jets, electronic warfare and reconnaissance aircraft, unmanned aerial systems, missile defense platforms, artillery systems, warships, counter-drone equipment, refueling assets and cargo aircraft.

On March 11, Centcom issued a warning to civilians that the Iranian regime is using civilian ports along the Strait of Hormuz to conduct military operations that threaten international shipping.

“This dangerous action risks the lives of innocent people. Civilian ports used for military purposes lose protected status and become legitimate military targets under international law,” the warning reads.

The War Department honors the American heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice in support of Operation Epic Fury, Wilson said, adding, “These patriots paid the price in full, and the Department of War will deliver total victory in their name.”

Shifting to homeland security, the District of Columbia National Guard activated the 260th Special Purpose Brigade at the D.C. National Guard Armory, March 7, Wilson said. It is the only brigade in the Army specifically designed to coordinate military support to civil authorities and protect critical infrastructure in the nation's capital.

The brigade was created in response to President Donald J. Trump's Executive Order 14339 and a subsequent directive from Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, calling for the immediate establishment, training and equipping of a dedicated National Guard unit to support public safety operations.

"The brigade will coordinate military support to civil authorities and enable National Guard forces to rapidly integrate with federal and local agencies responsible for safeguarding our capital," Wilson said.

"Partnerships like this are essential in Washington," said U.S. Marshal Jurgen Soekhoe at the brigade's activation ceremony. "The 260th Special Purpose Brigade brings a level of coordination and readiness that allows federal law enforcement and the National Guard to operate as a unified team when security demands it."

This week, the North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command concluded Arctic Edge 2026, a three-week, multidomain field training exercise conducted across Alaska and Greenland, Wilson said.

U.S., allied and interagency partners trained together to sharpen Arctic operations, improve interoperability and strengthen homeland defense capabilities in the high north, she said.

Key objectives of the exercise, according to a Northcom press release, were:

- Cruise missile defense;
- Coordination with interagency partners on the protection of critical infrastructure such as power grids in Alaska;
- Counter-small UAS defense;
- Joint and service-level experimentation and technology demonstrations;
- Arctic survival and mobility training in Greenland.

On March 8, at the direction of U.S. Southern Command commander, Marine Corps Gen. Francis L. Donovan, Joint Task Force Southern Spear conducted a lethal kinetic strike on a vessel operated by a designated terrorist organization, achieving its objective without U.S. casualties, Wilson said.

Intelligence confirmed the vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the eastern Pacific, and the operation resulted in the elimination of six male narco-terrorists, she said.

USCGC William Hart Returns

Home After 48-Day Operation Blue Pacific Patrol in Oceania



Henry Helsabeck, son of U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Jason Helsabeck, awaits the return of fast response cutter USCGC William Hart (WPC 1134) on Coast Guard Base Honolulu March 15, 2026. Helsabeck, the cutter's commanding officer, led his crew on a 48-day patrol throughout Oceania, visiting Samoa, Cook Islands, American Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Corinne Zilnicki)

Coast Guard Oceania District External Affairs, March 15, 2026

Editor's Note: Click [here](#) to download high-resolution video.

HONOLULU – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter William Hart (WPC 1134) returned to Honolulu Sunday following a 48-day patrol in support of Coast Guard Oceania District's Operation Blue Pacific in Oceania.

The William Hart crew departed Coast Guard Base Honolulu in January and traveled more than 7,000 nautical miles, making port calls in Apia, Samoa, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Pago Pago, American Samoa, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, and Kiritimati, Kiribati.

Patrolling in support of Operation Blue Pacific, the cutter's crew worked alongside Pacific Island partners to bolster maritime security and sovereignty, counter illicit maritime activities and transnational criminal organizations, and protect vital marine resources.

The William Hart crew exercised partnerships with Samoa and Cook Islands through bilateral maritime law enforcement agreements, professional exchanges and community engagements. In total, the William Hart crew and Pacific Island enforcement officers conducted eight boardings of fishing vessels.

The crew conducted one additional boarding of a foreign fishing vessel on the high seas supporting the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission as part of a multinational effort to deter illegal fishing practices throughout Oceania. While on patrol to control, secure and defend the U.S. maritime border and its approaches in American Samoa, the crew worked alongside Coast Guard Sector Honolulu boarding team personnel and conducted a total of six boardings, including a cargo vessel, recreational boats and three passenger vessels in the vicinity of Pago Pago.

In Tonga, the crew hosted U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau and Prime Minister Fatafehi Fakafānua to facilitate the signing of the new annex to the 2009 bilateral maritime law enforcement agreement between the U.S. and Kingdom of Tonga. This addition significantly strengthened the security partnership between both nations by enhancing the ability to combat illegal fishing, illicit maritime activities, and transnational

crime in Tonga's exclusive economic zone through expanded enforcement authority and technical cooperation.

"This historic patrol advanced critical partnerships with Pacific Island nations, protecting valuable marine resources and strengthening U.S. Coast Guard presence throughout Oceania," said Lt. Cmdr. Jason Helsabeck, commanding officer of the William Hart. "Our crew's dedication to these partnerships ensures a more secure and prosperous future for the region. I am deeply proud of the crew's unsurpassed professionalism, relentless commitment to securing our maritime borders, and the positive impact we've made alongside our trusted partners. We look forward to future deployments in Oceania."

Operation Blue Pacific is an overarching multi-mission Coast Guard endeavor to promote security, safety, sovereignty and economic prosperity in Oceania. Coast Guard cutters, aircrew and personnel deploy throughout Oceania to maintain unrestricted, lawful access to the maritime domain for all nations, improve regional stability, and solidify the Coast Guard as a reliable partner for maritime safety, security and stewardship in the Pacific.

The William Hart is the third 154-foot Sentinel-class fast response cutter homeported in Honolulu. The cutter's primary missions are maritime law enforcement, search and rescue, and national defense.