

Ticonderoga-Class Cruiser USS Vella Gulf Decommissioned



Sailors and former shipmates stand in formation during the guided-missile cruiser USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) decommissioning ceremony, Aug. 4. Vella Gulf was commissioned on Sept. 18, 1993, at Naval Station Norfolk. Vella Gulf is the first of five cruisers set to be decommissioned this year. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jacob Milham*

NORFOLK, Va. – With plank owners and former crew members looking on, the crew of USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) decommissioned their ship at a Naval Station Norfolk, ceremony Aug. 4, Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic said in a release.

The event comes just months before the ship's 29th commissioning anniversary. Hundreds gathered in the August heat to celebrate the ship's distinguished history and military service. Capt. Constantine Xefteris, Vella Gulf's first commanding officer, went back to the beginning,

addressing the many plankowners on hand.

“In 1993, every officer, every chief, every Sailor wanted to be on an Aegis cruiser,” said Xefteris. “It was the finest, most lethal ship in the world. Aegis cruisers set the standard for performance and everyone knew it.”

Following several Xefteris sea stories illuminating the ship’s early days, Rear Adm. Brendan McLane, commander, Naval Surface Forces Atlantic, lauded the crews, both current and former, for their hard work, dedication and setting the standard over the years.

“In 2020 the Vella Gulf crew completed perhaps the most challenging deployment of the ship’s career, deploying to the Middle East and Europe with the USS Eisenhower Strike Group during Covid,” said McLane.

“The crew spent 205 days underway,” he continued. “Vella Gulf’s crew proved their mettle on that deployment, embodying self-sufficiency, grit and warrior toughness by staying on station, despite the immense challenges. Nobody came out. Nobody left.

“As we enter an era of strategic competition, the example and lessons of Vella Gulf will guide us in meeting the challenges.”

Vella Gulf’s current Commanding Officer, Capt. Mike P. Desmond, spoke of the powerful bond between Sailors and their ships and the lives forged aboard. His words resonated with the audience as they bade farewell to the cruiser.

“Decommissioning conjures up a broad spectrum of emotions, as different as the backgrounds of the Sailors who have called Vella Gulf home away from home,” said Desmond. “Vella Gulf was as temperamental as can be, but when all systems were operating as designed, she was perhaps the most reliable, capable and lethal warship on the planet.”

Vella Gulf was built at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia, Sept. 18, 1993.

The ship was named in commemoration of the World War II Battle of Vella Gulf, which was fought in the area surrounding the Solomon Islands in the Pacific Ocean from Aug. 6-7, 1943. The battle saw six American destroyers successfully disrupt the Imperial Japanese Navy's supply lines without taking a single casualty or damage from enemy fire. It was a decisive victory for the United States.

Over its 29 years of service, the cruiser has been an important part of America's national defense strategy.

In 1999, the crew participated in NATO strikes against Serbia in an effort to stop government-sanctioned human rights abuses against ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo region.

In 2001, Vella Gulf answered the call, taking part in the national effort to provide homeland defense for the country's northeastern region immediately following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. The crew supported air traffic control efforts as the air defense commander, controlling protocols for an area spanning from Boston to Washington D.C.

In 2009, the ship led a task force responsible for curbing anti-piracy efforts off the Horn of Africa. During its mission, CG 72 responded to a distress call from the merchant vessel Polaris, a 420-foot tanker that was under attack. Vella Gulf's intervention led to the pirates arrest and made the region safer for shipping.

In 2017, the Vella Gulf joined Carrier Strike Group 11. During its assignment, it supported strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

The ceremony marks the first of five cruisers set to be decommissioned this year. Inactivation is a normal part of a

warship's lifecycle. After decommissioning, the ship is slated to be towed on Oct. 11 to the Navy's Inactive Ship's facility in Philadelphia, where it will be in a Logistical Support Asset status.

"She has served her crews and her nation well, and rightfully takes her place among the ships that, for well over 200 years, have played an indispensable role in protecting the United States of America and serving her strategic interests across the world." concluded Desmond.

"This ship and her crews will forever share a proud and lasting legacy."

**Navy Orders Construction of
Two Fleet Oilers, One
Expeditionary Sea Base**



General Dynamics NASSCO has been awarded two contracts for detailed design and construction for two fleet replenishment oilers and one expeditionary sea base ship. *GENERAL DYNAMICS NASSCO*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has awarded two contracts totaling \$1.4 billion for the detailed design and construction of three ships to be built by General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego: two fleet replenishment oilers and one expeditionary sea base ship.

The Naval Sea Systems Command awarded General Dynamics

National Steel and Shipbuilding Co. (NASSCO) an \$890 million contract modification for detailed design and construction of the seventh and eighth John Lewis-class fleet replenishment oilers T-AO 211 and 212, according to an Aug. 4 Defense Department contract announcement. The company also was awarded a \$535 million contract modification for detailed design and construction of Lewis B. Buller-class expeditionary sea base (ESB) 8, the sixth ship of the class.

The T-AO contract modification also includes an option for the detail design and construction of T-AO 213 which, if exercised would bring the cumulative value of that contract modification to \$1.63 billion.

In June, the Naval Sea Systems Command awarded NASSCO a \$500 million contract modification for long-lead-time material in support of the T-AO 211 and 212, according to a June 28 Defense Department contract announcement. The company also was awarded a \$100 million contract modification for long-lead-time material in support of ESB 8.

On July 27, NASSCO delivered to the Navy the lead ship of the new 742-foot-long, 49,850-ton fleet oiler class, the John Lewis (T-AO 205). Three more T-AOs are under construction – the future USNS Harvey Milk (T-AO 206), the future USNS Earl Warren (T-AO 207), and the future USNS Robert F. Kennedy (T-AO 208) – and four, T-AO 209 through 212, are under contract. The oilers each will have a fuel capacity of 157,000 barrels of oil as well as other dry stores to replenish ships at sea.

The Lewis B. Puller-class ESB is a development of the Montford Point-class mobile landing platform ship. The 784-foot-long ESB is equipped with a 52,000 square-foot flight deck that can handle H-1, H-53 and H-53 helicopters and V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft. The ship is a capable platform to support mine-countermeasures missions, special operations forces, patrol boat support and unmanned systems.

Three ESBs are serving in the fleet – USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3), USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) and the USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5) – and two more, the future USNS John L. Canley and USNS Robert E. Simanek (ESB 7), are under construction.

NASSCO said the construction of the three newly contracted ships is planned for third quarter of 2023 and continue into 2027. The company sees the contracts as helpful in sustaining and growing its workforce.

Hawaii-based Coast Guard Units Conclude RIMPAC 2022 Participation



A U.S. Navy Sailor directs Navy and U.S. Coast Guard Sailors

to a U.S. Navy MH-60R Seahawk helicopter during flight operations during Rim of the Pacific 2022. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Taylor Bacon*

PEARL HARBOR – Four Hawaii-based Coast Guard units concluded operations contributing to the largest Coast Guard participation in the history of RIMPAC and returned to service of the residents of Hawaii and the Pacific region on Aug. 4, the Coast Guard 14th District said in a release.

U.S. Coast Guard Cutters Midgett and William Hart, the Pacific Dive Locker, and Maritime Safety and Security Team Honolulu partnered with military members from Australia, Peru, Republic of Korea, Canada, France and Japan throughout the in-port and at-sea portions of the Rim of the Pacific 2022, which ran from late June to early August. The exercise marked a series of “firsts” for Coast Guard participation.

Coast Guard Cutter Midgett conducted a broad spectrum of operations with the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force Ship Izumo, the USS Chafee, USS Gridley, French Navy Frigate FS Prairial, and Peruvian Navy BAP Guise. The combined team of Midgett, William Hart, Izumo and USS Essex completed RIMPAC’s first mass rescue operation, successfully partnering to find, recover and provide medical assistance to 10 simulated people in the water.

Following RIMPAC, Midgett’s crew will depart on a western Pacific patrol to build on the regional partnerships demonstrated here and conduct international training and fisheries law enforcement. William Hart’s crew will conduct necessary maintenance, complete training, and resume their role as a standby search-and-rescue asset for vessels in distress in the waters around Hawaii, a role it shares with the other two fast response cutters in Honolulu, Cutter Joseph Gerczak and Cutter Oliver Berry.

This year’s RIMPAC featured the first Coast Guard-led humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercise. The

exercise tested reopening a harbor that had been struck by a simulated hurricane. A boat crew from Coast Guard MSST Honolulu partnered with underwater survey teams from the U.S. and Royal Australian Navies to conduct underwater scans of Honolulu Harbor to identify hidden hazards. After that, divers from the Coast Guard Pacific Dive Locker collaborated with divers from the U.S. Army and Republic of Korea Navy to remove the hazards and practice maintaining aids to navigation underwater.

Following RIMPAC, the Pacific Diver Locker will focus on training and preparations for annual safety inspections and provide support to local Coast Guard assets and aids to navigation missions.

“This was an incredible opportunity to work alongside our partners in the Blue Pacific to strengthen our relationships,” said Coast Guard 14th District Commander Rear Adm. Michael Day. “Our ability to come together for RIMPAC 22, in person, has helped reconnect within and beyond the region. It is through those connections and relationships that we will move forward to bolster impactful engagement opportunities.”

**Mark Fleming to Lead New
VideoRay Defense and
Government Business Unit**



VideoRay's Mark Fleming. *VIDEORAY*

POTTSTOWN, Pa. – VideoRay, a global leader in underwater remotely operated vehicle technology, has established a Defense and Government business unit to further develop the company's successful defense and government program, the company said Aug. 4.

Mark Fleming will lead the unit as vice president, defense and

government, responsible for all strategic business development and customer support.

Fleming, who served in the U.S. Navy specializing in explosive ordnance disposal and attained the rank of chief warrant officer five (CW5), joined VideoRay 10 years ago to increase government sales. Building on the company's relationship with the U.S. Coast Guard, Fleming established new connections that led to contracts with the U.S. Navy, foreign navies and other governmental entities. He has built these relationships through his deep understanding of the challenges that defense personnel face in underwater missions and his strong customer service ethic.

VideoRay has been experiencing substantial growth over the past two years, due in part to multimillion-dollar contracts with the U.S. Navy for Mission Specialist Defender ROV systems.

"Defense and government sales of our Mission Specialist systems have grown because our capabilities are proven to be extremely valuable and unique for underwater explosive ordnance disposal. Mark is the driving force behind this success," said Chris Gibson, vice president, sales and marketing.

Fleming added, "I'm looking forward to advancing VideoRay's defense and government outreach and developing new ROV technology to support safe underwater missions around the world."

Under Fleming's direction, VideoRay will conduct a search for a new salesperson for the business unit.

The Mission Specialist Defender ROV system is designed for precise control of the vehicle position and orientation, heavier payloads and demanding intervention applications. With seven thrusters, the Defender ROV system can move in any direction and maintain active pitch to face the vehicle in an

upward or downward orientation, making it ideal for dangerous or heavy-duty missions. In addition, these submersible ROV systems use interchangeable modular components that reside on a single platform, which enables operators to integrate tooling, sensors and payloads quickly and easily in the field to meet mission objectives and maximize uptime.

Bollinger Delivers 50th Fast Response Cutter to Coast Guard



The Coast Guard Cutter William Chadwick in Key West. *BOLLINGER*

SHIPYARDS

LOCKPORT, La. – Bollinger Shipyards LLC has delivered the Coast Guard Cutter William Chadwick to the U.S. Coast Guard in Key West, Florida, the company said Aug. 4. This is the 176th vessel Bollinger has delivered to the U.S. Coast Guard over a 35-year period and the 50th fast response cutter delivered under the current program.

“It’s incredibly meaningful that we could deliver the 50th FRC, the USCGC William Chadwick, on the Coast Guard’s 232nd birthday and that she’ll be homeported in Sector Boston, the birthplace of the Coast Guard,” said Bollinger President and CEO Ben Bordelon.

“Pound for pound, the quality and capabilities of the FRC platform is unmatched and can be looked upon as a model government acquisition program. Our unique experience building for the Coast Guard is unparalleled and has shown time and time again that we can successfully deliver the highest quality vessels on a reliable, aggressive production schedule and cost, even in the most challenging circumstances. We look forward to continuing our historic partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard.”

Chadwick will be the first of six FRCs to be homeported in Sector Boston, responsible for coastal safety, security and environmental protection from the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border southward to Plymouth, Massachusetts out to 200 nautical miles offshore. Sector Boston directs over 1,500 active duty, Reserve and Auxiliary members whose mission is to protect and secure vital infrastructure, rescue mariners in peril at sea, enforce federal law, maintain navigable waterways, and respond to all hazards impacting the maritime transportation system and coastal region.

Each fast response cutter is named for an enlisted Coast Guard hero who distinguished themselves in the line of duty. William

P. Chadwick served as keeper of the Green Island Lifeboat Station in New Jersey and was awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal for the rescue of the crew of the schooner George Taulane on Feb. 3, 1880. Even after suffering a debilitating injury from flying debris, Chadwick directed the repeated efforts to save the crew of the broken Taulane as they battled mother nature's high winds, heavy rains and dangerous surf. Finally, after five and a half hours, Chadwick's men were able to erect a breeches buoy. Within a half hour all the Taulane's crew were safely ashore.

USS Delbert D. Black Under Way for First Deployment



The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Delbert

D. Black (DDG 119) departs Naval Station Mayport for deployment, Aug 2. USS Delbert D. Black is homeported at Naval Station Mayport. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Juel Foster*

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Delbert D. Black (DDG 119) departed Naval Station Mayport Aug. 2 on the ship's inaugural deployment, U.S. 2nd Fleet said Aug. 4.

The ship completed all training phases of the Optimized Fleet Response Plan with Destroyer Squadron 26 and Carrier Strike Group 10.

“Our ship and crew have trained for this moment for more than four years,” said Cmdr. Mark Gallagher, commanding officer, Delbert D. Black. “We are prepared for any mission directed to us. The crew and ship are the finest the Navy has to offer, and I am proud to sail with each one of these fine men and women.”

Commissioned in September 2020, the ship's crew is comprised of more than 50 officers and nearly 300 enlisted Sailors.

Delbert D. Black is the 68th Arleigh Burke-Class guided-missile destroyer delivered to the Navy and the first to bear its name. The ship honors the first master chief petty officer of the Navy. Black is known for initiating the master chief program, ensuring enlisted leadership was represented Navy-wide.

“It is an honor and a privilege to take this ship and crew on its maiden deployment,” said Delbert D. Black Command Master Chief Christopher Bartley. “We are following in the footsteps of our trailblazing namesake, making Del and Ima Black proud.”

Ima Black, Black's widow and a former Sailor, serves as the ship's sponsor. She served during World War II in the Navy WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service).

A detachment from Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 48 will remain embarked aboard Delbert D. Black.

Delbert D. Black provides the nation multiple warfighting capabilities as one of the Navy's newest destroyers that maintains maritime stability and security to ensure access, deter aggression, and defend U.S., allied and partner interests as part of the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group.

U.S. Navy Delivers First Upgraded CN-235 Aircraft to RMAF



The U.S. Navy has delivered the first of three Royal Malaysian

Air Force CN-235 military transport aircraft converted to a maritime patrol platform. *U.S. NAVY*

PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The U.S. Navy has delivered the first of three Royal Malaysian Air Force CN-235 military transport aircraft converted to a maritime patrol platform, the Naval Air Systems Command said Aug. 3. This comes just three and a half years after the U.S. signed a letter of offer and acceptance to begin increasing the capability and interoperability of U.S. and Malaysian forces.

The effort was facilitated by the U.S. Navy's Building Partner Capacity program, aligned with the U.S. government's Maritime Security Initiative, which is intended to assist the Malaysian government in increasing maritime security and maritime domain awareness within the Malaysian Exclusive Economic Zone.

The project to integrate an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance upgrade into the aircraft was undertaken by the Malaysian air force in cooperation with the Naval Air Systems Command's Security Cooperation Office and Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division's AIRWorks.

"Our collective international team has overcome tremendous challenges during the recent worldwide pandemic to deliver this capability. We are excited to deliver this first aircraft," said Gerald Swift, who leads AIRWorks, NAWCAD's office focused on rapidly and effectively delivering warfighter capability to meet immediate and emergent warfighter needs.

The upgrade includes a maritime surveillance mission suite, maritime surveillance radar, an electro-optical infrared turret, line-of-sight datalink and a roll-on/roll-off mission system operator station. Compatible mobile and fixed ground stations are also being delivered to increase the Malaysian air force's ISR capability.

The project's CN-235s were flown to Indonesia for completion

and testing in Sept. 2020 amid COVID-19 restrictions and first flight took place in October 2021. Work on the two remaining CN-235 aircraft and multiple ground stations continues and is expected to be completed in 2022.

Exercise PANAMAX 2022 Kicks Off in Mayport, Florida



Argentine Navy Rear Adm. Marcelo Fernandez, PANAMAX 2022 Combined Force Maritime Component Commander, throws the ceremonial first pitch at a Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp minor league baseball game for the start of PANAMAX 2022, in Jacksonville, Florida, Aug. 2. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jahlana Royer*

MAYPORT, Fla. – U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet is hosting the Combined Force Maritime Component Command Staff participating in exercise PANAMAX 2022, in Mayport, Florida, Aug. 1-12.

Exercise PANAMAX 2022 is a U.S. Southern Command-sponsored exercise that provides important training opportunities for nations to work together and build upon the capability to plan and conduct complex multinational operations. The exercise scenario involves security and stability operations to ensure free flow of commerce through the Panama Canal.

U.S. forces participating in this year's exercise include staff elements from Southern Command, U.S. Army South, U.S. Marine Forces South, Special Operations Command South, 12th Air Force (Air Forces Southern), and U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet, along with participants from 23 partner nations.

Approximately 300 Sailors, Marines and public security forces will serve on the CFMCC staff under the leadership of Argentine Rear Adm. Marcelo Fernandez, who serves as Commander, Atlantic Naval Area for the Argentine Navy.

"PANAMAX demonstrates our ability to ensure regional security and stability through multi-national maritime operations in support of the Panama Canal," said Fernandez. "I look forward to the opportunity to work together with the U.S. and our other partner nations during this important exercise."

Under the exercise scenario, a multinational force has formed to execute a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for defense of the Panama Canal. The force includes air, land and special-forces components, in addition to the maritime component, which will plan and conduct simulated operations in and around the canal and its surrounding waters in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

There are no live forces in this year's PANAMAX. Instead, component staffs will work through a computer-aided scenario in support of the Multinational Forces South Commander, Maj. Gen. William Thigpen, Commanding General, U.S. Army South.

Forces will participate in the training at various U.S. locations including Joint Staff Exercise Directorate at Suffolk, Virginia; U.S. Southern Command, Doral, Florida; Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas; Homestead Air Reserve Base, Homestead, Florida; Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Tucson, Arizona; and Naval Station Mayport, Florida.

For the fifth straight PANAMAX, the air, land and maritime component commanders for the exercise are partner nation flag or general officers.

SIOP Contract Awarded for Dry Dock Upgrade, Berth Repairs at NNSY



The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75), front, passes the aircraft carrier USS George H. W. Bush (CVN 77) as it departs Norfolk Naval Shipyard after completing a 10-month regularly scheduled extended carrier incremental availability. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Steven Edgar*

NORFOLK, Va. – Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) Mid-Atlantic awarded AECOM Technical Services Inc. a \$91.5 million firm-fixed-price with award fee task order July 29 under a previously-awarded multiple-award construction contract for berth repairs at Norfolk Naval Shipyard (NNSY) in Portsmouth, Virginia, the Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Mid-Atlantic Public Affairs said Aug. 3.

Repairs to Berths 40 and 41 and the accompanying Dry Dock 8 upgrades will directly support the mission of NNSY to perform maintenance on Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers and are part of the Navy's Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program (SIOP).

The award of this contract is a crucial step to ensuring that

NNSY has the infrastructure needed to service future fleet platforms and demonstrates the importance of the SIOP program for the Navy. SIOP remains committed to improving fleet operational availabilities at the nation's four public shipyards to ensure they can effectively continue to serve the national defense.

SIOP is a holistic investment plan that integrates infrastructure investments at the Navy's four public shipyards to meet fleet maintenance requirements and improve Navy maintenance capabilities by expanding shipyard capacity and optimizing shipyard configuration.

The work to be performed provides for repairs to Berths 40 and 41 structural components by replacing deteriorated pile systems, cast-in-place concrete systems, pile caps, concrete beams, and fender pile systems.

USS Bulkeley Departs Norfolk for Homeport Shift to Rota



Sailors aboard the USS Bulkeley (DDG 84) cast off lines as they depart Naval Station Norfolk Aug. 4 for the ship's scheduled homeport shift to Rota, Spain, as part of the U.S. Navy's long-range plan to gradually rotate the Rota-based destroyers. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Theodore Green*

NAVAL STATION NORFOLK – The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Bulkeley (DDG 84) departed Naval Station Norfolk Aug. 4, commencing the ship's scheduled homeport shift to Rota, Spain, as part of the U.S. Navy's long-range plan to gradually rotate the Rota-based destroyers, U.S. Fleet Forces Command said Aug. 4.

Bulkeley will join destroyers USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51), USS Roosevelt (DDG 80), USS Paul Ignatius (DDG 117) and Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 79 as Forward Deployed Naval Force-Europe (FDFE) assets stationed in Rota.

“The Bulkeley crew has been working extremely hard the past year to prepare to join our forward deployed forces in Rota and work with our partners and allies in the region,” said

Capt. Mac Harkin, commanding officer, USS Bulkeley. "We are excited to join our sister ship and aviation units already at the tip of the spear, to assure our allies, respond to threats as required and ensure support to global operations."

U.S. Navy ships assigned to FDNF-E demonstrate national resolve, strengthen alliances, dissuade potential adversaries and enhance the ability to respond quickly to contingencies. Rota offers a world-class port facility that provides an excellent location for multi-mission Aegis ships to support NATO and U.S. missions, exercises and engagements.

"Bulkeley is a highly capable, multi-warfare platform that is joining a substantial force of FDNF-E assets already in place," said Harkin. "When combined with our partners and allies, we are collectively ready to perform a myriad of tasks, including NATO ballistic missile defense, the full spectrum of maritime security operations, bi-lateral and multi-lateral training exercises, and NATO operations and deployments."

The rotation of the FDNF-E ships serves to keep these multi-mission capable ships forward deployed to better support maritime security operations in the region as well as Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) of U.S. and allied units and personnel.

With Bulkeley's arrival, along with Paul Ignatius' arrival earlier this year, USS Ross (DDG 71) and USS Porter (DDG 78) will shift homeports from Rota to Norfolk in the coming months, marking the final scheduled homeport shifts in the long-planned FDNF-E rotation.