

USCGC Mohawk Returns from Eastern Pacific Patrol, Conducts International Collaboration



The USCGC Mohawk (WMEC 913) hosts senior officials from the coast guard, navy, and marines of Ecuador for a professional exchange on Nov. 28, 2021, at sea off Ecuador. The Famous-class medium endurance cutter returned to homeport in Key West Sunday after completing a groundbreaking 45-day deployment to the Eastern Pacific Ocean. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

KEY WEST, Florida – The Famous-class medium endurance cutter USCGC Mohawk (WMEC 913) returned to homeport in Key West Dec. 19 after completing a groundbreaking 45-day deployment to the Eastern Pacific Ocean, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area said Dec. 20.

While on patrol, the Mohawk crew disrupted illegal narcotics

smuggling, interdicting more than 3,200 pounds of cocaine. The team conducted joint training missions with crews from Panama and Ecuador to strengthen regional partnerships in the Western Hemisphere.

Patrolling in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South, the Mohawk team interdicted a low-profile drug smuggling vessel with approximately 3,200 pounds of cocaine aboard and apprehended three suspected narcotics smugglers. These low-profile vessels are purpose-built to evade detection and transport illicit contraband across thousand-mile stretches of ocean. The drugs, worth more than \$60 million, were seized in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean off the coast of Ecuador. While in theater, Mohawk aided in stopping 17 suspected drug smugglers, contributing directly to U.S. Southern Command objectives to combat transnational criminal organizations.

During the Mohawk's deployment, the crew took multiple opportunities to strengthen ties with partner nations in the region, including conducting joint rescue and assistance drills, exchanging law enforcement and boarding techniques, and practicing towing with Panamanian Servicio Nacional Aeronaval vessels. Mohawk's crew also completed a passing exercise with the Armada del Ecuador offshore patrol vessel LAE Isla San Cristobal (LG 30) and conducted a two-day joint counter-narcotics patrol through Ecuador's exclusive economic zone in the Galápagos Islands.

"International partnerships are critical to detecting and deterring illicit narcotics smuggling; engagements such as these with foreign partners enhance interoperability and interdiction capabilities," said Cmdr. Andrew Pate, commanding officer of the Mohawk.

Mohawk made history during its deployment as the first U.S. Coast Guard cutter to visit and anchor in the Galápagos Islands. The islands are a province of Ecuador and a UNESCO

World Heritage site, made famous for species diversity and unique terrain. While at anchor in San Cristobal, Galápagos, Mohawk conducted a professional exchange with senior ranking officials from Armada del Ecuador, held joint law enforcement training, enjoyed a cultural exchange ashore, and took part in a friendly U.S. versus Ecuador game of soccer.

“The U.S. Coast Guard’s ability to forge strong and lasting international partnerships that further the national interest is what makes us such a unique instrument of national security. I am very proud of the Mohawk crew for their work as envoys of the U.S. Coast Guard. The opportunity to work alongside the maritime professionals of Ecuador and Panama during this deployment, as well as our interdiction success sends a strong signal to transnational criminal organizations that the United States values enduring commitments in the region,” Pate said. “Our interactions with the Armada del Ecuador in Galápagos left a profound impression on my crew. Choosing to go to sea and serve on a U.S. Coast Guard cutter opens the door to experiences and camaraderie that you don’t get in a normal nine to five job.”

While underway, the cutter’s crew completed aviation, damage control, engineering, seamanship, navigation, and combat systems training to maintain operational readiness and prepare for future multi-mission deployments.

Commissioned in March of 1991, Mohawk is the 13th and final of the 270-foot Famous-class cutters built. The medium endurance cutters fall under the command of the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area. Based in Portsmouth, Virginia, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area oversees all Coast Guard operations east of the Rocky Mountains to the Arabian Gulf. In addition to surge operations, they also allocate ships to deploy to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific to combat transnational organized crime and illicit maritime activity.

U.S. Navy, Boeing Complete First Carrier Tests for MQ-25



An MQ-25 Stingray test asset conducts deck handling maneuvers Dec. 12 while underway aboard USS George H.W. Bush (CVN -77). This unmanned carrier aviation demonstration marked the first time the Navy conducted testing with the MQ-25 at sea. *U.S. NAVY*

NORFOLK, Va. – The U.S. Navy and Boeing have successfully maneuvered the Boeing-owned T1 test asset on a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier for the first time, an early step forward in ensuring the MQ-25 unmanned aerial refueler will seamlessly integrate into carrier operations.

During an underway demonstration aboard the USS George H.W.

Bush (CVN 77), Navy flight deck directors – known as “yellow shirts” – used standard hand signals to direct T1 just like any other carrier-based aircraft. Instead of a pilot receiving the commands, however, it was a Boeing MQ-25 Deck Handling Operator (DHO) right beside the yellow shirt who commanded the aircraft using a new handheld deck control device.

“This is another significant step forward in demonstrating MQ-25’s integration into the Carrier Air Wing on the flight deck of our fleet’s aircraft carriers,” said Capt. Chad Reed, Unmanned Carrier Aviation program manager. “The success of this event is a testament to the hard work of our engineers, testers, operators and the close collaboration and teaming from Naval Air Force Atlantic and the crew aboard CVN 77.”

The demonstration was intended to ensure the design of the MQ-25 will successfully integrate into the carrier environment and to evaluate the functionality, capability and handling qualities of the deck handling system both in day and night conditions. Maneuvers included taxiing on the deck, connecting to the catapult, clearing the landing area and parking on the deck.

“The Navy has a rigorous, well-established process for moving aircraft on the carrier. Our goal was to ensure the MQ-25 fits into the process without changing it,” said Jim Young, MQ-25 chief engineer. “From the design of the aircraft to the design of the system moving it, our team has worked hard to make the MQ-25 carrier suitable in every way.”

DHO’s trained in Boeing’s deck handling simulation lab in St. Louis, where they practiced entering commands from simulated yellow shirts into the real handheld device. A simulated MQ-25, running the aircraft’s real operational flight code and interfaces, would move accordingly. The handheld controller is a simple, easy-to-use device designed specifically for a generation of sailors who natively understand such handheld technology and have experience with controllers used in the

gaming industry today.

The deck handling demonstration followed a two-year flight test campaign for the Boeing-owned T1 test asset, during which the Boeing and Navy team refueled three different carrier-based aircraft – an F/A-18 Super Hornet, an E-2D Hawkeye and an F-35C Lightning II.

“The Navy gave us two key performance parameters for the program – aerial refueling and integration onto the carrier deck,” said Dave Bujold, Boeing MQ-25 program director. “We’ve shown that the MQ-25 can meet both requirements, and we’ve done it years earlier than traditional acquisition programs.”

Navy Secretary Sees Climate Change, Illegal Fishing as Global Maritime Security Challenges



USCGC Stone (WMSL 758) patrols high seas observing fishing activity to support Operation Southern Cross in the South Atlantic, Feb. 6, 2021. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class John Hightower*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Linking climate change’s impact on trade, fishing, energy and employment with the economic and environmental toll of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, U.S. Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro says the world’s “blue economy” has never been more important or more challenging.

“From climate change to illegal and unreported fishing, the environmental challenges facing our oceans are global challenges that require truly a global response,” Del Toro told an ocean security forum at a Washington think tank Dec. 16.

The Navy secretary told a live audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and others watching remotely, that the Navy-Marine Corps team “is determined to do our part.”

The World Bank defines the blue economy as the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem.”

On climate change, Del Toro said the marine environment is under threat from receding shorelines, melting sea ice, extreme weather and “a more aggressive competition for resources” like fish stocks and underwater energy and mineral deposits.

Prompted by President Joe Biden and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s concerns about the climate challenge, Del Toro said the Navy Department, among other actions, is implementing hybrid technology to power five classes of combat ships and eight classes of logistics ships, purchasing zero emission vehicles and assessing a renewable energy system at Marine Air Station Miramar, California, to reduce reliance on San Diego’s power grid.

Del Toro said IUUF is having “profoundly destabilizing effects on many regions. This is happening on an industrial scale as nations like China not only refuse to restrain their distant waters fishing fleet, but actively subsidize the devastation they’re actively causing,” he said.

IUUF has taken such a toll on the economies of small maritime nations and world fish stocks – while increasing geo-political tensions and spawning instability – that the U.S. Coast Guard says it’s a greater security threat today than piracy at sea.

The combined Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard Maritime Strategy includes IUUF as part of the threat posed by near peer competitors China and Russia. The document notes China’s “state-subsidized distant water fishing fleet steals vital resources from nations unable to defend their own exclusive economic zones.”

Del Toro noted Coast Guard law enforcement teams have been

deployed aboard several Navy ships as part of the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative.

Also speaking at the forum, Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said his agency has taken an increasing leadership role in building trust and partnerships with foreign maritime states, particularly with the small island nations of the Pacific who lack the resources to enforce sovereignty over their resources and waters. Ocean-going Coast Guard cutters have trained partner nation coastal protection forces and aided them with situational awareness.

He noted the National Security Cutter Stone (WMSL 758), on its first voyage sailed down the east coast of South America, partnering with the maritime forces of Guyana and Brazil, and later with Ecuador and Colombia on the Pacific coast.

The Coast Guard, with approximately 57,000 personnel, does not have the capacity to be “the world’s fish cops,” Schultz said, “but I think we could bring some leadership. We could stitch together partners. We have a recognized brand that’s sort of known across the globe.”

NAVSEA to Proceed with COBRA II Littoral Mine- Countermeasures System



COBRA Block II is planned for installation on MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned aerial vehicles, such as the one shown here on littoral combat ship USS Jackson (LCS 6) in April, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Ens. Alexandra Green*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Naval Sea Systems Command announced it intends to solicit bids for a contract to design, develop and build a Block II version of the Coastal Battlefield Reconnaissance and Analysis system.

The COBRA Block I is a mine- and obstacle-detection multispectral sensor that is a modular component of the mine warfare mission package for littoral combat ships. It is designed to detect mines from the beach through the surf zone. The COBRA is the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance technology component of the planned Assault Breaching System. In March 2009, COBRA Block I was rated mature enough to enter low-rate initial production. The COBRA was tested on an MQ-8B Fire Scout unmanned helicopter in October 2010. Initial operational capability was achieved in July 2017. Operational testing was completed in April 2018. The Block I was built by Arete Associates.

Block II, planned for installation on the MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned helicopter, will add night operation capability and full-detection capability of mines in the surf zone out to 200 feet of water depth during a single pass with a high coverage rate.

The COBRA Block II system, when fully developed, will be a battlefield reconnaissance and analysis system designed to conduct aerial tactical reconnaissance in the littoral battlespace for the detection and localization of individual mine-like objects, minefields, minelines and obstacles in the surf zone and beach zone; for the detection and localization of surface and near-surface mine-like objects in very shallow water; and for the detection and localization of surface and near-surface mine-like objects, moored or drifting in shallow water through deep water in day or night, the NAVSEA announcement said.

NAVSEA anticipates the contract award will be for up to three engineering and manufacturing development models and up to five low-rate initial production units of the COBRA Block II.

NAVSEA anticipates releasing a request for proposals in the second quarter of fiscal 2022.

Canadian Patrol Ship Circumnavigates North America on First Voyage



HMCS Harry DeWolf, which recently called at Naval Station Norfolk as part of its circumnavigation of North America. *WIKIPEDIA / Hken 167*

The Royal Canadian Navy Arctic and offshore patrol ship HMCS Harry DeWolf (AOPV 430) recently called at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, as the final stop on its historic circumnavigation of North America.

Commissioned in June, Harry DeWolf is the Royal Canadian Navy's first new warship in 25 years and its first ice-capable vessel since HMCS Labrador in 1958.

For its first voyage, Harry DeWolf transited to the Arctic to participate in Canada's Operation Nanook annual training exercises in the high north, then continued through the Northwest Passage and working with the U.S. Coast Guard in Alaskan waters. From there the patrol vessel proceeded to San Diego and embarked a U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment and conducted counter-narcotics operations in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean Basin.

In Alaska, the ship participated in a mass casualty drill with the U.S. Coast Guard. Further south, the crew took part in Op Caribe, Canada's contribution to U.S. enhanced counter-narcotics operations under U.S. Joint Interagency Task Force South in the Eastern Pacific and Caribbean. Working with an embarked U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment, Harry DeWolf helped with the seizure and offload of approximately 26,250 pounds of cocaine and 3,700 pounds of marijuana worth about \$504 million from the USCGC Hamilton (WMSL 753) in Port Everglades, Florida, Nov. 22.

The ship arrived in Norfolk Dec. 9 and departed Dec. 12.

While highly capable for polar operations, the ship is also designed to conduct patrols wherever needed in the world. HMCS Harry DeWolf Commanding Officer Cmdr. Corey Gleason said the unique ship design is specific to Canadian needs.

"Our allies all have offshore patrol vessels, but they don't have the Arctic stamp on it. If we are truly going to operate our domestic waters, we have to be to go north, not just during the navigable between July and October, but any time. Earlier this year we were up in the dead of winter breaking ice, with no other ships," he said.

The deployment also demonstrated the endurance of the ship as it visited ports and communities in Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon Territory. While the ship did take on fuel during port visits to Nuuk, Greenland, and Dutch Harbor, Alaska, Gleason said the ship has the range to sail from Halifax to the Esquimalt naval base in British Columbia on a single tank of fuel.

"I always knew that this ship had an incredible capability anywhere in the world. And we demonstrated that tenfold in the four and a half months that were deployed," he said.

Gleason said the Royal Canadian Navy doesn't have a great deal of experience operating in the ice. As the skipper of the

first Arctic and offshore patrol ship, Gleason said he spent a lot of time providing ship-handling experience to his officers, and he's been training the commanding officers, executive officers and navigators of the other ships to help them get ready for the Arctic when their ships are commissioned.

During the deployment, the ship underscored the close working relationship between maritime services of Canada and the U.S.

"In terms of our cooperation, the United States is really is our premier partner in the Arctic," said Martin Loken, deputy head of mission for foreign policy and national security at the Embassy of Canada in Washington. "Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework sets out our overall government approach to the north and to the Arctic. There are a lot of elements there, and almost every single one of them aligns with U.S. interests in the Arctic, whether it's providing economic opportunities for populations, building and investing in stronger, more resilient infrastructure, preparing for the impacts of climate change, advancing indigenous reconciliation, and the list goes on."

A U.S. naval officer joined the ship for its first deployment. Lt. j.g. Kyle Luchau of the guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 80), served as a liaison officer and completed the circumnavigation of North America.

The RCN plans to build six Arctic and offshore patrol ships at the Irving Shipyard in Halifax, which are being constructed as part of Canada's National Shipbuilding Strategy. Two more AOPS will be built for the Canadian Coast Guard.

MQ-4C Triton UAS Arrives in Florida as Australian Triton Takes Shape



The Navy's MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft arrived in Mayport, Florida, Dec. 16, as part of early operational capability efforts. *U.S. NAVY*

MAYPORT, Fla. – The Navy's MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft system arrived in Mayport, Florida, Dec. 16, following its initial deployment in the Pacific theater, the office of Commander, Naval Force Atlantic said Dec. 17.

This air vehicle was one of two MQ-4C Triton UAS that operated from Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, after completing their first rotational deployment to Japan Oct. 12, 2021.

“The MQ-4C Triton demonstrates the significance of manned and unmanned integration to support national security interests,” said Cmdr. Brian Conlan, commander, Unmanned Patrol Squadron

(VUP) 19. "The VUP-19 and MQ-4C Triton deployment to the 7th Fleet area of responsibility provided an opportunity to apply and refine the tactics, techniques, and procedures to expand our concept of operations and inform planning for future deployments around the world."

VUP-19, the first Triton UAS squadron, operates and maintains two aircraft as part of an early operational capability to further refine the concept of operations, including expeditionary basing, and complement manned systems to better locate, identify, and track contacts of interest in the maritime domain.

The MQ-4 Triton's arrival at Naval Station Mayport will support unit-level training and preparation for the next variant of MQ-4C.

The Navy conducted its first test flight of the MQ-4C Triton in its upgraded hardware and software configuration, known as integrated functional capability 4, July 29 at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland. IFC-4 brings an enhanced multi-mission sensor capability as part of the Navy's maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting transition plan.

The MQ-4C Triton conducts intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions that pair with the P-8A Poseidon and it brings increased persistence, capability, and capacity through its multi-sensor mission payload.



Australia's first MQ-4C Triton fuselage is lowered onto the unique one-piece wing. *NORTHROP GRUMMAN*

Australian MQ-4C Triton Takes Shape

Meanwhile, Northrop Grumman Corp. recently completed a significant milestone in the production of Australia's first MQ-4C Triton when the aircraft fuselage was mounted onto Triton's unique one-piece wing, the company said. Once completed and delivered, Triton's powerful payload and endurance will provide the Royal Australian Air Force the ability to detect and analyze threats that were previously undetectable.

"This production milestone further demonstrates our commitment to both sides of the cooperative program between the Royal Australian Air Force and the U.S. Navy," said Rho Cauley-Bruner, Triton program manager at Northrop Grumman. "We are on schedule to deliver Triton's powerful capability in support of Australia's national security."

Australia's first Triton is on track to be delivered just as

the U.S. Navy expects to achieve initial operating capability with its multi-intelligence Tritons, the same configuration Australia is receiving. The identical capabilities will allow the RAAF and U.S. Navy to share data and maintain an unblinking autonomous intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting capability over some of the world's most critical maritime regions.

"I am looking forward to seeing our first Triton roll off the production line and then commence flying in Australian skies in 2024," said Group Captain Jason Lind, director of Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare at RAAF headquarters. "This capability will extend Australia's ability to see and understand our maritime approaches to the north and also as far south as Antarctica."

PEO Columbia Recognized for Acquisition Excellence



NAVSEA's PMS 397 Columbia Class Submarine Program team photo for the Packard Award. *U.S. NAVY / Laura Lakeway*

WASHINGTON – Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen H. Hicks named the Columbia-class submarine program office (PMS 397) winner of the 2021 David Packard Acquisition Excellence Award during the virtual 2021 Defense Acquisition Workforce Awards on Dec. 15.

The Columbia-class submarine program is developing the follow-on to the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) which currently serve as the cornerstone for the nation's strategic deterrence force. The David Packard Excellence in Acquisition Award recognizes Department of Defense acquisition programs and their teams that have demonstrated exemplary acquisition excellence, innovation and reform.

"Our winners this year are the best of the best among our nation's public service professionals," said Hicks, adding that the work of the department's acquisition professionals "is vital to supporting our nation's military."

The Columbia-class submarine program stood out from other DoD acquisition efforts by developing and executing acquisition, contracting, supply chain, workforce development and sustainment improvements. The Columbia-class team negotiated and awarded the first modern-era, two-submarine purchase for the first and second-of-class submarines.

“Traditionally, we buy the first-of-class submarine under a single contract. With Columbia, though, we’re confident that we can project the total costs for both the first and second hulls and therefore put both PCU Columbia (SSBN 826) and the SSBN 827 on a single contract to maximize efficiencies and help ensure the on-time delivery of these national assets. In doing so, we avoided about \$1.5 billion in costs,” said Rear Adm. Scott Pappano, Program Executive Officer, Strategic Submarines.

According to Columbia-class program manager, Capt. Jonathan Rucker, “As the Department of Defense’s highest-priority acquisition program, the Columbia team and its industry partners continue to design, build, test, and sustain the nation’s high quality, sea-based strategic deterrent on schedule within budget. The program continues to try to be a leader within the acquisition community executing program efforts and supporting other programs through the acquisition community.”

Pre-commissioning unit Columbia is scheduled to deliver in 2027 and conduct its first strategic deterrence patrol in 2030.

USS Portland Tests High Energy Laser Weapon System in Gulf of Aden



Amphibious transport dock ship USS Portland (LPD 27) conducts a high-energy laser weapon system demonstration on a static surface training target Dec. 14 while sailing in the Gulf of Aden. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Staff Sgt. Donald Holbert*

MANAMA, Bahrain – Amphibious transport dock ship USS Portland (LPD 27) conducted a high-energy laser weapon system demonstration Dec. 14 while sailing in the Gulf of Aden, U.S. 5th Fleet Public Affairs said Dec. 15.

During the demonstration, the Solid-State Laser – Technology Maturation Laser Weapons System Demonstrator Mark 2 MOD 0 aboard Portland successfully engaged a static surface training

target. Portland previously tested the LWSD in May 2020 when it successfully disabled a small unmanned aerial system while operating in the Pacific Ocean.

The Office of Naval Research selected Portland to host the laser weapon technology in 2018. The LWSD is considered a next-generation follow-on to the Laser Weapon System that afloat forward staging base USS Ponce (AFSB(I)-15) tested for three years while operating in the Middle East.

Portland is part of the Essex Amphibious Ready Group that includes amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2), dock landing ship USS Pearl Harbor (LSD 52) and embarked Marines from the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit. The units departed San Diego in August and began operating in the U.S. 5th Fleet region in September.

The region's geography, climate, and strategic importance offer a unique environment for technology innovation. U.S. 5th Fleet's area of operations includes the world's largest standing maritime partnership, Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean.

USCGC Vigilant Offloads 17,000 Pounds of Illegal Narcotics in Port Everglades



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant (WMEC-624) crewmembers pose with approximately 17,000 pounds of illegal narcotics at Port Everglades, Florida, Dec. 15. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Ryan Estrada*

PORT EVERGLADES, Fla. – The USCGC Vigilant crew (WMEC 617) offloaded illegal narcotics worth an estimated \$236 million on Wednesday in Port Everglades before returning to homeport in Port Canaveral, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release.

The crew of the 67-year-old Vigilant offloaded more than 17,000 pounds of cocaine and marijuana following a 45-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. An embarked U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment augmented the ship's crew, leveraging the service's unique capabilities and authorities to perform law enforcement operations in international waters.

The drugs, which include nearly 12,000 pounds of cocaine and more than 5,000 pounds of marijuana, were seized during five interdictions conducted by crews of the Vigilant, USCGC Tampa

(WMEC 902), and the Royal Canadian Navy's HMCS Harry Dewolf (AOPV 430) in international waters off the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America.

Numerous U.S. and partner nation agencies cooperate to combat transnational organized crime.

"The successful interdiction of over 17,000 pounds of illegal narcotics and the apprehension of 17 suspected traffickers are the result of tremendous teamwork," said Cmdr. Jay Guyer, commanding officer of the Vigilant. "We are thankful for coordinated efforts across the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Defense, Customs and Border Protection, as well as our international partners from Canada and throughout Central and South America."

Vigilant, a 210-foot Reliance-class medium endurance cutter, patrols the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean, performing counter-drug operations, migrant interdiction operations, search and rescue and fisheries enforcement.

**Corps Discharging 103 Marines
for Refusing COVID vaccine;
Navy to Separate Sailors Who
Stay Unvaccinated**



Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Cory Troche, left, assigned to the “Blue Blasters” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 34, administers a COVID-19 booster vaccination to Aviation Electronics Mate 3rd Class Mark Galloway, assigned to the “Sunliners” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 81, aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75).
U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication 3rd Class Bela Chambers

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Marine Corps has discharged 103 Marines for refusing to be vaccinated against the coronavirus COVID-19, officials announced Dec. 16.

“Per Marine Corps policy (MARADMINs 462/21, 533/21, and 612/21), any active-duty Marine and Ready Reserve Marine in an active duty status who did not receive a final vaccination dose by Nov. 14 is considered unvaccinated,” Maj. Jim Stenger, a Marine Corps spokesperson, said in a statement. “All unvaccinated Marines without a pending or approved administrative exemption, medical exemption, or religious accommodation, or appeal, will be processed for administrative separation.”

Marine Corps guidance directed units to document a specific code in the Marine Corps Total Force System upon separation for vaccine refusal. "To date, 103 Marines have been separated from the Marine Corps with the vaccine refusal discharge code," Stenger's statement noted.

The Marines' decision came a day after the Navy announced plans to remove Sailors who refuse to comply with the Navy's vaccine mandate. In addition to separation from the service, Sailors and officers rejecting vaccination will not be eligible to promote or advance. Enlisted personnel will not be able to re-enlist and could lose education benefits and bonus pay. As of Dec. 16, 2021, 5,472 active component Sailors remain unvaccinated, according to the Navy.

The Navy removed the executive officer of the Arleigh Burke-class missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill for rejecting COVID vaccination and refusing to be tested for the virus.

In late August, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, with the approval of President Joe Biden, ordered mandatory COVID vaccines for all U.S. military personnel. Both the Navy and Marine Corps set a Nov. 28 deadline for active duty Sailors and Marines to be fully vaccinated.

"The Marine Corps recognizes COVID-19 as a readiness issue. The speed with which the disease transmits among individuals has increased risk to our Marines and the Marine Corps' mission," Stenger's statement says.

As of Dec. 15, 94% of the active duty Marine Corps is fully vaccinated, with 95% at least partially vaccinated. Marine Corps Reserve components account for 81% fully vaccinated and 84% at least partially vaccinated. That was a big jump from Nov. 5, when Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger expressed concern that 56% of Marines in the Ready Reserve had not been vaccinated and faced a Dec. 28 deadline to do so. "We are one Marine Corps, active duty and Reserve, so it is

important for them to get vaccinated as well," Berger said.

Both the Marine Corps and the Navy require active and reserve component service members to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, unless medically or administratively exempt. The Marines report there have been 1,007 approved exemptions.

There have been 3,144 requests for religious accommodation to avoid the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. At this time, 2,863 have been processed and zero requests have been approved, according to Stenger.

The Navy has granted seven permanent medical exemptions, 296 temporary medical exemptions, 216 administrative exemptions and zero religious accommodation requests for vaccine exemptions. None of the 2,751 active-duty requests for a religious accommodation from COVID immunization have been granted.