HM-15, Lewis B. Puller Team Up for Training

MANAMA, Bahrain – An MH-53E Sea Dragon assigned to the "Blackhawks" of Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron (HM) 15 embarked the expeditionary sea base ship USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3) for the first time in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations for interoperability training Oct. 28-Nov. 7.

The training focused on improving airborne mine countermeasures (MCM) capability and interoperability in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility (AOR). Lewis B. Puller is capable of supporting a wide variety of missions including crisis response, counter-piracy operations, maritime security operations and humanitarian aid/disaster relief. By embarking HM 15, the will add the airborne MCM mission to its expanding repertoire.

U.S. 5th Fleet's Task Force 52 deputy commander, Capt. Andy Lamb of the U.K. Royal Navy, visited the Puller to observe the training.

"Ensuring maritime access for the free flow of trade is what mine countermeasures is about," said Lamb. "The integration of HM-15 with Puller is a key component of this and demonstrates first-class versatility and readiness."

The airborne aspect of MCM is one of the three areas that support the MCM triad. In addition to shipboard and expeditionary MCM, airborne MCM helps ensure stability and security in the region's three critical chokepoints. Reoccurring training opportunities ensure that Task Force 52 is prepared to handle any potential threats to the free flow of commerce.

The expeditionary sea-base platform supports Naval Amphibious Force, Task Force 51, 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade's (TF

51/5’s) diverse missions that include crisis response, airborne MCM, counter-piracy operations, maritime security operations and humanitarian aid/disaster relief missions while enabling TF 51/5 to extend its expeditionary presence in the world’s most volatile regions.

“Lewis B. Puller provides TF 51/5 and 5th Fleet a permanent platform that can be rapidly reconfigured to support vastly different mission sets in mere days,” said Capt. Scott Hattaway, the ship’s commanding officer. “Embarking the Blackhawks of HM-15 to conduct airborne MCM operations demonstrates this flexibility, especially in light of the entire equipment on load to achieve full mission-capability and actively conducting AMCM operations was accomplished in less than three days pierside.”

Lewis B. Puller was commissioned as a warship after previously being classified as a “USNS” ship in August 2017. Redesignating the ship as a commissioned warship allows the Navy greater operational flexibility and provide critical support to TF 51/5’s joint forces at sea, from the sea and ashore to meet potential threats in the 5th Fleet area of operations.

U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The expanse is comprised of 20 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb at the southern tip of Yemen.