SECNAV Del Toro Names T-AGOS Explorer-Class and First Two Ships



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ANNAPOLIS, Md. (Jan. 10, 2025) – Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro named the T-AGOS ocean surveillance ships the Explorer class, the future USNS Don Walsh (T-AGOS 25) and the second ship the future USNS Victor Vescovo (T-AGOS 26).

Del Toro made the announcement during a ship naming ceremony amongst members of Congress, National Geographic Explorers, local civic leaders, educators, scientists and a wide multitude of explorers at the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland, on Jan. 10.

In 2022, the Navy procured the first of seven larger, faster surveillance ships known as T-AGOS 25. Today, I am proud to announce these vessels will be known as the Explorer-class of ocean surveillance ships, named in honor of those who made discoveries under sea, on land, and in the skies above.

“These ships are essential to maintaining strategic deterrence and operational awareness in the world’s oceans,” said Del Toro. “There is no one better to name for the first ship than Captain Don Walsh, a man whose life and career embody the very essence of exploration, innovation, and dedication to our Navy and our Nation. In naming the second T-AGOS, no one is more deserving than Commander Victor Vescovo, for his explorations in the air, on land and under the seas as well as his many scientific contributions. I am proud to name today, the future USNS Don Walsh (T-AGOS 25) and the future USNS Victor Vescovo (T-AGOS 26).”

Operated by the Military Sea Lift Command, the Explorer-class will play an integral role in the Navy’s anti-submarine warfare operations. T-AGOS ships align with the class’s mission of ocean surveillance and highlights the wide-range of careers in the Navy and Marine Corps, encompassing opportunities to explore land, air, and sea.

“I am honored to stand side-by-side with the Navy to launch the new Explorer Class of ocean surveillance ships” said Jean Case, Chairman of the National Geographic Society. “We could not be more proud that the inaugural vessel in this class honors our beloved National Geographic Explorer, retired US Navy Captain Don Walsh. We are grateful for the long-standing

partnership the National Geographic Society and the US Navy have shared embracing the spirit of exploration and commitment to go to the front lines of the unknown. Together, we champion the courage and curiosity that drive humanity to discover, protect, and build a better understanding of our world."

The future USNS Don Walsh is the first-in-class, named in honor of the late Captain Don Walsh, USN, a renowned explorer and pioneer of deep-see submergence. Walsh is a 1954 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and served first in the amphibious forces before being selected for submarine duty aboard USS Rasher (SS-269). Later while assigned to the staff of Submarine Flotilla 1, he volunteered for the fledgling deep-dive program and became Navy Submersible
Pilot No.1. On Jan. 23, 1960, Walsh, accompanied by scientist Jacques Piccard, successfully piloted bathyscaphe Trieste 35,797 feet down to Challenger-Deep, the deepest known point of the ocean, located southwest of Guam in the Mariana Trench. President Dwight D. Eisenhower subsequently presented Walsh with a Legion of Merit for his pioneering work in "innerspace."

Walsh went on to earn a doctorate in Physical Oceanography while in the service and would ultimately command USS Bashaw (AGSS-241) before retiring as a Captain and going on to be a world-renowned ocean scientist and explorer, with countless awards and accolades. Captain Walsh recently passed away on Nov. 12, 2023, at his home in Oregon. This will be the first Navy vessel named for Walsh.

"My father was many things to many people- explorer, educator, colleague and mentor. But if you asked him what most defined his character, Navy Man, would be top of the list. His contributions to ocean exploration and advocacy spanned 60 plus years and he "wrote the book" on how we talk about, research and protect our planet's circulatory system. His historic dive to Challenger Deep as a Navy Lieutenant was just

part of what would become a life of service to the country, the oceans and the global community," said Kelly Walsh, son of the late Don Walsh. "To me he was dad: a brilliant example of living a life full of adventure and curiosity. He shared the world with his family over the years, and in turn, we got to share him with the world. His legacy will remain- on the waves, over the horizon and just beyond the next great discovery. He will be there in practice and spirit."

Secretary Del Toro named Mrs. Joan Walsh, spouse of the late Walsh, and his daughter, Liz Walsh, as sponsors of TAGOS-25. Sponsors are selected by the Secretary of the Navy and hold a unique role in maintaining a lifelong relationship with the ship and crew.

"The Walsh family is profoundly honored that the Navy has chosen to recognize Don Walsh's lifetime of service and dedication by naming this new TAGOS ship after him. Don sometimes described being a kid in the San Francisco Bay area, daydreaming about where all those ships were going as they sailed to and for over the horizon; that little boy would certainly marvel that one day his legacy would be memorialized in such an enduring way," said Liz Walsh. "As the ship's Sponsors, my mother Joan and I are proud to now become a small part of the Navy's future. We eagerly look forward to developing bonds with the future ship, officers, and crew who will be a key part in protecting America at sea."

The future USNS Victor Vescovo is named to honor Commander Victor Lance Vescovo, USNR (Ret) (1966 – present). Vescovo, a private equity investor, explorer, and retired naval intelligence officer who currently holds the world record for the deepest dive of a crewed vessel to Challenger Deep in the Mariana Trench, was the first person to reach Earth's highest and lowest points. Vescovo has also completed the Explorers' Grand Slam (Last Degree), in which he climbed the highest mountain on each continent and attained both the North and

South Poles. Following his dive to Challenger Deep in his custom-built submersible Limiting Factor, Vescovo completed his own Five Deeps challenge, descending to the lowest points in the Earth's oceans.

He confirmed the identity of the wreck of Johnston (DD 557), which was sunk following a valiant stand against an overwhelming Japanese force during the Battle off Samar in Leyte Gulf, October 1944, which had been discovered but not confirmed by Vulcan, Inc., in 2019. The following year he discovered the wreck of Samuel B. Roberts (DE 413), lost in that same battle. Samuel B. Roberts is the deepest identified wreck at a depth of 22,621 feet. In 2021, Vescovo won the 2021 Captain Don Walsh Award for Ocean Exploration alongside Patrick Lahey for their 2019 Five Deeps Expedition and history of further dives of scientific and historical interest. There have been no previous Navy vessels named for Vescovo.

"It is a great privilege to honor my friend and colleague in the US Navy and ocean exploration, Captain Don Walsh. Vessels such as this upgraded T-AGOS class are essential to the US Navy's mission to safeguard the security of the world ocean as well as contribute to its greater understanding," said Vescovo, namesake of T-AGOS 26. "I am also beyond honored to follow in Captain Walsh's footsteps both to the bottom of the ocean and in the line of succession of naming these great ships."

During the naming ceremony, Del Toro also announced the sponsor of the future USNS Victor Vescovo, Victoria Vescovo Webster, the sister of CDR Vescovo.

"The naming of this ship for my brother, as the USNS Victor Vescovo, is a very deep and moving honor to me and our family," said Vescovo Webster. "The role of this ship will be such a perfect combination of his tremendous achievements as an explorer, and his service as a Naval Intelligence officer.

I am truly grateful to be named as the sponsor for this ship, and will endeavor to fulfill that role with the same spirit of service as the ship’s namesake.”

T-AGOS 25 class will be part of the tactical auxiliary general ocean surveillance (TAGOS) ships fleet operated by the Military Sealift Command (MSC) of the US Navy. The Navy in FY2022 procured the first of a planned class of seven new T-AGOS 25 class ocean surveillance ships. T-AGOS ships support Navy antisubmarine warfare (ASW) operations and gather underwater acoustical data to support the mission of the Integrated Undersea Surveillance System (IUSS) by providing a ship platform capable of theater anti-submarine acoustic passive and active surveillance.

T-AGOS 25 class ships will be 356ft (110m) long and feature a steel small waterplane area twin hull (SWATH) design. The upper section of the ship is supported by two struts that reach down to a set of submerged hulls resembling those of a submarine. The struts feature a slender profile where they meet the waterline, resulting in a minimal waterplane area.

The ships will have an 8,500t displacement and accommodation for 68 personnel. They will support the navy’s Integrated Undersea Surveillance System (IUSS) for collecting underwater acoustical data, using Surveillance Towed-Array Sensor System (SURTASS) equipment. The high stability of the SWATH design in adverse weather conditions is useful for SURTASS operations.

The other associated electronic equipment on the ships will help in processing and transmitting the data to shore stations through satellite, for evaluation. The ship will be able to sail at a maximum speed of 20 knots.