SECNAV Names Future Expeditionary Sea Base Ship USNS Hector A. Cafferata Jr. (ESB 8)

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QUANTICO, Va. – Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro announced today that the future expeditionary sea base ship ESB 8 will be named in honor of Medal of Honor recipient and Korean War veteran Hector A. Cafferata Jr.

The future USNS Hector A. Cafferata Jr. is the first ship to bear his name. Naming an expeditionary sea base after Cafferata follows a tradition honoring Marines who served with distinction.

SECNAV Del Toro made the announcement during a ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps on Korean War Armistice Day.

“This venue was not chosen by happenstance. For today, on the 70th anniversary of the signing of Korean War Armistice agreement, we are gathered here to reflect on the legacy of our Sailors and Marines who served as part of the United Nations force that defended the citizens of South Korea from 1950 to 1953 under harsh combat conditions,” said Del Toro. “I would also like to thank the members of the Korean War Veterans Association, The Chosen Few Organization, the Korea Defense Veterans Association, and all of our Korean War Veterans who joined us for this event. Your sacrifices in

defense of our Nation and the people of South Korea will never be forgotten."

Cafferata was born on Nov. 4, 1929, in New York City. His father was a Peruvian immigrant who ran a paper mill. The family eventually moved to the Montville, New Jersey area, where his mother grew up. After graduating from Boonton High School, Cafferata played semi-pro football while also working at a manufacturing plant for the Sun Dial Corporation. He joined the Marine Corps Reserve on Feb. 15, 1948, and served with a local unit, until he was called to active duty on Sept. 6, 1950. Cafferata was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division. By mid-October, he was on his way to Korea.

In the early hours of Nov. 28, 1950, Cafferata was serving as a rifleman with the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines, in action against enemy forces. When all other members of his fire team became casualties, he waged a lone battle with grenades and rifle fire as an enemy attack gained momentum. Making a target of himself under devastating fire from automatic weapons, rifles, grenades, and mortars, Cafferata maneuvered up and down the line and delivered effective fire against the enemy force, killing 15, wounding many more, and forcing the others to withdraw so that reinforcements could move up and consolidate the position. As he fought against a renewed onslaught that same morning, a grenade landed in an entrenchment occupied by wounded Marines. Cafferata rushed into the gully under heavy fire, grabbed the grenade in his right hand, and hurled it free of his comrades before it detonated, severely wounding his right hand and arm. Despite intense pain, he fought on until he was struck by enemy fire and evacuated for medical treatment.

"Private First Class Cafferata, in the face of daunting circumstances, never hesitated to put his fellow Marines' lives ahead of his own, remaining 'always faithful' to them throughout the Battle of Chosin Reservoir," said Del Toro.

“And it is my hope that the Cafferata family will serve in this same spirit, and be ‘always faithful’ to the USNS Hector A. Cafferata Jr. and her crew, serving as the bonds that forever link them to the memory of PFC Cafferata throughout this ship’s time in service.”

“For the next 40 years and hopefully beyond, there will be 60,000 tons of American fighting power sailing the seas under the name Cafferata,” said Gen. Eric M. Smith, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. “The Cafferata name joins our legends and is now forever engrained in the blood, sweat, and history of your United States Marine Corps.”

Cafferata retired from the service due to his wounds. He returned to New Jersey and spent the next few decades selling hunting and fishing equipment, working for the state’s Division of Fish and Game and owning a bar. In 1965, he married Doris Giblock, and they had four children: Lynn, Deborah, Heather and Dale, who is a retired Air Force Major.

Jessica Cafferata, Dale Cafferata’s daughter and the namesake’s granddaughter, attended the ceremony.

“This ship, being named for Hector A. Cafferata Jr., will inspire all to serve with courage and to reach for the highest ideal of selfless service,” said Jessica Cafferata. “It will remind us of the honor and bravery of the Korean War veterans.”

“If my great grandpa was standing here today for this historic event, it would be with honor and pride. Thank you to all veterans for your service to our country,” said Remy Lim, Hector Cafferata’s great grandson.

Cafferata died in 2016 and was buried at Quantico National Cemetery in Virginia. His Medal of Honor and Purple Heart were entrusted to the school named in his honor – Hector A. Cafferata, Jr. Elementary School – in Cape Coral, Florida. School principal Dr. Jason Kurtz brought the medals to the

naming ceremony.

“It is a privilege to be here today and experience first-hand the continuing legacy of Private First Class Hector A. Cafferata Jr.,” said Dr. Kurtz. “The faculty, students, and staff of Hector A. Cafferata Jr. Elementary School strive daily to emulate his character and values. We remember all that he did for others.”

The ESB ship class is highly flexible that may be used across a broad range of military operations supporting multiple operational phases, similar to the Expeditionary Transfer Dock (ESD) class. Acting as a mobile sea base, they are part of the critical access infrastructure that supports the deployment of forces and supplies to provide prepositioned equipment and sustainment with flexible distribution.

Other ESBs named for Medal of Honor recipients include Lance Cpl. Miguel Keith, Private First Class Robert E. Simanek, Sergeant Major John L. Canley, Warrant Officer Herschel “Woody” Williams, and Lt. Gen. Lewis B. Puller, who, with five Navy Cross awards, is regarded as the most decorated Marine in Marine Corps history.

More information on ESBs can be found here.