

USNS Kanawha Receives Presidential Unit Citation Award for Combat Logistics Force Support



Norfolk, Va. (May 16, 2026) –Family and friends gathered on the pier at Naval Station Norfolk on May 16, 2026, to welcome home the crew of the USNS Kanawha (T-AO 196). The fleet replenishment oiler and its 92 civil service mariners returned after a 204-day deployment, which included 156 days actively at sea.

NORFOLK, Va. – In a historic milestone for U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command's Combat Logistics Force, fleet replenishment oiler USNS Kanawha (T-AO 196) was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation during an award ceremony at Naval Station Norfolk, July 17, 2026.

The rare honor recognizes the ship's extraordinary logistics support to the USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group during Operation Epic Fury.

The crew of dry cargo and ordnance vessel USNS William McLean (T-AKE 12) also provided critical logistics support to the strike group and was also awarded the PUC for their efforts. The crew will be formally recognized for their accomplishments in an upcoming ceremony.

“By serving as a vital lifeline in contested waters, the civil service mariners of Kanawha ensured the strike group remained fueled, armed, and ready for combat,” said Adm. Karl Thomas, commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, who presided over the award ceremony.

“By earning the first of two Presidential Unit Citations in Military Sealift Command’s 77-year history, these civilian mariners didn’t just support the fleet; they made history. Their courage, resilience, and unwavering dedication demonstrate what we already know: our civilian mariners are frontline warriors.”

Thomas went on to praise the crew’s historic achievement, stating, “They have earned the deepest respect of the entire United States Navy.”

Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson, commander, Military Sealift Command, echoed these sentiments, highlighting the extraordinary nature of Kanawha’s contributions.

“This team represents the best of our Civil Service Mariner force. Their work, this brave performance, is the reason why MSC’s Combat Logistics Force has maintained its more than 77-year reputation as the logistics line that sustains the fight at sea. They play a vital role in our Navy’s ability to maintain its forward presence. This is a massively well-earned achievement, congratulations to USNS Kanawha and her crew for etching their name in our nation’s history.”

“Our success on this mission was a direct result of the relentless dedication of our crew and the seamless interoperability we built with the strike group,” said

Kanawha's former Chief Mate Anthony Canseco. "[This award] is a testament to the sacrifice and professionalism of every single Kanawha crew member."

In addition to the unit award, 20 individual accolades were presented to crew members for their standout bravery during the deployment, including three Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Medals: Chief Mate Anthony Canseco, Chief Engineer Abel Reyes, and Ship Master, Captain Brian Roney; 10 Civilian Service Commendation Medals: First Assistant Engineer Alexander Bacalso, Second Assistant Engineer Jose DeBarros, Junior Supply Officer Ashly Farmer, Ships Communication Officer Anthony Felton, Cargo Bosun James Fitzpatrick, Second Assistant Engineer Brian Franklin, Bosun Theo Niang, Operations Chief Nicholas Petrone, Supply Officer Cierra Reed, and Chief Radio Electronics Technician Malik Taylor; and seven Civilian Service Achievement Medals: Able Seaman Melanie Ausmer, Supply Utilityman Simone Cassells, Ordinary Seaman Jason Chambers, Supply Utilityman Kaylin Hayes, Electronic Technician Jayryan Imbuido, Engine Utility Ardrian Lincoln, and Ordinary Seaman Jose Yanez.

Individual crew members reflected on the significance of the award, the sacrifices made, and what the recognition means for the morale and legacy of MSC mariners.

"Receiving this recognition lets the Supply Department know that the hard work put into underway replenishments, in-port replenishments, fuel movements, and office duties does not go unnoticed," said Cierra Reed, supply officer. "The supply department plays a major part in all operations and continues to perform great in the fleet. Being recognized shows just that, while also inspiring and motivating others."

"When our deployment was unexpectedly extended in support of Operation Epic Fury, the sacrifice became very personal," Canseco said. "Many mariners, including myself, voluntarily delayed our scheduled reliefs, knowing it meant more time away

from our families. We did so because we understood the stakes. U.S. warships depended on us to keep them fueled, supplied, and ready to fight.”