

USNS William McLean Receives Presidential Unit Citation for Historic Deployment



NORFOLK, Va. – U.S. Navy Capt. Elizabeth Nelson, commodore, Military Sealift Command Atlantic (MSC Atlantic), welcomed home the civil service mariner (CIVMAR) crew of USNS William McLean (T-AKE 12), Sept. 2. She presented the team with the Presidential Unit Citation (PUC) award for an extraordinary deployment, supporting the USS Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group (GRFCSG) during Operation Epic Fury (OEF).

McLean earned the PUC award alongside MSC's fleet replenishment oiler USNS Kanawha (T-AO 196). Together, they share the historic distinction of being the first MSC Combat Logistics Force (CLF) vessels to receive this prestigious award. Kanawha received her award, July 17, 2026.

"You are the lifeline of the sea," Nelson said. "McLean's performance underscores the indispensable role that MSC's CLF ships play in modern naval operations – ensuring U.S. and coalition forces remain forward, ready, and capable."

Deployed for 179 days, the McLean served as a strategic enabler across the U.S. Fifth and Sixth Fleets, enabling sustained, port-independent operations for high-profile missions like OEF and Cobalt Shield. In its role as a floating warehouse, the ship replenished fuel, ammo, and stores while underway and eliminated the need for GRFCSG and other U.S. Navy and coalition warships to break station for logistical support.

At sea for 152 days , the McLean traveled 135,000 nautical miles. Sustaining 45 U.S. Navy and coalition ships, the crew executed 70 replenishments, transferred more than five million

gallons of fuel, moved 1,900 cargo pallets, and transported 70 people.

The McLean crew also set the gold standard as goodwill ambassadors during 18 port visits to Greece and Italy. As MSC ambassadors, the crew helped to forge bonds of trust in the world of combat logistic sea services.

“The crew is proud to have been included in the recognition afforded by the battle group’s receiving the PUC, said Capt. Jeffrey Helfrich, McLean’s ship master. “The logistics support provided by William McLean was instrumental in the accomplishment of the mission”.

USNS William McLean is a Lewis and Clark-class dry cargo and ordnance vessel of the United States Navy Military Sealift Command. It is named in honor of William McLean, a United States Navy physicist, who conceived and developed the heat-seeking Sidewinder missile.

As part of MSC’s Combat Logistics Force vessels, McLean resupplies the fleet with fuel, stores, and ammunition, enabling Navy combat ships to remain at sea for extended periods.

MSC operates more than 140 civilian-crewed ships that replenish Navy vessels, preposition combat cargo, and move military supplies for deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners. Over the last 77 years, MSC has conducted hundreds of thousands of replenishments at sea.

[By LaShawn Sykes, Military Sealift Command Atlantic, Sept. 23, 2026](#)