

USS Curtis Wilbur Returning Home After 25 Years in Japan



The fleet replenishment oiler USNS Tippecanoe (T-AO 199) conducts a replenishment at sea with USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG 54), an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer. *U.S. NAVY / Christopher Bosch*

YOKOSUKA, Japan – USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG 54) departed Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan, Aug. 18, following 25 years of service as a forward-deployed ship to U.S. 7th Fleet, the fleet said in a release.

Curtis Wilbur arrived in Yokosuka, Japan in September 1996 and operated in the Indo-Pacific while assigned to Task Force 71/Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 15, the Navy's largest forward-deployed DESRON and U.S. 7th Fleet's principal surface force. The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer is en route to San Diego, scheduled for routine maintenance and operations as a part of U.S. 3rd Fleet.

"Curtis Wilbur has been a Destroyer Squadron 15 mainstay in the Forward Deployed Naval Forces for the past 25 years," said Cmdr. Anthony Massey, USS Curtis Wilbur's commanding officer. "She executed countless operations and exercises in support of United States' strategic interests and maintained free and open Indo-Pacific sea lanes while navigating the most highly contested waterways in the world."

Curtis Wilbur's numerous years in U.S. 7th Fleet included many highlights across all warfare areas and helped forge lasting relationships with partner nations and allies in the region. The ship participated in multiple bilateral anti-submarine operations with the Republic of Korea navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, to include submarine detection exercises and joint anti-submarine warfare tactics. as well as participated in various bilateral operations across all

domains with the Royal Australian Navy, the Royal Thai navy and the Royal Saudi navy.

Curtis Wilbur integrated with multiple U.S. Navy battle groups, strike groups, and expeditionary strike groups in surface, subsurface, fire support, Ballistic Missile Defense, and air and strike warfare operations. The ship's most recent operations include enforcing U.N. Sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, routine operations in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, Freedom of Navigation Operations and bilateral operations with the Royal Australian Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. Additionally, Curtis Wilbur participated in multiple joint operations with the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force.

"As the first Aegis destroyer forward-deployed to Japan, Curtis Wilbur leaves behind a legacy of warfighting excellence and operational performance that set the standard for every destroyer that followed," said Capt. Chase Sargeant, Commander, Task Force (CTF) 71. "For the last 25 years, the 'Steel Hammer of the Fleet' boldly sailed the Indo-Pacific as part of the long grey line of warships of Destroyer Squadron 15 that maintained the freedom of the seas and protection of our national interests."

Curtis Wilbur also spent time in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operation conducting maritime interception operations in the Arabian Sea in support of U.N. resolutions in the region, and later supported Operation Enduring Freedom with the Kitty Hawk Battle Group.

Curtis Wilbur provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Dili, East Timor, and supported some of the first on-site help for Operation Tomodachi following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.

Massey stated the memories Curtis Wilbur Sailors have made in U.S. 7th Fleet, and especially Japan, will be enjoyed for long

after the ship leaves the region.

“While forward-deployed, many Curtis Wilbur Sailors have developed lifelong friendships, met spouses, and started families in Japan,” said Massey. “I cannot express how deeply thankful I am to the people of Japan for making us part of their family and letting us enjoy all the great things Japan has to offer – from its cuisine and towering landscapes to the beautiful countryside.”

With arrival of USS Higgins (DDG 76) and USS Howard (DDG 83) to their new forward-deployed location in Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan on Aug. 16, Curtis Wilbur is scheduled to join U.S. 3rd Fleet, which leads naval forces in the Indo-Pacific and provides the realistic, relevant training necessary for an effective global Navy. U.S. 3rd Fleet works consistently with U.S. 7th Fleet to complement one another and provide commanders capable, ready assets across the spectrum of military operations in the Indo-Pacific.