

USS John L. Canley Commissioning Recognizes Legacy of Vietnam Veterans and Medal of Honor Recipient



NAVAL BASE CORONADO (Feb. 17, 2024) – The crew of the expeditionary sea base USS John L. Canley (ESB 6) mans the ship during its commissioning ceremony on Naval Base Coronado Feb. 17, 2024. The ship is named for Medal of Honor recipient John Lee Canley, a retired Marine Corps Sergeant Major and Vietnam war veteran. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Claire M. DuBois)

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CORONADO, CALIFORNIA (Feb. 17, 2024) – Expeditionary Sea Base (ESB) USS John L. Canley (ESB 6) commissioned at Naval Air Station North Island in Coronado, California, Feb. 17.

The first of its name, ESB 6 honors United States Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. John L. Canley, Ret., who was awarded the Medal of Honor 50 years after his actions during the Battle of Hue City. Canley served as Company Gunnery Sergeant, Company A, First Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division (Alpha/1/1) in the Republic of Vietnam from Jan. 31 to Feb. 6, 1968. Sgt. Maj. Canley passed away in Bend, Oregon on May 11, 2022.

During the ceremony guest speaker, Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy reflected on the importance of what matters to the future. "As the world's problems grow increasingly more complex and stability more uncertain, we need to tap into America's most precious resource—its people—to solve the issues of the future. Because better technology and more ships will go to waste without the courageous Americans who will answer the call to service to their country."

In office when Canley received the Medal of Honor, General Joseph P. Dunford, Jr., 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and 36th Commandant of the Marine Corps began by honoring Medal of Honor recipients Colonel Robert J. Modrzejewski, USMC (Ret.) and Colonel Jay R. Vargas, USMC (Ret.), seated in the front row.

"In our initial engagement, I was struck by Sgt. Maj. Canley's sincerity, and his humility. In time, I gained an appreciation for his commitment to service, and his character as well," Dunford recalled. "In addition to being understated, Sgt. Maj. Canley was uncomfortable in being singled out for his actions in Vietnam. He was also offended by the lack of recognition Vietnam veterans received when they returned home."

"In addition to recognizing Sgt. Maj. Canley's heroism, I'd like to recognize the broader legacy of John Canley and his

fellow Vietnam veterans,” said the former Commandant. “Our Vietnam veterans have left us a very proud and rich legacy.”

Sergeant Major Carlos Ruiz, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, focused on the totality of Canley’s service, in and out of uniform, and what it means. “Sgt. Maj. Canley earned this honor over seven days, but he had 15 years of building Marines. Of making warriors. Getting them ready for the fight. On the back end of the seven days, he spent another decade, plus, continuing to serve in uniform.”

Ruiz relayed how Canley influenced Marines today. While those seven days helped to name the ship, it’s the 30 years that brought this group together. “He showed us how to show courage. How to do the right thing. He would walk with such calmness to pull his Marines out of danger. Those who were wounded; to get them out.”

“There’s this generation that keeps building on each other,” he continued. “They do some of the very similar things that John Canley did. And that’s care for each other. Not that long ago, you saw Marines being exactly like John Canley taught them to do. Standing on a wall looking through a sea of people, trying to find anyone else that they could save.”

Ship’s sponsor Ms. Patricia A. Sargent and Sgt. Maj. Canley’s daughter said, “To be able to give the order to bring this ship to life, I need to give you some information in regards to my father. My father understood that greatness is not achieved by the individual; it is achieved by the courageous acts of the many. The Marines of Alpha Company 1/1 are an example of that in what they achieved in the Battle of Hue City. In that battle, my father earned their Medal of Honor, which now resides on the USS John L. Canley.”

“This ship will achieve greatness, but it will only do that by the courageous actions of the many,” said Sargent. “It is in

honor of my father, my family, members of the 1/1, and the great people of the United States that I give the command: Officers and Crew of the USS John L. Canley, man our ship and bring her to life!"

Capt. Thomas Mays, the commanding officer, thanked Alpha/1/1, Sgt. Maj. Canley's unit at Hue City, for keeping the gunny's legacy alive, and working to see that he received the recognition this nation owed him. He also thanked Sargent and maid of honor, granddaughter, Viktoria Sargent for the esteem and care they have given the Sailors before having a "personal conversation" with the crews – gold, blue, and civilian mariners.

"Our vessel's footprint upon the seas is not the extent of her reach, nor the measure of her impact upon this world," he said. "The length, breadth, and endurance of that impact rests solely with you and I, with how we back one another, with how we handle our charge to care for this vessel, and with how we approach our sacred duty to defend these United States.

"Her spirit lived upon this earth for 83 years before her first plank was laid, imbued with honor, courage, and selfless sacrifice by her namesake. But the lifeblood that pumps through her veins, that makes her move, that faces down the threats our nation is confronted by, that lifeblood is you."

Four of USS John L. Canley's crewmembers later reenlisted aboard the new warship.

Mr. David Carver, President of General Dynamics NASSCO reminded everyone of ESB 6's "remarkable capabilities that will allow our servicemen and women to carry out a wide variety of missions, including mine counter measures, counter piracy operations, maritime security operations, humanitarian aid, disaster relief missions, special operations, and Marine Corps crisis response.

“The ship is designed to support nearly every rotary wing aircraft in the DoD inventory,” he continued, “as well as allied aircraft, all while serving off the fleet’s third largest flight deck. Canley has substantial residual space, weight, and power to accommodate a wide range of current and future, manned and unmanned, surface, aerial, and undersea systems across multiple warfighting functions. This is a massive, capable, flexible warship that gives fleet commanders decision space they need throughout their operating theaters.”

The mission of CNSP is to man, train, and equip the Surface Force to provide fleet commanders with credible naval power to control the sea and project power ashore.