

USS John P. Murtha to Support NASA's Artemis II Mission



Sailors assigned to amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) and NASA engineers prepare to release a crew module test article from the ship's well deck, Jan. 26, 2026. John P. Murtha is underway in the U.S. 3rd Fleet area of operations performing a just-in-time training in support of U.S. Space Command's human space flight recovery mission to retrieve NASA's Artemis II crew and spacecraft following their splashdown in the Pacific Ocean. (U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Jomark A. Almazan)

From Petty Officer 1st Class Jomark Almazan, April 6, 2026

SAN DIEGO – Amphibious transport dock ship USS John P. Murtha (LPD 26) is slated to serve as the recovery ship for the Orion spacecraft and its crew upon their return from the historic Artemis II mission.

The ship is named in honor of the late and long-serving Pennsylvania Congressman John P. Murtha.

“It is a fitting tribute to Congressman Murtha, who dedicated his life to serving our nation, that the ship bearing his name will be integral to this historic moment in space exploration,” said U.S. Navy Capt. Erik Kenny, commanding officer of John P. Murtha. “He was a champion for our military and a visionary. We are honored to carry on his legacy by supporting NASA and the Artemis II mission.”

The Artemis II mission is the first crewed flight of NASA’s Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft, sending four astronauts on an approximately 10-day journey that will take them beyond the Moon. This mission will mark humanity’s first crewed voyage to the vicinity of the moon in over 50 years.

Upon completion of their mission, the Orion capsule will splash down in the Pacific Ocean, where John P. Murtha and its crew will be prepared to recover the astronauts and the spacecraft.

The U.S. Navy’s amphibious transport dock has unique advantages, including a well deck, helicopter pad, onboard medical facilities, and communication capabilities needed to support the mission. The platform gives NASA the ability to recover the Orion space capsule and collect critical data to help ensure it’s ready to recover the astronauts and capsule during future Artemis missions.

MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopters from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 23 will provide imagery support for NASA by tracking the Orion space capsule as it travels through Earth’s atmosphere. After splashdown, HSC-23 helicopters will recover the astronauts once they exit the capsule and bring them to the ship for assessment and then transport them to shore.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group (EODGRU) 1 will provide Navy divers to recover and transport the Orion space capsule from the ocean to the ship's well deck. Navy divers are experts in mobile diving, salvage, towing, and open water, small boat operations. In addition to the Navy divers, EODGRU-1 will support the recovery mission with a dive medical team to assess and assist the astronauts following their exit from the capsule.

Artemis II is NASA's first crewed mission in a series of missions around and to the lunar surface where crew can build and test systems needed to prepare for the challenge of future missions to Mars. The mission launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, April 1, with four astronauts onboard.