

LPD USS Richard M. McCool, Jr. Commissioned



Navy Junior Sea Cadets and Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets make and arrival line for USS Richard M. McCool Jr. Commissioning Ceremony at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Pensacola, Florida Sept. 7, 2024. (DoD photo by EJ Hersom)

From Commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

NAVAL AIR STATION PENSACOLA, Fla. (September 7, 2024) – The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock USS Richard M. McCool, Jr. (LPD 29) commissioned aboard Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida, September 7.

Welcomed throughout the week, the crew, joined by the ship's sponsor, Shana McCool, and McCool's great-grandchildren, attended community events supported by local businesses, flyovers by the Navy's Blue Angels flight demonstration squadron, a visit by the Pensacola Blue Wahoos, and ceremony host, Naval Air Station Pensacola. Participating in the ceremony were Marine Aviation Training Support Groups Two-One and Two-Three, Navy Training Wing Ten (VT-10) Wildcats, Navy Band Southeast, McGuire's Pipe and Drum Band, and 350 Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps and Navy League Sea Cadets from Alabama, Arkansas, and Pensacola.

During the ceremony guest speaker, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, honored the ship's namesake as they brought the ship to life, beginning its commissioned service. "Captain McCool's leadership in the face of grave danger and his acts of heroism to save the crew and the ship our nation entrusted to him are indeed an example for all throughout."

“I am proud that the Department of the Navy is pursuing the award of the Amphibious Multi-Ship Procurement Contract for a total of three San Antonio Class amphibious ships—just like USS Richard M. McCool Jr.—along with an America Class amphibious assault ship,” Del Toro continued. “I am proud to see these Sailors and Marines bring this incredible warship to life in service to our nation, much like this ship’s courageous namesake.”

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti also reflected on the importance of the Navy-Marine Corps team. “The LPD plays an essential role on our Blue-Green team as the workhorse of our Amphibious Fleet, and soon the USS Richard M. McCool, Jr. will set sail and begin embarking, transporting, and landing elements of our Navy-Marine Corps team for a variety of expeditionary warfare training and missions,” said Franchetti. “The commissioning of this ship puts more players on the field in America’s Warfighting Navy—players the Navy needs to promote our Nation’s prosperity and security, deter aggression, and provide options to our Nation’s leaders. We need more of these players—platforms that are ready with the right capabilities, weapons, and sustainment to ensure we are fully prepared to fight and win our Nation’s wars in this decade and beyond.”

“LPD 29 represents a shift in what an amphibious warship is,” said Gen. C.J. Mahoney, Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. “With the latest in integrated SPY-6 (air and missile defense radar system) and Next Generation Surface Search Technology, she enables reconnaissance and counter reconnaissance on the forward edge of the battlespace – making sense and decision space for the Fleet and Joint Force Commanders.”

Emphasizing the critical role of the integrated Navy-Marine Corps team in the event that deterrence fails, Gen. Mahoney concluded, “If the Marine Corps is a bullet to be fired by the Navy, the USS Richard M. McCool, Jr. – with the very crew you

see here today – will pull the trigger.”

Commanding Officer Capt. Jeff Baker thanked family, friends, the commissioning committee, those who were not able to be present, the communities of Pascagoula and Pensacola, and Gulf Coast shipbuilders – electricians, machinists, pipe fitters, painters, riggers, welders, and more; everyone who helped to bring this ship to life

Echoing McCool’s words when receiving the Medal of Honor “Fight as a unit, not as an individual”, Baker talked about the importance of the crew. “I hope that we’ve made him proud. I hope that we have lived up to and will continue to honor his legacy. The remarkable warship moored behind me, is ready for pictures, but its full of potential energy. It takes 330 officers, chief petty officers, and enlisted crew to sail her and make our warship ready for tasking. Manning these rails are the finest men and women this country has to offer. I couldn’t be prouder of them. The ship needs them all. I need them all. The Navy and our country need them all. Please thank them. They’ve got the watch.”

“LPD 29, Richard M. McCool, when deployed comes equipped with the most advanced weapons system ever produced. The weapons system with unlimited reach, lethality, and combat effectiveness. The only system known to mankind that cannot be defeated by any adversary anywhere in the world. The weapons system of the United States Marines Corps.”

LPD 29 is the 13th San Antonio-class LPD commissioned in the United States Navy, and the first U.S. Navy ship to bear this namesake.

The naming of LPD 29 honors U.S. Navy Capt. Richard M. McCool, Jr., Ret. who received the Medal of Honor in 1945 for the heroism he displayed after his ship, USS LSC 122, was attacked by kamikaze aircraft in the Battle of Okinawa. Despite

suffering from shrapnel wounds and painful burns, he led efforts to battle a blazing fire on his ship and rescue injured Sailors.

McCool was a leader whose life and legacy revolved around service. In addition to USS LSC 122, he commanded the USS LSC 44 and served on the USS McKean (DD-784), USS Frank Knox (DD-742), and USS Leyte (CV-32), and at the University of Oklahoma, and Eighth Naval District, New Orleans, Louisiana. Attending Boston University in Massachusetts, he was redesignated as a public information officer with assignments as the deputy commander at the Armed Forces Information School at Fort Slocum, New York; and to Commander, Naval Base, Long Beach, California; Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington, D.C.; Commander, South Eastern Asia Treaty Organization, Bangkok, Thailand; Ninth Naval District at Great Lakes, Illinois; Commander, First Fleet; and Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, and Commander, Seventh Fleet, Japan. Retiring as a captain in 1974 after 35 years of active duty, he continued serving his community through engagement in local politics in the Bremerton, Washington, area. McCool died in March 2008 and is buried at Naval Academy Cemetery in Annapolis, Maryland.

San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ships are warships that embark, transport, and land elements of a landing force for a variety of expeditionary warfare missions. They provide the Navy and Marine Corps with modern, sea-based platforms that are networked, survivable, and built to operate in the 21st century, with the MV-22 Osprey, the upgraded Amphibious Assault Vehicle, and future means by which Marines are delivered ashore.