

Navy to Christen Expeditionary Sea Base USNS Miguel Keith



The newest expeditionary sea base will be named in honor of Marine Corps Vietnam veteran and Medal of Honor recipient Miguel Keith during a ceremony on Nov. 4. U.S. Navy ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy will christen the Expeditionary Sea Base USNS Miguel Keith during a 10 a.m. PDT ceremony on Saturday, Oct. 19, at General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego, according to the Defense Department.

The ship is named in honor of Marine Corps Vietnam veteran and Medal of Honor recipient Lance Cpl. Miguel Keith and is the first ship to bear the name.

Retired Marine Gen. Walter E. Boomer, the 24th assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, will deliver the ceremony's principal address. Keith's mother, Eliadora Delores Keith, who serves as the ship's sponsor, will break a bottle of sparkling wine across the bow to formally christen the ship.

"USNS Miguel Keith honors the dedicated and heroic service of a fellow Marine," Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said. "This dedication will live on in the ship and her crew as they deploy around the world bringing additional capability to our fleet. This christening cannot be achieved without the dedication demonstrated by the men and women who worked tirelessly to build this ship."

Keith was born in San Antonio, Texas, in 1951. He left North High School in Omaha, Nebraska, in December 1968 and enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve at Omaha on Jan. 21, 1969. He was discharged and enlisted in the regular Marine Corps on May 1, 1969.

In 1969, Keith served as a machine gunner with Combined Action Platoon 132, III Marine Amphibious Force in Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam. He was promoted to the rank of lance corporal on April 1, 1970.

He was severely wounded on the morning of May 8, 1970, when his platoon came under a heavy-ground attack. Despite being injured in the attack and open to hostile fire, he continued to engage the enemy with heavy machine gun fire.

Keith's efforts resulted in him killing three attackers and dispersing two remaining adversaries. Despite receiving further serious injuries caused by an enemy grenade, he continued to advance upon an estimated 25 enemy soldiers, killing four and dispersing the rest.

Keith was mortally wounded, but his performance in the face of overwhelming odds contributed, in no small measure, to the success of his platoon defeating a numerically superior enemy force.

ESB class ships are flexible, modular platform optimized to support a variety of maritime-based missions, including special operations forces and airborne mine countermeasures support operations, in addition to humanitarian support and sustainment of traditional military missions.

Built by General Dynamics NASSCO, the Montford Point-class is comprised of five ships across two variants: expeditionary transfer dock and expeditionary sea base. USNS Montford Point, USNS John Glenn, USS Lewis B. Puller and USNS Hershel "Woody" Williams have been delivered to the fleet. Miguel Keith is the third platform of the ESB variant and is scheduled to deliver later this year.

The platform has an aviation hangar and flight deck that include four operating spots capable of landing MV-22 and MH-53E equivalent helicopters and accommodations, workspaces and ordnance

storage for an embarked force. The platform will also provide enhanced command and control, communications, computers and intelligence capabilities to support embarked force mission planning and execution. The reconfigurable mission deck area can store embarked force equipment including mine sleds and rigid hull inflatable boats.