

Three Mine Countermeasures Ships Set for Decommissioning



Special Warfare Boat Operator 1st Class Nick Fajardo, a member of the U.S. Navy Parachute Team, the Leap Frogs, comes in for a landing during the decommissioning ceremony of the mine countermeasure ship USS Champion on Aug. 18. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kevin C. Leitner

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy will decommission three of its Avenger-class mine countermeasures ships over the next few days, commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSFP) said in an August 20 release.

The USS Champion, the USS Scout and the USS Ardent officially will be decommissioned at Naval Base San Diego on Aug. 25, Aug. 26 and Aug. 27, respectively. Their retirements will leave eight MCMs remaining in service, forward deployed to Sasebo, Japan, and Manama, Bahrain. Ceremonies marking their retirements were held this week.

“Due to public health safety and restrictions of large public events related to the novel coronavirus ... pandemic, the ceremonies were virtually celebrated with ship plank owners and former crew members,” according to CNSFP.

The 14 Avenger-class MCMS were part of the naval build-up of the 1980s. The MCMs were “designed as mine sweepers/hunter-killers capable of finding, classifying, and destroying moored and bottom mines,” the CNSFP release said.

“These ships use sonar and video systems, cable cutters, and a mine-detonating device that can be released and detonated by remote control. They are also capable of conventional sweeping measures. The ships are fiberglass sheathed, wooden hull

construction.”

Three MCMs preceded their sister ships into retirement: The Avenger was decommissioned on Sept. 30, 2014, followed by the Defender on Oct. 1, 2014; the Guardian left service in 2013 after being grounded near the Philippines.

“Champion, Scout and Ardent Sailors, past and present, are a special breed,” said Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, said at the Scout’s ceremonies.

“These Sailors served with distinct pride and dedicated tremendous energy in representing the U.S. Navy’s mine-sweeping community over the lifespan of these unique ships. As this chapter comes to a close, we look back proudly on the efforts of these Iron Sailors, their families and these tested and proven wooden ships as they all played an important role in the defense of our nation and maritime freedom around the globe.”

The following brief histories of the ships were provided by CNSFP:

The Champion was built in Marinette, Wisconsin, by Marinette Marine Corp. and commissioned on Feb. 8, 1991. Originally assigned to active Naval Reserve, Mine Countermeasures Squadron 2, the Champion spent most of its years homeported in either Ingleside, Texas, or San Diego. Since 2000, the Champion has operated exclusively in the Gulf of Mexico and Pacific Coast. Its stateside presence allowed for continuous improvement of mine-warfare technologies and crew training for forward-deployed naval forces in Bahrain and Japan.

The fourth ship to bear the name, the Scout was laid down on June 8, 1987, at Peterson Builders in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. It was launched on May 20, 1989, and commissioned

on Dec. 15, 1990. Among the Scout's achievements were helping to evacuate refugees from Kosovo in 1999, supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, and joining Hurricane Katrina relief operations in 2005.

USS Ardent was commissioned on Feb. 8, 1994. In 1998, in the North Arabian Gulf, the Ardent received emergent tasking to assist USNS Catawba in locating and recovering a downed F/A-18C. Later that year, it conducted operations inside Iraqi territorial waters in Mine Danger Area (MDA) 10 in support of Operation Desert Fox. The Ardent departed on an emergency sortie from Mina Salman Port, with all other ships, in the wake of USS Cole bombing in Port of Aden, Yemen, in October 2000.