

Ticonderoga-Class Cruiser USS Vella Gulf Decommissioned



Sailors and former shipmates stand in formation during the guided-missile cruiser USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) decommissioning ceremony, Aug. 4. Vella Gulf was commissioned on Sept. 18, 1993, at Naval Station Norfolk. Vella Gulf is the first of five cruisers set to be decommissioned this year. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jacob Milham*

NORFOLK, Va. – With plank owners and former crew members looking on, the crew of USS Vella Gulf (CG 72) decommissioned their ship at a Naval Station Norfolk, ceremony Aug. 4, Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic said in a release.

The event comes just months before the ship's 29th commissioning anniversary. Hundreds gathered in the August heat to celebrate the ship's distinguished history and military service. Capt. Constantine Xeftaris, Vella Gulf's first commanding officer, went back to the beginning, addressing the many plankowners on hand.

"In 1993, every officer, every chief, every Sailor wanted to be on an Aegis cruiser," said Xeftaris. "It was the finest, most lethal ship in the world. Aegis cruisers set the standard for performance and everyone knew it."

Following several Xeftaris sea stories illuminating the ship's early days, Rear Adm. Brendan McLane, commander, Naval Surface Forces Atlantic, lauded the crews, both current and former, for their hard work, dedication and setting the standard over the years.

"In 2020 the Vella Gulf crew completed perhaps the most challenging deployment of the ship's career, deploying to the Middle East and Europe with the USS Eisenhower Strike Group during Covid," said McLane.

“The crew spent 205 days underway,” he continued. “Vella Gulf’s crew proved their mettle on that deployment, embodying self-sufficiency, grit and warrior toughness by staying on station, despite the immense challenges. Nobody came out. Nobody left.

“As we enter an era of strategic competition, the example and lessons of Vella Gulf will guide us in meeting the challenges.”

Vella Gulf’s current Commanding Officer, Capt. Mike P. Desmond, spoke of the powerful bond between Sailors and their ships and the lives forged aboard. His words resonated with the audience as they bade farewell to the cruiser.

“Decommissioning conjures up a broad spectrum of emotions, as different as the backgrounds of the Sailors who have called Vella Gulf home away from home,” said Desmond. “Vella Gulf was as temperamental as can be, but when all systems were operating as designed, she was perhaps the most reliable, capable and lethal warship on the planet.”

Vella Gulf was built at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, and commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia, Sept. 18, 1993.

The ship was named in commemoration of the World War II Battle of Vella Gulf, which was fought in the area surrounding the Solomon Islands in the Pacific Ocean from Aug. 6-7, 1943. The battle saw six American destroyers successfully disrupt the Imperial Japanese Navy’s supply lines without taking a single casualty or damage from enemy fire. It was a decisive victory for the United States.

Over its 29 years of service, the cruiser has been an important part of America’s national defense strategy.

In 1999, the crew participated in NATO strikes against Serbia in an effort to stop government-sanctioned human rights abuses

against ethnic Albanians in the Kosovo region.

In 2001, Vella Gulf answered the call, taking part in the national effort to provide homeland defense for the country's northeastern region immediately following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. The crew supported air traffic control efforts as the air defense commander, controlling protocols for an area spanning from Boston to Washington D.C.

In 2009, the ship led a task force responsible for curbing anti-piracy efforts off the Horn of Africa. During its mission, CG 72 responded to a distress call from the merchant vessel Polaris, a 420-foot tanker that was under attack. Vella Gulf's intervention led to the pirates arrest and made the region safer for shipping.

In 2017, the Vella Gulf joined Carrier Strike Group 11. During its assignment, it supported strikes against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

The ceremony marks the first of five cruisers set to be decommissioned this year. Inactivation is a normal part of a warship's lifecycle. After decommissioning, the ship is slated to be towed on Oct. 11 to the Navy's Inactive Ship's facility in Philadelphia, where it will be in a Logistical Support Asset status.

"She has served her crews and her nation well, and rightfully takes her place among the ships that, for well over 200 years, have played an indispensable role in protecting the United States of America and serving her strategic interests across the world." concluded Desmond.

"This ship and her crews will forever share a proud and lasting legacy."