

USS St. Louis Completes First Deployment to 4th Fleet



The Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS St. Louis (LCS 19) arrives at Naval Station Mayport, Florida, after a deployment to the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. (MC1 Brandon J. Vinson)

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NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Fla. – USS St. Louis (LCS 19), a Freedom-variant Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), returned to Naval Station Mayport this week, concluding its first deployment to the U.S. 4th Fleet Area of Responsibility (AOR).

The eight-month deployment, which lasted from June 15, 2024 to February 24, 2025, marked a series of groundbreaking achievements that underscore the capabilities of the LCS platform and its growing contributions to naval operations.

While assigned to TASK FORCE 45/Destroyer Squadron 40,

operating primarily in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean, St. Louis, embarked Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron (HSM) 50 Detachment 4, and U.S. Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDET) 105 and 407, disrupted and confiscated over \$100 million worth of illicit contraband in five different operations, significantly hampering the activities of transnational criminal organizations.

“From our first week in theater, the crew demonstrated its tactical acumen in locating and intercepting illicit traffickers. Most of these interdictions were conducted at night, requiring long days and late hours but the crew stayed immensely resilient. I am very proud of what the team accomplished,” said Cmdr. T.J. Orth, USS St. Louis’ Commanding Officer.

In August, St. Louis transited the Panama Canal and operated in the Pacific Ocean for the first time, making history as the first FRE-variant LCS to travel as far south as Valparaíso, Chile when she participated in the 65th iteration of UNITAS, the world’s longest-running multinational maritime exercise. Alongside naval forces from 44 countries, the ship showcased its capabilities in maritime interoperability, enhancing ties with partner nations and furthering regional stability.

After returning through the Panama Canal, St. Louis received new tasking to support U.S. Southern Command’s Joint Task Force-Bravo as that command responded to the deteriorating security situation in Haiti. St. Louis served as a fueling station and Search and Rescue force for 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment (AVN REGT) UH-60 Blackhawks conducting evacuations out of Haiti. To prepare, St. Louis and 1-228th AVN REGT conducted more than 50 deck landings. This successful integration expanded the ship’s operational versatility, paved the way for future joint missions, and underscored the potential for cross-branch collaboration in dynamic environments.

To wrap up USS St. Louis' first deployment, St. Louis Sailors showed their flexibility and capacity to rapidly deploy in support of Joint Task Force Operation Southern Guard onboard U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Sailors supported the expansion of the Maritime Operations Center (MOC) in preparing the MOC to receive up to 2,000 illegal aliens, erecting 50 tents and setting up several hundred cots in several days. Operation Southern Guard is highlighting effective interagency collaboration, as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) oversees the operation.

"We saw a lot of 'firsts' on this ship's first deployment and it was amazing to see what this ship and crew was capable of. Looking back, this deployment demonstrated the growing potential for Freedom class LCS and the support they can provide not just in the Caribbean, but in the entire 4th Fleet AOR," said Cmdr. Lee Shewmake, USS St. Louis' executive officer. "There were many lessons learned that the crew took to heart and put in practice as deployment went on, and I believe that is what enabled our success over the past seven months."

"St. Louis demonstrated the great potential of the LCS Freedom class, not only in executing its assigned missions but also in breaking new ground for the community. The professionalism and dedication of this crew have laid a strong foundation for the future of LCS operations," said Master Chief Roderick Bolton, St. Louis' Command Master Chief. "USS St. Louis returns home with its crew proud of their achievements and eager to share lessons learned from this historic deployment. As the U.S. Navy continues to evolve, St. Louis has proven itself a capable and innovative platform, ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow."

USS St. Louis' first deployment to 4th Fleet was a resounding success, marked by numerous milestones and contributions to

naval strategy. The ship's accomplishments highlight the flexibility and utility of the Littoral Combat Ship platform in tackling modern challenges.