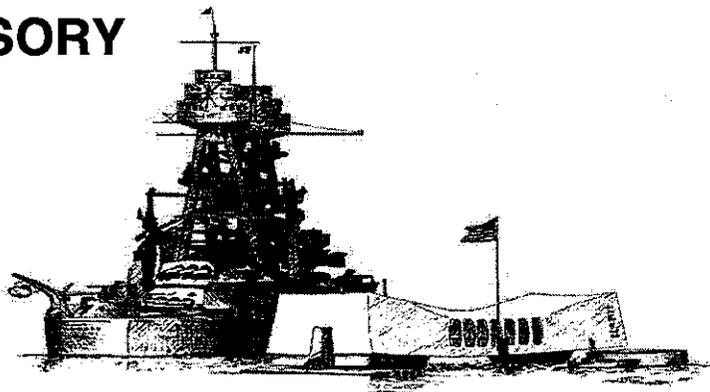


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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**POC: LCDR Jane Campbell**

**January 29, 2003**  
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## ***USS FLETCHER CREW RETURNS -- WITHOUT THEIR SHIP***

PEARL HARBOR – The crew of the USS Fletcher (DD 992) will return from an Arabian Gulf deployment Friday, January 31, at 9 a.m. after being deployed for six months. Media is invited to cover the unique homecoming at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, Kaneohe, Hangar 5.

The crew is returning on an airplane, having left the ship behind in Australia. Fletcher is part of the Navy's Sea Swap Initiative, a program that is rotating three crews through a single ship. As a result, the ship is spending 18 months forward deployed.

After departing the Arabian Gulf, USS Fletcher's Pearl Harbor-based crew made a brief stop in Diego Garcia, then made it's final stop as crew and ship together in Fremantle, Australia. In Fremantle, the crew turned the Fletcher to the crew of the former USS Kinkaid (DD 965). The ship will continue on deployment for another year, initially with the crew of Kincaid and subsequently with the crew of USS Oldendorf. Meanwhile, the Pearl Harbor-based USS Fletcher crew will be disbanding over the next two months, with Sailors moving on to their next assignments.

The purpose of the Sea Swap is to increase the time ships can remain on station during a period when Navy forces are being stretched thin by growing operational requirements around the globe. It takes about 45 days to sail between the West Coast and the Arabian Gulf. By flying crews out to the ship, the Navy can save weeks of transit time and millions of dollars in fuel.

During Fletcher's five months in the Arabian Gulf, the Pearl Harbor crew conducted missions in support of Operations Enduring Freedom/Southern Watch and maritime interception

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operations, enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq. They boarded 178 suspect vessels, served as the flagship for two Royal Australian Navy commodores who were assigned as Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) Commander, worked with U.S. Navy special warfare teams, Polish special forces, U.S. Coast Guard tactical law enforcement teams, British, Australian, Polish, Greek, Canadian, Kuwaiti and Japanese navies, and were the most forward deployed Navy ship close to Iraqi waters for most of the time in theater. HSL 37 Detachment 2 flew in excess of 775 hours supporting operations against smugglers and Iraqi naval vessels.

CDR Thomas C. Neal commands USS Fletcher's Pearl Harbor crew. The ship was named for Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher, and was commissioned on July 12, 1980. Ingalls Shipbuilders built USS Fletcher in Pascagoula, Mississippi. The ship is 563 feet long, 55 feet wide, and has approximately 340 crewmembers. Additional information about Fletcher is available on the ship's website [www.fletcher.navy.mil](http://www.fletcher.navy.mil) or on the Navy website [www.navy.mil](http://www.navy.mil).

Additional information about the USS Kincaid and their role in the Navy's Sea Swap initiative can be found at [http://www.news.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story\\_id=5308](http://www.news.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=5308)

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***Media representatives who would like to cover the crew's arrival please contact Navy Region Hawaii Public Affairs Office, 473-2888 by 4 p.m. Jan. 30.***