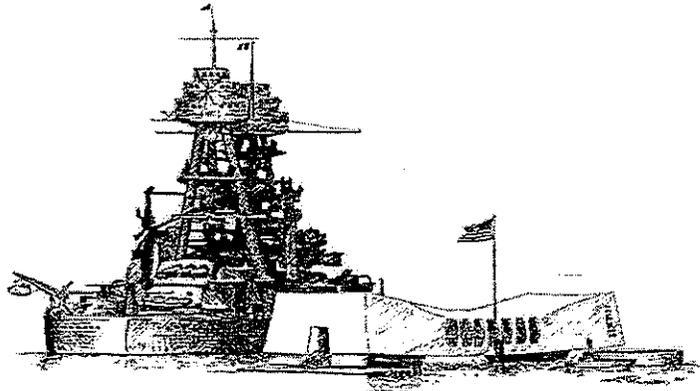


PRESS ADVISORY

NAVY REGION HAWAII
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
850 TICONDEROGA ST., SUITE 110
PEARL HARBOR, HI 96860

Tel: (808) 473-2888
Fax: (808) 473-2876
www.hawaii.navy.mil



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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POC: Agnes Tauyan

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USS FLETCHER RETURNS FOR FINAL VISIT

PEARL HARBOR – After two years and four crews, USS Fletcher (DD 992) will return to Pearl Harbor May 25 at 9:30 a.m. for a two-day port visit. The ship is returning from deployment on its way to San Diego where it will be decommissioned in October.

Cmdr. John P. Nolan commands Fletcher and her crew of approximately 340 Sailors. The former Pearl Harbor-based ship is part of the Navy's Sea Swap Initiative, a program that rotates four crews through a single ship at six-month intervals.

The original Pearl Harbor-based crew deployed in August 2002. In January 2003, the ship pulled into Fremantle, Australia to make preparations to turn it over to the former crew of the USS Kinkaid (DD 965). After Kinkaid was decommissioned, the Kinkaid crew flew to Australia to assume command of Fletcher.

Shortly after reporting on station Fletcher was tasked with Tomahawk missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. During the first and second phase of the war in the spring of 2003, Fletcher launched missiles and remained underway for 89 consecutive days.

Other follow-on crews came from USS Oldendorf (972) and its current crew, USS Elliot (DD 967). Their deployment in the Arabian Gulf included missions in support of Operations Enduring Freedom/Southern Watch, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and maritime interception operations, enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq.

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.

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Media representatives interested in covering Fletcher's arrival should call the Navy Region Hawaii Public Affairs Office at 473-2888 by 4 p.m. May 24 to arrange an escort. Media representatives will be met at the Nimitz Gate Visitors Pass Office parking area tomorrow, May 25 at 9 a.m.

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