

THE USS HAWAII COMES HOME

With the motto, *Kupale 'Aina – “defending the land”*— the USS Hawaii is coming home, to be welcomed just in time for our state’s 50th anniversary. Governor Linda Lingle, who sponsored the submarine as the representative of the people of Hawaii, christened the USS Hawaii on June 17, 2006. Commissioned on May 5, 2007, the USS Hawaii (SSN-776) is the first commissioned warship of the United States Navy to be named for the 50th State. Its homeport as of this year will be Pearl Harbor, a major United States military port in the Pacific Rim arena.

The USS Hawaii was named in recognition of the tremendous support the Navy has enjoyed from the people and state of Hawaii and in honor of the rich heritage of submarines in the Pacific Ocean. Joining the USS Virginia and North Carolina, the USS Hawaii is the third Virginia class submarine in the U.S. Navy. It was completed ahead of schedule, in late December, 2006. In January 2008, the submarine embarked on its maiden voyage from its first tour of duty station in Groton, Connecticut.

Many people are excited about this line of naval craft for maritime peacekeeping around the globe. The Virginia class submarine is the newest in the United States Navy’s front line of defense, becoming the latest cornerstone of United States coastal and national defense in helping to ensure peace in the world’s waters. The cutting edge design, most advanced armament, and sonar capabilities make the USS Hawaii one of the most technically sophisticated submarines in the world. Years of planning by highly qualified individuals, using the most advanced and often secret technologies available, go into the design of new military craft. The biggest and most powerful weapon on the block, in proud military vernacular, the Virginia class is functional, cost efficient, and geared for longevity as well. In building the submarine for its mission to defend, come lifesaving advances in technology, as well as more effective tactics and weaponry. The USS Hawaii’s nuclear reactor gives the submarine a virtually inexhaustible fuel source.

The first USS Hawaii, launched but never commissioned and named after the Territory of Hawaii, was a battle cruiser destined for service in World War II. This USS Hawaii, a submarine, is an amazing work of engineering, even apart from tactical, speed, navigational and weaponry aspects. Submerging a vehicle underwater without implosion is a marvel in itself. A vessel underwater receives the force of the immensely heavy weight of the whole ocean over it. Submarines are designed to withstand the effect of high pressure within the ocean without imploding from that pressure. Add to that the fact that over a hundred humans onboard need water, air, food, sanitation, and other necessities of life, and you can see how incredible these vessels are. Taking care

of the USS Hawaii in the Pearl Harbor homeport will give Hawaii the benefit of employment opportunities for those individuals with high skills and education.

Commander Edward Herrington has chronicled the journey to the new homeport from its first tour of duty station in Connecticut. The submarine has a speed of 25 knots (28 miles an hour). The nine-hour trip through the Panama Canal traversed three challenging sets of locks and a six hour drive through a large lake with about 12 different turns. Maneuvering a 7800 ton, 370 foot submarine through a 110 foot wide canal, wrote Cmdr Herrington, "is to say the least interesting." Housing 132 crew members underwater, in close quarters, for the lengthy journey from the northeast Atlantic across the North America-South America junction clear to the middle of the Pacific Ocean is a tribute to the human spirit. I'll take the liberty here of sharing some portions of Commander Herrington's blog:

"Monday, June 22, 2009....The ceremony [for the arrival] looks to be a festive event. I hope it will set the tone for the relationship that we desire to maintain with the local community over the next thirty years. Most of our families have left Groton, CT and are now arriving in Hawaii. Moving can be quite stressful for families, especially ones with small children. We have worked hard over the past year to make the transition for each family as smooth as possible. The families have been sharing stories about how welcome they have felt and of course how wonderful the weather and scenery has been. Having our families waiting on the pier for us when we arrive will make the homecoming that much more special."

"Thursday, May 28, 2009....We had some extra free time prior to mooring so we conducted a swim call with the crew. Everyone had a great time until a shark showed up. The crew got out of the water, a little slow for my taste, but everyone including the shark seemed to enjoy the swim....Every night underway the crew watches a movie together. During the week two of the movies had scenes filmed in Hawaii. Everyone was really excited about the scenes and how breathtaking everything is.

"Thursday, June 4, 2009....We also had the pleasure of hosting several groups of astronauts and engineers working on the replacement for the space shuttle. They were very interested in some of the systems we use onboard for atmosphere control and how they might be applied for use in space....The astronauts were generous enough afterwards to offer the crew a behind the scenes tour of NASA....Several of the Chief Petty Officers and I were also able to get away for a little golf. Something I look forward to doing more often once we get to Hawaii. The sailors that have served in Hawaii rave about how nice all of the golf courses are. Things continue to go smooth on the boat and the anticipation continues to build. I have the weather in Hawaii saved on my

iphone and check it frequently to remind myself of how nice it is going to be once we arrive home.”

“Friday, July 10, 2009. USS Hawaii is now in the Pacific!...The cribbage tournament is also underway. I won my first match and I am on my way to what I hope will be the championship. The crew always hopes they get the luck of the draw and play against me. First, they all think they can beat me and second they enjoy the bragging rights. The excitement continues to build with the crew, especially now that we are sailing the waters of the Pacific Ocean. We are counting down the days until our arrival.”