

## PCU Arlington Sailors Train for Success



MC1 Eric Brown- PCU Arlington (LPD 24) Detachment Norfolk's Chief Hull Technician Christopher Hovey helps Hull Technician Fireman Apprentice Joseph Dicaro don a self-contained breathing apparatus during damage control training at Naval Station Norfolk, Aug. 24

By MC1 Eric Brown | PCU Arlington (LPD 24) Public Affairs  
NORFOLK- "It's all about standards and ownership."

That's the mantra of Precommissioning Unit (PCU) Arlington's (LPD 24) Prospective Executive Officer, Cmdr. Brett Hershman and it applies to all aspects of the training and professional development of the ship's detachment of more than 100 Sailors at Naval Station Norfolk's Clendenin Hall.

"Everything from the ship's programs to cleanliness – we own it all now, not when we move aboard next year," Hershman explained. "If we don't like how something is working once we take custody, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We have the power to change things early on, which is harder to do once a ship has been in service for several years. We strive to instill a strong sense of ownership in every crew member from day one."

The Sailors assigned to the detachment are in Norfolk – far from where the amphibious transport dock ship is being constructed at Huntington Ingalls Industries' shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss. – for several reasons. Norfolk is the fleet concentration area where Arlington will be homeported following her 2012 commissioning and many of the schools Sailors are required to attend are located in the area.

When the Navy takes delivery of the ship in 2012, she will be manned by 374 Sailors and Marines. About two dozen of them, including Prospective Commanding Officer Cmdr. Darren Nelson, are already in Pascagoula, where work on the ship is roughly 88 percent complete.

"The crew down South is working with the shipbuilder as the Navy takes custody of spaces and equipment as well as conducting system light-offs," said Hershman. "They're also developing instructions, Ship's Organization and Regulations Manual (SORM) chapters and programs, as well as inventorying the thousands of line items of equipment and supplies that will be loaded onto the ship when we move aboard."

Arlington Sailors stationed in Norfolk are relocating to Pascagoula in four phases, which began 13 months before the scheduled delivery date.

"Phases one and two are key leadership personnel, including some department heads, leading chief petty officers, training and administrative staff, to work with the shipbuilder and Naval Sea Systems Command's Supervisor of Shipbuilding Gulf Coast," said Hershman. "Phases three and four come closer to the delivery date and are mostly our more junior Sailors, when we're getting ready to move aboard and take custody. At that point, it's all about training, drilling and preparing for certification by the Type Commander to safely operate the ship and sail it to Norfolk."

Prior to the ship's delivery, Arlington's crew is focused primarily on training, which encompasses spending time underway aboard other warships, attending schools and completing electronic training courses, primarily supplied by Navy Knowledge Online (NKO). All this is coordinated by Arlington's Training Department.

"We are responsible for tracking all scheduled and completed training, which includes weapons, physical security and damage control training for most crew members," said Arlington Training Officer Lt. (j.g.) Sean McDonnell. "The goal is to be 100 percent complete with all requirements in time for the delivery of the ship to the Navy."

"We have to go through detailed training on operating all our systems because when we sail away, nobody is going to be there to help us like in the shipyard," Nelson noted. About 60 percent of the crew will be Sailors with no seagoing experience and "that will be the first time they will be on their own to operate equipment."

Arlington Sailors gain firsthand knowledge of naval equipment in an amphibious environment by taking temporary additional duty orders to Norfolk-based sister ships, including USS San Antonio (LPD 17) and USS New York (LPD 21), as well as other amphibious ships.

"There's only so much we can learn in the classroom or from interactive courseware," said Hershman. "Nothing beats touching the gear we'll eventually operate. My goal is to have every Arlington Sailor spend time on one of our sister ships before they set foot aboard Arlington for the first time. That way they're familiar with the ship's layout and the equipment they'll own. They will have already been standing watches and getting qualified in warfare areas they'll be responsible for. The support we're receiving from the waterfront has been outstanding."

"Sailors also learn what it is like to complete some very high-risk evolutions such as underway replenishments, live ordnance shoots and amphibious operations," McDonnell added.

Detachment Sailors in Norfolk attend numerous Navy schools, some of which can last several months.

Fire Controlman 3rd Class Jason Burton recently completed a three-month Ship's Self-Defense System school and is now attending the six-month AN/SPS-48E radar school. Since reporting to Arlington in December, he has also attended classes in firefighting, damage control, ammunitions magazine sprinkler systems operations and security reaction force training and completed more than 40 NKO courses, as mandated by the Navy for his particular billet.

He attended the ship's christening ceremony in Pascagoula, March 26, and marched with other Arlington Sailors in the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C., May 30.

"Being on a (PCU) is a great way to start a Navy career," said Burton. "This has been is a great way to learn at a variety of schools. We are going to have a great ship and I can't wait to get there and start sailing."

Nelson believes PCU's are an ideal platform for developing leaders and teamwork.

"For most Sailors reporting to a command, that command has been operating for several years and Sailors keep it operating at a high level or to make small improvement the processes to make it better," he said. "With a new command you are starting from the ground up and that teaches our leaders to look deeper into programs and how to operate a ship much more closely. When everyone in the command is in the same position it builds more teamwork between the different departments. Teamwork between departments is what makes a good ship great."

Hershman agreed, elaborating, "Our crew get to form up from nothing into a complete, trained, qualified team. It's not like most tours where an individual shows up and has to become incorporated into a team that already exists. We have no 'newbies' or outsiders in a (PCU)."

Arlington is the eighth in Navy's San Antonio-class of ships, designed to be the most survivable amphibious vessels ever put to sea. Arlington's keel was laid on Dec. 18, 2008 and she was launched Nov. 23, 2010.

The third Navy ship to bear the name, Arlington combines 21st century amphibious shipbuilding and warfighting technologies to support current and future Marine Corps aircraft and landing craft and will be capable of taking nearly 1,200 Sailors and Marines into harm's way.

