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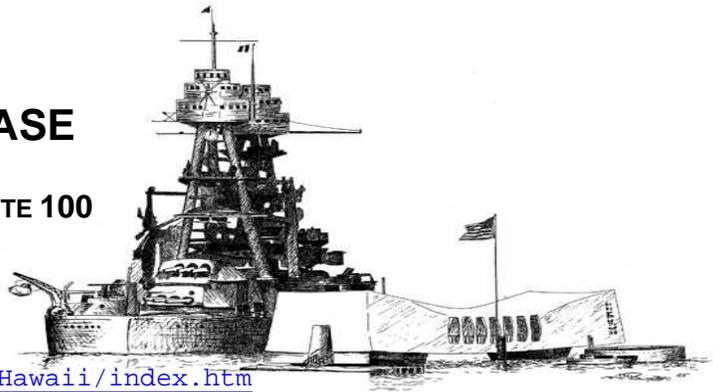
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## **USS Hopper Returns from Western Pacific Deployment**

Story and photos by Mass Communication Specialist 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Michael Lantron, Navy  
Region Hawai'i Public Affairs

**(Pearl Harbor, HI)** -- Although the normal sunshine of Hawaii was replaced with clouds and rain, friends and family on the pier braved the weather to hold signs and wave to their loved ones as Sailors aboard the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Hopper (DDG 70) returned to their homeport of Naval Station Pearl Harbor April 23 following a three month deployment to the Western Pacific in support of the Mid-Pacific Surface Combatant Operational Employment program.

“They all go through so much while they’re gone, so it’s an exciting and wonderful sensation to know they’re coming home safe and sound,” said the wife of a Hopper Sailor.

Hopper Sailors were proud of their efforts working as a unit during their time at sea and joyful to greet their loved ones waiting on the pier.

“We really flexed our ability to be liquid in that we never knew what was coming up next and we did everything we were asked. It was just a great job by everyone onboard,” said Fire Controlman 1<sup>st</sup> Class (SW) Justin Storto.

“It feels great to be back in Pearl Harbor after three months,” said Boatswain’s Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (SW) Roberto Bonilla. “To come home and be able to hold my son and wife in my arms is a wonderful feeling.”

After the ship moored and the brow was in place, Sailors and their significant others participated in a traditional “first kiss” ceremony, with the rest of the crew departing the ship shortly after.

“It feels great to be back in Hawaii. We’re going to enjoy the time we have with our families and friends as much as we can,” said Cmdr. Timothy Kott, Hopper’s commanding officer.

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Kott also complimented his Sailors for their extraordinary efforts throughout the deployment.

“As always, the crew performed remarkably and everything we asked of them, they executed perfectly. Everything we did will pay us great dividends for our future certifications and for future deployments,” said Kott.

During the deployment, the crew enjoyed five port visits to three countries, including Japan, Korea and Guam. In addition, Sailors also contributed to the host nations’ schools and orphanages during four community relations projects.

Hopper departed Pearl Harbor Jan. 20 to join the USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74) Battle Group and members of Destroyer Squadron 15 while supporting the Mid-Pacific Surface Combatant Operational Employment program. While on deployment, Hopper participated in numerous advanced phase training events and exercises in addition to acting as a ballistic missile defense asset by providing an increased presence of naval ships in the Seventh Fleet area of operations.

The Mid-Pacific Surface Combatant Operational Employment program calls for Hawaii-based surface combatants to focus on the Western Pacific by conducting intermediate/advanced training and regular deployments in the Western Pacific. The program also furthers America's Maritime Strategy by posturing credible power in the Western Pacific to protect our vital interests, assure our friends and allies and deter potential adversaries.

Hopper is 505 feet in length, 66 feet wide and has a maximum speed of 30 plus knots. Guided-missile destroyers operate in support of carrier strike groups, surface action groups, amphibious groups and replenishment groups and are multi-mission [Anti-Air Warfare (AAW), Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), and Anti-Surface Warfare (ASUW)] surface combatants.

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