



June 2026



The Lucky Bag

RICHMOND, VA COUNCIL NAVY LEAGUE OF THE UNITED STATES

★ WELCOME HOME ★ USS GERALD R. FORD

RECORD-SETTING DEPLOYMENT COMPLETE



MORE THAN 300 DAYS AT SEA
Longest post-Vietnam War deployment
by a U.S. aircraft carrier



**OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF
THE WAR AGAINST IRAN**



**PLAYED A ROLE IN THE CAPTURE OF
VENEZUELAN LEADER NICOLÁS MADURO**



**THANK YOU TO THE SAILORS AND THEIR FAMILIES.
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. WELCOME HOME.**



US Feed photo

After nearly a year at sea, the mighty **USS *Gerald R. Ford*** finally returned home to Naval Station Norfolk, Saturday May 16, 2026, ending one of the most demanding deployments in modern U.S. Naval history.

The world's largest and most advanced aircraft carrier spent an incredible 326 days deployed across multiple regions, supporting operations in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. Alongside the destroyers **USS *Bainbridge*** and **USS *Mahan***, the carrier strike group became a symbol of American naval power during a period of rising global tension, participating in major operations including missions connected to Venezuela and Operation Epic Fury in the Middle East.

For thousands of sailors aboard the massive warship, the homecoming was emotional, marking the first reunion with families since June 2025 after months of nonstop operations, combat missions, and relentless time at sea.

The deployment pushed both the ship and its crew to their limits. The **Ford** Strike Group sailed tens of thousands of miles, launches thousands of sorties, and maintained an almost constant operational tempo rarely seen since the Vietnam War era. Defense officials praised the carrier's sailors for their resilience, discipline, and combat effectiveness under extremely difficult conditions.

USS *Gerald R. Ford* homecoming continued on page 6

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Vaughan F. Dize



Greetings Fellow Richmond Council Navy League Members and Friends.

The Membership committee is currently working on updating our Councils membership list. Members of the committee have been contacting members who have not paid their dues for 2026. Many have replied that they did not see the dues notice in the December of *The Lucky Bag*. Unfortunately, we chose to send out our 2026 Dues Invoice in a broadcast email to cut down on postal expenses. Please be assured that **all future dues notices will be included in the December issue of *The Lucky Bag*.**

Unfortunately, our picnic which was scheduled for May 9th had to be cancelled due to lack of interest.

On May 6th, the Richmond Council Navy League presented the Coast

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The Lucky Bag is published monthly, except Jan. & Feb. Issues which are combined.

Guardman of the Year Award to Machinist Technician 1 Daniel Perez of the **USCGC *Spencer***. The award was presented by Liaisons Tom Hassell and Tom Jennings.

Five of our High School JROTC Units held their Awards Ceremonies in May. Richmond Council Liaisons presented awards to the top cadets to the following High Schools: Varina NJROTC; Mechanicsville NJROTC, Hermitage MCJROTC, Goochland MCJROTC and Highland MCJROTC. (see pages 3, 4, and 5 for more information).

The Marine League, James M. Slay Detachment, needs a Navy representative for their Color Guard. If you are interested, please contact our office, (804-355-7557), and we will get you in touch with the James M. Slay Detachment.

In June, two of our adopted ships will have a Change of Command: **USCGC *Northland* (WMEC-904)** on June 25th and **USCGC *Spencer* (WMEC-905)** on June 26h.

USS *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN-78), Destroyer Squadron 2 and **Carrier Air Wing Eight (CVW-8)** have returned home after a historic 11-month global deployment. The longest aircraft carrier deployment since the Vietnam War. Welcome home Sailors!

June Events in Naval History

- June 3-26, 1918: Battle of Belleau Wood
- June 4-7, 1942: U.S. defeats Japan at Battle of Midway
- June 4, 1944: Capture of German submarine U-505
- June 6, 1944: Operation Neptune and Overlord, the Invasion of Normandy (D-Day)
- June 8, 1967: **USS *Liberty*** attacked by Israeli forces.
- June 12, 1775: Capture of HMS *Margaretta*. Widely celebrated as the first naval battle of the American Revolution
- June 15, 1944: Battle of Saipan begins
- June 17, 1898: Navy Hospital Corps established.

Until next month, may you have fair winds and following seas! ✍

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Chaplain John A. Harler, M.D.



WHAT MOTIVATES OUR BEHAVIOR?

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (HEBREWS 4:12).

In his book, *Surgery of the Soul, Healing the Whole Person, Spirit, Soul, and Body*, surgeon William Standish Reed, M.D., uses a sword as a scalpel to illustrate how the Word of God discerns the true attitudes of our hearts, which determine our behavior.

This analogy shows how the Bible examines a person's inner life, like an airport scanner, distinguishing between what is truly spiritual and what is merely human.

The "Word of God" here refers to the Scriptures, which, like a "two-edged sword," cut both ways: bringing conviction and warning against disobedience, but also providing the message of salvation and promise. It acts as the final "measuring stick" for obedience to God.

Since our behavior ultimately results from what we believe, it is important to realize that our beliefs can be based on truth or falsehoods.

Proverbs 21:2 says, "All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart." This highlights human self-deception and God's ultimate judgment of motives. It is folly to ignore internal motives and the necessity of divine evaluation - the contrast between human perception and divine reality. While we may think that our thoughts and actions are good and

Chaplain's Corner cont. on page 3

Chaplain's Corner cont. from page 2

sound, only God, the Source of all goodness, can determine if they are. Seeking the truth in Scripture opens our eyes to God's Way.

Therefore, let us seek the Lord's perspective to determine whether our motives and behavior line up with His plan for our lives.

U.S. Marine Corps League Heilman Scholarship Award

The purpose of the Sergeant Bruce Heilman Scholarship is to provide financial support to one outstanding high school senior, who is a cadet in each of the four Marine Corps JROTC units in the Richmond area, who attends to pursue higher education at a "Qualifying Institution." Qualifying Institutions are defined as vocational schools, technical schools, community colleges, junior colleges, and four-year colleges.

This year's recipients of the Heilman Scholarship Award are Cadet Captain Madeline Rose and Angeniece Wilkes. Rose is a MCJROTC senior, graduating from J.R. Tucker HS and Wilkes is a graduate from Highland Springs HS, who served in the MCJROTC program for 2 years with the rank of LCpl.



Cadet Madeline Rose receives the award from the USMC Slay Detachment #329. LtCol Gaitens presented her the Scholarship Award.

Cadet Rose stated, "I will be earning my Private Pilot's License this summer

in an intensive eight-week course at Elizabeth City State University on a scholarship from the Navy for Navy and Marine Corps JROTC students (Commander, Naval Air Forces program). This year there were over 400 applicants, and I was one of 14 selects chosen. Currently I am working through a pre-work class to allow me to pass the FAA exam, and when I am there, we will be flying twice a day while continuing ground school classes. At Tech, I will join the Hokie Flying Club, which will allow me to keep flying while I am completing my studies. I will be majoring in National Security and Foreign Affairs with a focus/minor in Russian. I hope to go into an accelerated master's program to graduate with my bachelor's in three years and complete a political science master's in one additional year, which is possible because I will soon graduate from J Sargeant Reynolds Community College with an associate's degree in Humanities and Social Sciences through the Advance College Academy at Tucker."

Bravo Zulu, Cadet Rose! ✈



Angeniece Wilkes receives her Scholarship Award from USMC Commandant Tom Hastings. Angeniece will be attending Marymount University in Arlington, VA. Bravo Zulu, LCpl Wilkes!

AMERICA Division Sea Cadet Annual Awards

On May 3rd, The AMERICA Division Sea Cadets held their Annual Awards Banquet at the American Legion Post 284 in Colonial Heights. Council's

President and Liaison, Vaughan Dize, presented the top Cadets their U.S. Navy League Cadet Corps Awards.



Lead Cadet 3 Cora Landrum received the U.S. Navy League Cadet Corps, Cadet of the Year Award.



Cadet PO3 Andrew Smith received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

High School JROTC Annual Awards Ceremonies

JROTC High School Annual Awards Ceremonies were held in April and May. Richmond Council Navy League Liaisons presented Cadets with their Awards at the following schools:

James River H.S. NJROTC

Liaison: Gary Riffle

Cadet LCDR Jude Geilman received the Top Cadet of the Award.

Cadet PO1 Allizon Santamaria received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Cadet SN Tyler Merrill received the Perseverance Award.

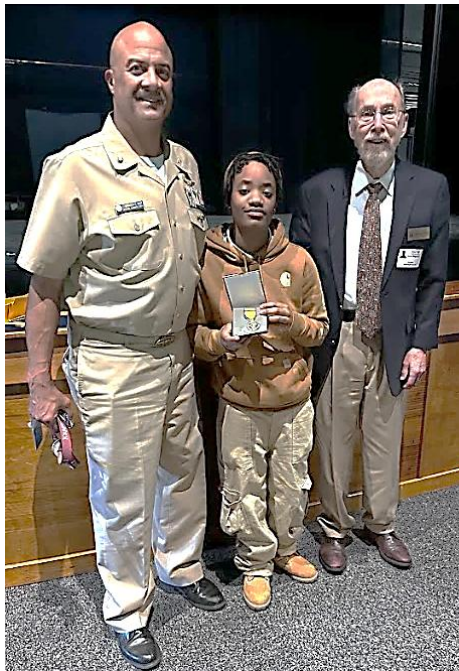
Cadet PO3 McKenna Stewart also received the Perseverance Award.



James River H.S. NJROTC: left to right: LCDR Jude Geilman; PO3 McKenna Stewart; RCNL Liaison Gary Riffle; PO1 Allizon Santamaria and SN Tyler Merrill. Congratulates Cadets!

Varina H.S. NJROTC

Liaison: James Dageforde, M.D.



Cadet Dekyia Taylor received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award. Pictured with her are CDR Curtis Irby and RCNL Liaison Jim Dageforde.



James River H.S. Liaison Gary Riffle presents Cadet LCDR Jude Geilman with the Top Cadet of the Year Award.



Cadet Erica Gallegos-Alvarada was awarded the Marine Corps League Distinguished Athlete Award from James River High School. Standing with her is Hermitage High School RCNL Liaison, Alan Clemmons.

Goochland H.S. MCJROTC

Liaison: Vaughan Dize

Cadet Ava Freeman received the Cadet of the Year Award.

Cadet Nathan Strong received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Cadet Avery Royer received the Perseverance Award.

Highland Springs H.S. MCJROTC

Liaison: George Feitig

Cadet J'Niyah Roston received the Top Cadet of the Year Award.

Cadet Lt Shamond Sukens received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Cadet Sairy Fernandez received the Perseverance Award.

Note: Unfortunately, we did not receive pictures of the top Cadets at all of the JROTC High School Annual Awards Ceremonies. We appreciate getting the ones we did receive. Thank you!

JROTC Awards cont. from page 4

Mechanicsville H.S. NJROTC
RCNL Liaison: Tom Hassell

Cadet LCDR Erin Moore received the Cadet of the Year Award.

Cadet CPO Keriol Lopez received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Cadet SA Christopher Brazier received the Perseverance Award.

Hermitage H.S. MCJROTC
Liaison: Alan Clemmons

Cadet 1st SGT Kaleigh Grontas-Biedenbender received the Cadet of the Year Award.

Cadet Angy Lopez received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Cadet Sgt Kambriah Berry received the Perseverance Award.

(note: due to technical difficulties, the Award Ceremony was held at a later date at Hermitage High School)



Liaison Alan Clemmons presented Cadet 1st SGT Kaleigh Grontas-Biedenbender the Cadet of the Year Award.



Liaison Alan Clemmons presented

Cadet Angy Keriol Lopez with the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.



Liaison Alan Clemmons presented Cadet Sgt Kambriah Berry receives the Perseverance Award.

New Kent H.S. NJROTC
Liaison: Patrick D. Harris

Cadet Brandon Crooms received the Cadet of the Year Award.

Cadet Nathan Herrington received the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Patrick Henry H.S. NCJROTC
Liaison: Earl Williams

Cadet CO Gabrielle White received the Cadet of the Year Award. Cadet White was also selected to receive one of the two Principal Medallions. This is one of the highest medallions that can be awarded out of six categories, for school leadership.



Liaison Earl Williams presents Cadet CPO Violet Lambert with the Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award. Cadet Lambert is a rising Junior and will be the Commander of the drill team next year.

Patrick Henry High School NJROTC was awarded the Unit Achievement Award for the school year 2026. There are 30 schools in area four and only six of them receive the award. This award is based on all factors: strength of the unit, the area, managers, inspection, competitions, community service, and all the areas in between.

J.R. Tucker H.S. MCJROTC
Liaison: Vaughan Dize

Cadet Madeleine Rose received the Cadet of the Year Award.

Cadet Craig Simmons received Theodore Roosevelt Medal and Ribbon Award.

Cadet Mason Chang received the Perseverance Award.

Congratulations to all the Cadets for their milestone achievements!

Richmond Council to Hold Annual Golf Outing September 16, 2026



GOLFERS and FRIENDS, get ready for a fun day! On **Wednesday, September 16, 2026**, the Richmond Council NLUS will hold its premier fundraiser, the **Annual Golf Tournament**, at the Hollows Golf Club, Montpelier, VA.

As the number of players will be limited to 110 for this popular event, you should make your reservations early to ensure you don't miss out.

The format is Captains Choice, Best Ball and the fee per golfer is \$95.00 which includes green fees, golf cart, a pork barbeque lunch, snacks refreshments (beer, soft drinks and water) and door prizes.

A good time should be had by all. Hurry and get those foursomes signed up!

More details will follow in our next issue of *The Lucky Bag*. 🍷

USS *Gerald R. Ford* Homecoming continued from front page

Their performance ultimately earned the prestigious Presidential Unit Citation, one of the highest honors a U.S. military unit can receive. Senior military leaders described the deployment as historic, not only because of its length, but because of the sheer scale of missions carried out during the cruise.

Despite mechanical challenges, onboard fires, exhausting schedules, and the emotional toll of extended deployment, the crew continued operating at a level that demonstrated the unmatched reach and endurance of modern carrier strike groups.

As the massive supercarrier slowly pulled back into Virginia, the moment represented more than the end of a deployment. It became a reminder of the enormous burden carried by modern naval forces in an increasingly unstable world. Families waved flags from the pier, sailors embraced loved ones after nearly eleven months apart, and the **USS *Gerald R. Ford*** returned not just as a warship, but as a battle-tested symbol of endurance, sacrifice, and the American sea power. (source: Military Tech Facebook).

At the homecoming, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth presented **Ford** Carrier Strike Group Twelve (CSG-12), with the Presidential Unit Citation (PUC). The PUC is the highest honor a military unit can receive, awarded for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy. *“You made history, answered the call with strength and resolve, and made our nation proud.”* (source: Military Tech Facebook)

Welcome home Sailors! ✍

Welcome Home Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 213 – Blacklions !



Naval Air Station Oceana photo

Families anxiously await their loved ones' arrival.

Then, what reunion it is!

U.S. Navy Aviators assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 213, the “Blacklions” were greeted by family and friends after returning to Naval Air Station Oceana, May 11, 2026, following a historic eleven-month deployment to U.S. 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th Fleets as part of the **USS *Gerald F. Ford*** Carrier Strike Group assigned to Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 8. CVW-8 logged more than 5,500 flight hours in support of Operation Epic Fury along, and more than 11,800 launches throughout the 11-month deployment. (source: Naval Air Station Oceana Facebook). ✍

Advocacy Update

Our Advocacy Taskforce is considering our first “campaign”, the Pay Our Troops Act (H.R. 5401), sponsored by Congresswoman Jen Kiggans, Second Congressional District. A blast email was sent to all Richmond Navy League members to discuss the legislation’s intent, pro’s and con’s, and our taskforce’s position.

It is becoming apparent that advocacy is more a function of numbers than words. Verbose letters to legislators receive no more individual consideration than a concise form letter. Each emailed outreach to a legislator becomes a tally mark, so headcount becomes more vital than wordcount.

How does a Navy League member access a campaign? It’s done through the website of the Navy League of the U.S. Here’s the process:

- Establish your personal account on NLUS’s website. Logon to **navyleague.org** and click on “**LOGIN**”.
- This takes you to a second screen with the middle choice “**Member Login**”. Click on that.
- That brings you to a third screen where you either access your established login or you create an account. *Creating an account is especially important for advocacy because your address and zip code identifies your Congressional District and ultimately connects you to your Congressperson.* Once your account is established, click on “**Login**” on the gold bar.
- This brings you to your Personal Snapshot. This is useful for online payment of dues, but for our purposes go to the top taskbar and click on “**Council Connect**”.
- Please be patient. You’re getting closer. On the Council Connect page, click on “**Member Resources**”.
- On the Member Resources page scroll down to the very bottom (12th photo) to “**Legislative Affairs Resource Center**”.
- The headline says “Voice to Congress”. Go to the top taskbar and click on “**Campaigns**”. All issues of concern (campaigns) are listed and explained by clicking one. The “**Write**” tab brings up a form letter to both of our Senators and to your Congressperson to enter you into the “headcount”. You can edit the letter or just click on “**Write**” to have it automatically sent. You will probably receive an email of receipt from your legislator.

See how “easy” that was? Seriously, it becomes less onerous the more you do it. It’s good to know how to navigate the Navy League’s webpage anyway.

Your Advocacy Taskforce consists of seven members. If each member followed the process outlined above, there would be seven “tallies” with each legislator. If every member submitted their “vote”, our Council would record **177 “tallies”** with each legislator. If we consider that we have members in numerous Congressional districts, our reach widens.

We’ve just described the process on the federal level. Campaigns that are State or Local will be handled the “old-fashioned” way... a drafted letter, emails, phone calls, personal visits, and other effective resources. Contact assistance will be provided by our Advocacy Taskforce.

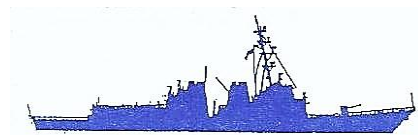
Two points were made in our April 2026 issue of *The Lucky Bag* that bear repetition: (1) we reserve the right to advocate for State, Local, and stakeholder concerns, and (2) our advocacy is primarily programmatic instead of veterans oriented.

Our close proximity to our state Capital is an advantage on which we should capitalize. Secondly, our programmatic focus does not EXCLUDE veterans’ concerns. There will be times we will be asked to add our support to a VSO’s (Veterans Service Organization... like the American Legion, VFW, etc.) position and those requests may be considered by our taskforce.

In all cases, our general membership will know what we’re doing. The communication of choice will be the Blast Email due to its efficiency. ✍

ADOPTED SHIPS UPDATE

(these reports may be edited to fit the space available)



USS Gravely (DDG-107)
CO: CDR Greg Piorun
XO: CDR Gregory Tornambe
CMC: CMDCM LeDezman Johnson

Alan Clemmons, Liaison
Courtney Mustin, Ass't Liaison

USS Gravely is on deployment.



USS Carter Hall (LSD-50)
CO: CDR Brittany N. Lynn
XO: CDR Phillip Wise
CMC: CMDCM Chelsea L. Turner

Pat Robson, Liaison

USS Carter Hall is in port at BAE Systems Norfolk Ship Repair.



USCGC Northland (WMEC-904)
CO: CDR Brian C. Gismervik
XO: LCDR Charles Chavtur
CSEL: MKC Ethan Stanford

Vaughan Dize, Liaison

USCGC Northland is in port.



USCGC Spencer (WMEC-905)
CO: CDR Justin Strock
XO: LCDR L.H. (Hank) Deatrach

Thomas T. Hassell, Jr., Liaison
Thomas A. Jennings, Ass't Liaison

This month has been a very busy and productive time aboard **Spencer**. We successfully completed several bi-

annual training assessments, and the crew's hard work leading up to these events clearly paid off in the excellent results we received.

As we prepare for our next patrol, training has been ongoing across all areas of the ship.

Our law enforcement teams have been sharpening their skills, weapons training has kept our crew busy, and damage control training has ensured the crew remains prepared to respond to any casualty.

We also want to extend our sincere appreciation to our supporters ashore. Thank you for visiting the ship, recognizing our Sailor of the Year, and spending time with the crew. It is always a pleasure to have you aboard, and we are especially grateful for Tom and Tom coming out and representing the Richmond Navy League.

As we prepare to get underway, it remains a busy time ensuring we have everything we need for what lies ahead. We are grateful for your continued support and encouragement. 🍷

Very Respectfully,
 CO CDR Justin Strock



USCGC Spencer (WMEC-905) honors Richmond Navy League with an engraved coffee mug.

Sailor of the Year Award

On Wednesday, May 6, Tom Hassell and Tom Jennings traveled to Portsmouth, VA to present **USCGC Spencer** Sailor of the Year Award to Petty Officer Tanner Lewis.



CO CDR Strock discusses the Award presented to Petty Officer Tanner Lewis.



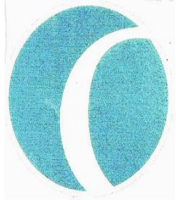
Liaisons Tom Jennings and Tom Hassell congratulate PO Lewis for receiving the Sailor of the Year Award.



During an all-hands meeting, CDR Strock and XO Deatrach gave Tom Hassell a BIG surprise by singing him Happy Birthday, presenting him with a card and a gourmet birthday cake, made by the chef. Happy Birthday, Tom!

Thank You Sponsors!

Your Financial contribution to the Richmond Navy League provides Funds for programs supporting those serving in the United States Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Council's Youth Programs; The Naval Sea Cadet Corps and the Local Navy and Marine JROTC Units.



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Peacoat History



Peacoats, known for staying warm even when wet, have been used by seafarers since the early 1700s. Originating with the Dutch, they became standard U.S. Navy issue around the turn of the 20th century.

The peacoat is such an iconic part of the sailor's uniform that it is immortalized by the Lone Sailor statues found at 19 locations worldwide.

The Lone Sailor is an iconic symbol of the Navy Memorial's mission to *Honor, Recognize, and Celebrate the men and women of the Sea Services, past, present, and future; and to Inform the public about their service.*

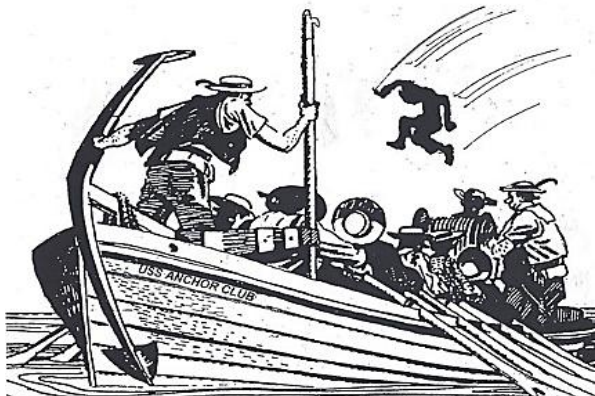
Created by sculptor Stanley Bleifield in 1987. The original bronze Lone Sailor stands at the Navy Memorial in Washington, D.C., honoring all sea service personnel.

Nearly 20 replicas stand at naval memorials, boot camps, and port cities around the world, including a prominent life-sized statue in Norfolk, Virginia. (sources: *The Coral Sea Breeze*, December 2025 and U.S. Navy Memorial website).



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Thanks for jumping on board !!!

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