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Navy missile cruiser *Leyte Gulf* visits Fort Lauderdale

Crew on shore leave gets a warm hello from the weather

By Robert Nolin

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After a chilly season in its home port of Norfolk, Va., the crew of the guided missile cruiser USS *Leyte Gulf* was delighted to get a taste of South Florida's mild fall.

"It's perfect weather," said Lt. Ed Angelinas, the ship's weapons officer.

"It's a lot warmer here than it is in Norfolk this time of year," said Ensign Patrick Kelley, the vessel's spokesman.

The *Leyte Gulf*, named for the decisive U.S. naval victory in World War II's Pacific theater, steamed with its 300-member-plus crew into Port Everglades on Monday. Though the ship has visited the port several times, Monday's docking marked a significant milestone. It was 20 years ago that the *Leyte Gulf*, once known as "Florida's battle cruiser," was commissioned at Port Everglades, the first Navy ship to be commissioned in a civilian port.

Kelley said the crew of the 567-foot-long, \$1 billion vessel was well aware of the ship's history with Port Everglades. More than half had visited here and many were eager to use their liberty call to experience the area before the vessel departs Friday for Mayport.

"This is always a fun port of call for them," Kelley said. "We want to give these guys every opportunity to blow some steam off and see what the town is like."

Angelinas, who has never been to Fort Lauderdale, ticked off possible destinations. "I'm assuming there are beaches and a great downtown area."

The crew was ready for relaxation after spending most of the summer in dry dock in Norfolk while the *Leyte Gulf* underwent renovations. "A lot of things were changed on the ship," Kelley said. "A lot of things have been upgraded."

After the renovations, the ship spent about two weeks doing drills at sea.



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"Everything went great," Kelley said. "The guns went bang and we got to do a lot of cool stuff."

Ship personnel, hosted by the Broward County Council of the Navy League of the United States, will participate in a golf tournament, visit a school and attend receptions. Because of security at the port, the public is not allowed to tour the ship or enter its vicinity.

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