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NEWS RELEASE

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NAVY'S OLDEST ACTIVE DESTROYER RETIRES

SAN DIEGO, January 28...After nearly 28 years of distinguished service, the colorful career of the destroyer USS Nicholas (DD 449) -- the first of the famed Fletcher Class destroyers to join the Fleet -- has now been logged into history.

Terminating a career which began during the bleak days of the Navy in early 1942 and spanned three wars, Nicholas will be retired from the Navy rolls on January 30, at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Nicholas is the last surviving link with the historic events which took place in Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945, when she transported U. S. and Allied representatives to the battleship USS Missouri (BB 63) for the Japanese surrender ceremony.

Launched February 19, 1942, Nicholas was commissioned at the Boston Navy Yard, June 4, 1942. Three months later, she was engaged in the Solomon Islands campaign, in the Battle for Guadalcanal.

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In the early morning Battle of Kula Gulf, July 6, 1943, during which the cruiser USS Helena was sunk, Nicholas rescued 291 of the cruiser's survivors, taking Japanese ships under torpedo and gun fire during the rescue operations. For her exploits during this action, the destroyer was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

One of the most decorated ships in active service, the record of her operations throughout the remainder of World War II is filled with similar action. Nicholas earned 16 battle stars on her Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Ribbon; with the downing of seven enemy aircraft plus two more possible kills, shore bombardments, task force operations, landings, escort duty and surface battles all noted in her colorful war diary.

After a brief retirement at the close of World War II, Nicholas underwent conversion to an escort destroyer and was recommissioned in February 1951.

During the period from 1951 to 1953, Nicholas played an active and significant role in the Korean Conflict and earned herself three more battle stars.

In 1960, she underwent FRAM (Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization) overhaul, which is part of a program to modernize and extend the life of the Fleet's destroyers.

Nicholas celebrated her 20th birthday on June 4, 1962, becoming the oldest active destroyer in the U. S. Navy.

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Continuing her brilliant career with service with the U. S. Seventh Fleet in Vietnam action, Nicholas recently completed her fourteenth Western Pacific deployment since the end of World War II.

In the words of Cdr John B. Hurd, her commanding officer, "This may be the oldest destroyer in the Navy, but she's also the most reliable. Nicholas has a great reputation. It won't be easy to replace her."

Rear Admiral Douglas C. Plate, Commander, Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet, dispatched the following message to be read at the decommissioning ceremonies for this proud old Navy veteran:

"The retirement of Nicholas from naval service comes after nearly 28 years of distinguished service. Today, your bridge proudly displays decorations fiercely earned in combat. Enemy held islands signed surrender documents in your wardroom and you were present during the surrender ceremonies in Tokyo Bay. You bravely fought through World War II, Korea, and now Vietnam. In all endeavors you have performed with the professionalism and spirit that has become expected of destroyermen. The modern destroyers that replace you will insure United States control of the seas in the future as you have done in the past. And, although you are leaving the rolls of the Naval Register, your name will live on as an example to destroyermen everywhere preserving the freedom of the seas."