



PHAN Casey James photo

USNS Mendonca, named after Army Sgt. Leroy Mendonca (upper left), sails past the USS Utah Memorial during its maiden voyage to Pearl Harbor June 15. The ship transported over 960 pieces of cargo for the 25th Infantry Division (Light) at Schofield Barracks.

# USNS Mendonca TAKR-303



## Army Sgt. Leroy Mendonca Korean War vet, Medal of Honor recipient from Hawaii honored, remembered

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Leslie Mendonca believes her brother would have been proud and tearfully recounts the last day she saw her brother.

When Leroy Mendonca attended McKinley High School in the late 1940s, he expressed his wish for world peace in an English class essay. Little did he know that just a few years later he would die in a foreign country defending his wish.

Yet while Mendonca's wish is still just a dream for many people, the memory of his efforts lives on through one of the Military Sealift Command's newest ships.

USNS Mendonca arrived in Pearl Harbor June 15 during its maiden voyage from Ft. Polk, La. Transporting over 960 pieces of cargo, including 44 helicopters for the 25th Infantry Division (Light) at Schofield Barracks, the ship's impressive, six-deck interior has a cargo carrying capacity of approximately 380,000 square feet, equivalent to about eight football fields. The ship can carry an entire U.S. Army armor task force, including 58 tanks, 48 other vehicles, plus more than 900 trucks and other wheeled vehicles.

On Sunday, 16 Mendonca family members proudly boarded their namesake vessel and remembered their beloved Leroy.

"To have Leroy's memory commemorated by a ship is just awesome," said Mendonca's sister, Leslie Mendonca.

"I feel very proud and I also feel very glad that the nation honored the memory of my uncle," said Leroy's nephew Thomas Mendonca. "I also feel a little sad because whenever they do something like this it brings back memories of his sacrifice and the impact that it had on his family," he said.

Mendonca is one of Military Sealift Command's (MSC) 19 large, medium speed roll-on-roll-off ships and is part of the 27 ships in the Sealift Program Office. At nearly 1,000 feet long, it is named for U.S. Filipino-American Army Sgt. Leroy A. Mendonca of Honolulu, Hawaii who on Aug. 14, 1952 was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions in his platoon's capturing of a strategic hill near Chich-on, Korea on July 4, 1951.

"The last we saw of him was maybe a month or so after he joined the Army when he got a call that he was shipping out. He went down to Hickam Air Field, and my family took his picture that is now hanging in the ship. I got down there just as he was boarding the plane. He turned around, as he was one of the last ones to board the plane, and he just waved. That was the last we ever saw of Leroy," said Leslie.

A few months later, as Mendonca's mother was in the kitchen making Leroy's favorite dish - a tomato cake - to send to him, the family gathered to celebrate the birthday of Leroy's niece. It was then that an Army chaplain appeared at the front door with the grievous news that Leroy was killed.

"After that, everything fell apart," said Leslie Mendonca.

During the night of July 4, 1951, a numerically superior enemy force assaulted the platoon's newly won position, outflanking the platoon. When the platoon was ordered to withdraw to a secondary line of defense, Sgt. Mendonca voluntarily remained in an exposed position to cover his platoon's withdrawal.

Although under intense enemy fire, he fired his weapon and hurled grenades at the enemy until his ammunition supplies were exhausted. He then fought on, using his rifle as a club and using his bayonet until he was mortally wounded.

After the action, it was estimated that Mendonca killed 37 enemy soldiers. His actions stalled the crushing assault and enabled the platoon to withdraw to a secondary position and allow the entire unit to repel the enemy attack and retain possession of the vital hilltop position.

When Leslie Mendonca first heard that the Navy was honoring her brother by naming a ship after him, she was in shock. "I wasn't able to speak," she said.

"God bless you, Leroy," she added. "He wanted peace and maybe now he will get it."



PH3 Josh Pritekel photo

Familymembers of Leroy Mendoncas receive a tour of the USNS Mendonca's engine room from Chief Engineer Ronald Omero Binetti.



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Captain Bill Dogerty presents a flag to Leslie Mendonca in honor of her brother.



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The Mendonca family poses for photos in front of the United States Naval Ship Mendonca. The ship was named after their family member Sgt. Leroy Mendonca who was awarded a Medal of Honor posthumously for his courageous actions on July 4, 1951.