

Aerial Stunts and Naval Grandeur: Fleet Week Returns to Baltimore in 2022

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Figure 1: Paddleboarding near the HMS Monmouth during Maryland Fleet Week & Air Show Baltimore 2018

Over thirty years ago, I served as a Marine on board the USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67), the last and largest conventional (non-nuclear powered) U.S. aircraft carrier. When our crew of over 5000 wasn't working or training to support naval flight operations, we were given the opportunity to spend time in various ports. Some of these ports celebrated our visit with [Fleet Week](#), an event first recognized in 1935 at the [California Pacific International Exposition](#). In 2016 and 2018, I experienced Fleet Week again, but this time as a civilian in Baltimore, Maryland, paddling among the moored vessels on my standup paddleboard (SUP). This festive event, which attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors, is scheduled to occur again on September 7-13, 2022, and include an air show and ship tours...so mark your calendar!

For the first Maryland Fleet Week & Air Show Baltimore, which took place in October 2016, I launched my SUP from [Canton Waterfront Park](#) and then paddled east towards the [Baltimore Inner Harbor](#). The harbor was packed with people anticipating the arrival of the U.S. Navy [Blue Angels](#) flight demonstration squadron. I expected to see several other small watercraft, but I counted only eight kayaks, a few small powerboats, and no other SUPs. This was largely due to area closures near [Fort McHenry](#) which prevented boats from traveling through a restricted zone during the air show. Hearing the roar of F/A 18 Hornet fighter jets, I turned and saw

the squadron zip past. The crowd “oohed” and “ahhed” while some people scurried around to get a better view. But standing on my SUP, I was happy to be in such an excellent position to witness the flawless flight acrobatics that make the Blue Angels famous.



*Figure 2: Watching the U.S. Navy Blue Angels air show performance*

The most talked-about ship at Fleet Week 2016, the [USS Zumwalt \(DDG 1000\)](#), was also the least accessible, due to security restrictions. Named after Admiral Elmo Russell Zumwalt, Jr., the youngest man to serve as the Chief of Naval Operation, this technologically-advanced, 610-foot-long destroyer introduced significant design innovations: stealth profile, small crew size, wave-piercing [tumblehome](#) hull, state-of-the-art electric propulsion, and the latest long-range gun and missile weaponry. Next to the Zumwalt, the [USS Leyte Gulf \(CG 55\)](#) guided missile cruiser and the [USS Jason Dunham \(DDG 109\)](#) guided missile destroyer were also docked. A floating yellow barricade and patrolling police boat made sure I observed these ships from no closer than 100 yards.



Figure 3: USS Zumwalt destroyer

One great thing about viewing the vessels in Baltimore is experiencing the striking juxtaposition of the modern city skyline with historic naval relics like the [USS Torsk \(SS-423\)](#) World War II submarine and the [USS Constellation](#) Civil War-era warship, both of which are regularly moored in the Inner Harbor. Paddling past the historic [Seven Foot Knoll Lighthouse](#), completed in 1855, I saw the visiting [U.S. Navy Yard Patrol \(YP 707\) Craft](#). Training ships like these are designed to teach navigation and seamanship to midshipmen.



Figure 4: U.S. Navy Yard Patrol Craft with the Seven Foot Knoll Lighthouse

Fifteen vessels were featured at Fleet Week 2016. Although most were U.S. military ships, two were from the Royal Canadian Navy: the Iroquois-class destroyer [Her Majesty's Canadian Ship \(HMCS\) Athabaskan \(DDG 282\)](#) and the Kingston-class Maritime Coastal Defence Vessel [HMCS Shawinigan \(MM 704\)](#). Additionally, two boats were civilian: the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) Research Vessel Bay Hydro II](#) and the [Pride of Baltimore II](#). The latter is a Baltimore Clipper topsail schooner commissioned in 1988 at Brown's Wharf in Fells Point, near the shipyard where the original “Pride of Baltimore” was built in 1812.



*Figure 5: Pride of Baltimore II schooner*

Two years later, I showed up at the second Maryland Fleet Week & Air Show Baltimore, in October 2018. This time, instead of the Blue Angels, the [Air Force Thunderbirds](#) demonstration squadron flew their F-16 Fighting Falcons for the air show.

Sixteen vessels were featured at Fleet Week 2018, and the most beautiful, in my opinion, was the [U.S. Coast Guard Cutter \(USCGC\) Eagle](#), a 295-foot-long training ship built in Hamburg, Germany in 1936. At the end of World War II, this ship was taken as war reparation, re-commissioned as the Eagle, and sailed to New London, Connecticut, her current home port.



Figure 6: USCGC Eagle training ship

Like Fleet Week 2016, some foreign ships were present, such as the [HMCS Moncton](#). This Canadian ship was initially built to be a minesweeper, but has since assumed other duties, including patrols in the Arctic and drug-interdiction operations in the Caribbean. One of my favorite ships was the 436-foot-long [Her Majesty's Ship \(HMS\) Monmouth \(F235\)](#) (shown in the top photo). Known as “The Black Duke,” this British frigate earned more battle honors, upon its decommissioning, than any other serving warship in the Royal Navy.



Figure 7: HMCS Moncton

A few of the smaller vessels at Fleet Week 2018 also participated in 2016, such as the Bay Hydro II and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' steel debris vessel [Reynolds](#), which patrols the Baltimore Harbor and Patapsco River for debris that could be potentially hazardous to navigation. But it was the big, sleek, modern naval ships such as the [USS Milwaukee \(LCS 5\)](#) which piqued the curiosity of many. This Freedom-class [littoral combat ship](#), commissioned in 2015, is the fifth to be named for the largest city in Wisconsin.





Figure 8: USS Milwaukee

Both of my Fleet Week paddleboarding trips covered only about 6.5 miles, but what I saw in that short distance was extremely memorable. I can hardly wait to get my SUP on the water for the next Maryland Fleet Week & Flyover Baltimore which should overlap with Baltimore's oldest holiday, [Defenders' Day](#), September 12, 2022, a day celebrating the successful defense of the city from the British during the War of 1812. Planning is underway and the organizers are looking for volunteers, donors, and sponsors for what is guaranteed to be a spectacular event. At the time of this writing, visiting ships and the flyover squadron have not been announced, but if it is anything like previous years, it will surely be amazing. Hope to see you there!

For more information, see

- [Maryland Fleet Week & Air Show Baltimore \[2018\]](#)
- [Maryland Fleet Week & Flyover Baltimore \[2022\]](#)