

## **Society of Sponsors of the United State Navy President's Annual Report**

**May 3, 2007 - May 8, 2008**

Since the Annual Meeting May 3 2007, there have been 7 christenings, 5 commissionings, 2 submarine return to service ceremonies, and 1 keel laying. (You will recall that Dianne Reason, during our changeover period in May, 2007 attended the commissioning of USS HAWAII (SSN 776), the christening of USNS ROBERT S. BYRD (T-AKE 4) and the christening of STERETT (DDG 104). She included them in her 2007 report.)

In June, I traveled to Pascagoula for the June 2 christening of the TRUXTUN (DDG 103), the 25<sup>th</sup> of the Arleigh Burke Class destroyer and the 6<sup>th</sup> Truxtun. Its sponsors are 4<sup>th</sup> generation great granddaughters of Commodore Thomas Truxtun, sisters Susan Scott Martin of Woodbury, VT and Carol Leigh Roelker of Loveland OH. Both Carol and Susan were very excited, almost as excited as their father. Susan's bottle broke as at practice but Carol's broke on the 6<sup>th</sup> swing. Her bottle had not been scored. And Carol is quite an athlete. The master of ceremonies cleverly remarked that the 6 swings were for each of the Truxtuns. Northrup Grumman presented a very moving film about the history of the Truxtuns especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> Truxton (spelled differently) which ran aground in a storm off the coast of Newfoundland during WWII. 110 crew members were lost. Several survivors attended the christening as well as the mayor of St. Lawrence, the citizens of which helped to rescue the survivors. Both Carol and Susan recently joined the Society.

On June 9 I attended the commissioning of the USS Kidd (DDG-100), a lovely and exciting night time event, my first night time commissioning, in Galveston. The Galvestonians embraced the crew and the event. The granddaughters of RADM Isaac Kidd, Regina Kidd Wolbarsht and Mary Corrinne Kidd Plumer, brought the ship to life. RADM Kidd died on board the Arizona in Pearl Harbor. Both Regina and Mary are new members of the Society and their mother, Angelique, is a long time member. The impressive crew men and women were anxious to get to their homeport of San Diego.

I was unable to attend the Michigan Return to Service Ceremony in Bremerton, Washington on June 12. Mrs. Margaret Nedzi gave the order to man the ship and bring it to life as she had done in 1979, 27 years ago. The submarine had undergone a billion dollar overhaul and modification, a transformation from a Trident Missile sub to one capable of using conventional Tomahawk cruise missiles and supporting special forces in the war on terrorism. I have seen several happy photos of the event. Margaret (Peggy) Nedzi is a member of the Society.

I spent the summer learning more about the Society, exploring the voluminous files bequeathed me and making several trips from my home in Virginia Beach to DC. The Secretary of the Navy hosted a dinner cruise in honor of Dianne; RADM Goddard, PEO Ships along with Alicia Aadenson and Debbie Simmons, who have so graciously worked with many of you, gave me a briefing; Muff Phillips, Barbara Pilling and I met with Pat Day at Edelman, who manages our funds; at the Navy Memorial, representatives presented their offer to feature the Society on their Navy TV Channel; Barbara Pilling frequently briefed me on her work to establish the Iraq-Afghanistan Wounded War Veterans

Scholarship.

During the summer we lost 2 of our most notable members, Lady Bird Johnson, sponsor of USSTENCH (SS-417) and Brooke Astor, USS RUSSELL (DDG-59) at 105 years of age.

On October 21 we attended a worship service in honor of our Navy at the USNA Chapel; we so appreciated Chaplain Sawatsky working with the Society. Afterwards, the Superintendent, VADM Fowler and his wife Katie hosted us for a beautiful lunch overlooking the sunlit autumn gardens at Buchanan House. Also attending were 3 of our scholarship winners, so grateful and inspiring. The Admiral and Katie and the Command Master Chief made us feel so welcome. Claudia Natter organized this event.

October 24 was the date of the Washington DC Chapter Luncheon co-chaired by Connie Jeremiah and Mary-lin Ryan at the Army Navy Country Club. Beautiful mums adorned in gold lame, graced the tables. In attendance, was one of our newest sponsors, Doro Bush, sister of the President and Margon Edney our west coast representative and third vice-president. Our speaker was the wonderful Joe Hanna with whom practically all of us are acquainted. The stories and anecdotes he related about various christenings and commissionings were so entertaining and informative as well as his tongue in cheek story of how a West Virginia boy who enlisted in the navy came to occasionally tell Admirals what to do! He has been running commissionings for 20 years and he kept us in awe, laughter, and even a few tears with his moving accounts of commissionings

On a rainy, blustery, November 2, 2007, despite 30-40 mph winds, the USS SAMPSON (DDG 102) was commissioned. DDG 102 is the 4<sup>th</sup> ship named for RADM Sampson, known as a champion of technology and who on July 4, 1898 sent his now famous message, "The Fleet under my command offers the nation, as a Fourth of July present, the whole of Cervera's Fleet." The weather did not dampen the spirit of the crew nor of the host town even though ponchos were the fashionable attire for the day. The sponsor, is Clare Parsons, the great-granddaughter of RADM Sampson and the daughter of "Deak" Parsons who as a Captain armed the first atomic bomb in the Enola Gay. She is also a 25 year navy veteran who in addition to bringing her ship to life, sang a solo, "O Master Let Me Walk with Thee" with a Navy band accompanying her. Senator John Kerry was the senior platform guest. The commanding officer is CDR Philip Roos.

On December 4 I represented the Society at a memorial service for Jane M. Denton, sponsor of USS MOBILE BAY (CG-53) and the wife of POW, Senator and Admiral Jeremiah Denton. I did not know her then, but she resided in my current neighborhood in Virginia Beach with her 7 children (I believe), at the time of his capture. After several years of misery and feeling powerless, she became an activist for the POW's. Many POWS believe that this activism and the awareness it created saved their lives. She said that her sponsorship of MOBILE BAY was "a highlight of my life."

December 15<sup>th</sup> found me in Panama City, Florida for the Commissioning of the USS MESA VERDE (LPD 19) the third amphibious transport dock ship in the San Antonio Class. And this time the heavy rains and winds held off almost until the last guests had departed the reception. What a fantastic job the commissioning committee did as it was made up of enthusiastic members from both Colorado and Panama City. The sponsor, Mrs. Linda Campbell who is a long-time promoter of Native American and Western art and culture, gave the order to “bring her ship to life.” Her husband, the Honorable Ben Nighthorse Campbell, former US Senator from Colorado was the speaker. With over 5000 attendees there was tremendous participation from the winter Panama City community and the Colorado-Mesa Verde community including educational exhibits about the National Park and the 24 Indian tribes with links to the area. Local students displayed projects tied to Mesa Verde. The ship’s commanding officer is CDR. Shawn W. Lobree

On January 26, 2008, I was in Pascagoula for the christening of DEWEY (DDG 105) the 55<sup>th</sup> Aegis guided missile destroyer named for the only Admiral of the Navy and famous for his order to attack in Manila Bay, “You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.” Deborah Mullen, the wife of Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the sponsor. She stated, “There are actually no words to describe today. Having been a Navy wife for all these years, having my sons serve, being a sponsor of a ship is probably the greatest honor I have ever had.” In a well received speech, she emphasized that family readiness is “integral to military readiness.” Despite striking the ship with all her might, the bottle did not break but on the second whack after the microphone had been moved, the bubbles flowed.

On February 9, 2008, the USNS ROBERT E. PEARY (T-AKE 5), an Advanced Dry Cargo Ship, was christened in San Diego. The original christening on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 was cancelled because of the California fires. Margon Edney, our third vice president, represented the Society and reported that it was a beautiful clear day with no smoke anywhere. The sponsor is the Honorable Peary S. Fowler, a great-granddaughter of RADM Robert E. Peary, the renown Artic explorer. She is a former prosecutor who was elected to the 16<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court in the Florida Keys where she has been presiding as a county judge.

On March 1, I attended the extraordinary name-giving event---the christening of NEW YORK (LPD 21) at Avondale. Dotty England is the sponsor of this amphibious assault ship, which is built with 7 ½ tons of steel rescued from the World Trade Center. Embodying the spirit of the residents of New York, this steel is now part of the bow stem of the ship and infusing the ship with that spirit and in honor of those victims, heroes, survivors and families of 9/11, Dotty England christened her NEW YORK. Northrop Grumman presented a very moving short film detailing the construction of the ship and the reciprocity of respect between the ship builders and the 9-11 victims and survivors. Although Dotty knocked the paint off the ship with her first swing, it took a second swing to break the bottle. We are honored to have Dotty as one of our newest members.

On Friday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, Claudia Natter represented the Society at the Return to Service of GEORGIA (SSGN 729). The state was so proud to have her returned to service in Georgia. Sheila McNeil, former President of the Navy League and a leader in bringing the ceremony to Kings Bay, gave the order to bring the ship back to life. The former sponsor, Sheila Watkins is deceased.

On April 6 fireworks lit up the San Diego harbor as NASSCO celebrated the christening of USNS AMELIA EARHART (T-AKE 6). Because of the tides the ceremony was held at 9 PM. The night launch was spectacular. The ship's sponsor is Mrs. Amy Kleppner, the niece of Amelia Earhart. Mrs. Kleppner resides in Vermont and is a bit of an explorer herself, as she is a lifelong hiking enthusiast, and educator. Despite hitting the ship with all her might, 3 times, I believe, the bottle did not break before the ship was launched. An investigation revealed that the bottle was frozen so Mrs. Kleppner was taken out to the ship the following day where she successfully broke the bottle.

On April 12 I attended the keel authentication ceremony of the NEW MEXICO (SSN 779) at Northrup Grumman Shipbuilding in Newport News. Cindy Giambastiani, the sponsor, in her apron and protective helmet, authenticated the keel. Cindy spoke of the rewarding relationship she is already having with the people of New Mexico. A Navajo Code Talker honored the ceremony with a Navajo Blessing.

On April 18, Mary-lin Ryan kindly represented the Society at the spring meeting of the USNA Foundation in Annapolis. She presented a check for 12,000 dollars to be administered by the Foundation for our scholarship recipients.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, our Linda Bowman, the sponsor of USS NORTH CAROLINA (SSN 771) gave the order to man her ship and bring her to life before a crowd of over 5000 on the pier in Wilmington, NC. The city embraced Linda and the crew of NC, offering up a fireworks display in their honor on the eve of the commissioning. As with all the ceremonies, this one had a personality of its own. Captain Mark Davis is the commanding officer. In a well presented speech, Linda, extolled the virtues of the Navy family and stressed the necessity of caring for them.

There will be many christenings and commissionings in the coming months; I can't wait to tell you about them next year. Please try to attend and support our sponsors when these events are in your area. Hope to see you at the Annual Luncheon and Meeting in our 101<sup>st</sup> year!!

Submitted by Janet Gehman.