

SOCIETY OF SPONSORS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY PRESIDENT'S REPORT MAY 2008—MAY 2009

(I have represented the Society at 8 christenings and 7 commissionings since the May 2008 Annual Meeting; additionally, sponsors have participated in 3 keel authentications. Don't forget to visualize these *special* events---and maybe attend one next year!)

Following our Centennial Year Annual Meeting on May 8, I departed for Bath Maine. There on May 10, 2008, a blustery but sunny day at Bath Iron Works (BIW), STOCKDALE (DDG-106), named for a great American hero and Naval Officer, Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale, was christened by his widow, Mrs. Sybil Stockdale, assisted by her Maid of Honor and eldest grand daughter, Elizabeth Stockdale. VADM Stockdale was a Medal of Honor recipient as well as a Vice Presidential candidate with Ross Perot. He spent 7 1/2 years as a Prisoner of War.

Sybil Bailey Stockdale is a founder of the NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SE ASIA. She met with Henry Kissinger, President Nixon and even the Viet Nam delegation at the Paris Peace Talks. She was the first wife of an active duty officer to receive the Navy's Distinguished Public Service Award. With her husband she co-authored the book IN LOVE AND WAR. She is also the sponsor of AVENGER (MCM-1) and a life member of the Society.

The four Stockdale sons and several grandchildren shared in the festivities along with some of his fellow POWs. As has often been the case this year, the bottle did not break the first time but BIW was prepared to try again and the second time was a success. Children of shipyard workers, stationed on the ship itself, shot red, white and blue streamers into the air as a Navy Band played *Anchors Aweigh*. Admiral Patrick Walsh, Vice Chief of the Navy, gave the principal address, using some of Stockdale's own words from speeches he had given. Dugan Shipway, President of BWI, made everyone feel as though they were family.

On May 22, 2008 and May 21, 2009 during Commissioning Week at USNA, I attended the Color Parade at Worden Field; later, at the Prizes & Awards ceremony in Alumni Hall, I presented a brief case to the graduate with the highest proficiency in the art of practical ship handling. That young future leader was Rhett Z. Begley in 2008 and Kyle James Szatkowski in 2009. All the events were so well organized; it was a thrill (and, yes, *special*) to be among the Navy's future leaders, such outstanding and highly performing men and women.

On June 21, an absolutely glorious New England day, NEW HAMPSHIRE (SSN 778), the fifth submarine of the Virginia class was christened at General Dynamics Electric Boat Shipyard in Groton, Connecticut. ADM Kirkland H. Donald, Director Naval Nuclear Propulsion, gave the principal address.

The sponsor is Mrs. Cheryl McGuinness a New Hampshire resident and the widow of Tom McGuinness, a former Navy pilot and "top gunner" and the co-pilot of American Flight 11 which was flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. A former corporate executive and mother of two, Cheryl turned her sorrow into a positive, establishing a ministry "Beauty Beyond the Ashes" as well as authoring a book by the same name. Unlike the surface sponsors of the past

year, Cheryl broke the bottle on the first try and told the crew, “I believe I am not looking at one but at many heroes. You all are my heroes.” *John Casey, President of Electric Boat, presented Cheryl with a lifetime membership to the Society.* I have been told by the PAO that General Dynamics Electric Boat hopes to continue that practice.

On July 31, the Society responded to the request of the Secretary of the Navy, Dr. Winter, to have a member help him host the sponsor of the JASON DUNHAM, Deb Dunham, the mother of the Marine Medal of Honor winner. Our own Martha Donovan and her husband, VADM Frank Donovan joined the Secretary’s official party and visited ships in Norfolk similar to the one under construction at the Bath shipyard which will be named for her son and christened in August, 2009. It was a *special day* for all involved.

On August 9, a very mild Baltimore summer evening, Rosalie Calhoun, First Vice President and I, watched the spirit of Andrew Sterett move over from the USS CONSTELLATION to the USS STERETT (DDG 104) after sponsor Michelle Sterett-Bernsen enthusiastically gave the order to “Man my ship and bring her to life.” Many dignitaries attended the ceremony, including, the Honorable Donald Winter, the Secretary of the Navy, Sen. Barbara Mikulski, as well as Maryland Governor O’Malley. The Honorable Sean Stackley, Assistant Secretary for Research, Development and Acquisition delivered a stirring speech about the American flag flying nearby at Fort McHenry the sight of which inspired Francis Scott Key to write *The Star Spangled Banner*.

Michelle, who was pregnant when she christened STERETT, had her daughter, Amelia, christened the next day on board along with several other infants of crew members. The Commanding Officer of USS STERETT (DDG 104) is Brian P. Eckerle. There is a heart-warming human interest story involved with this christening. Michelle’s Matron of Honor Le Phung is a Viet Nam boat person, who was picked up at sea by the previous STERETT (CG-31). Starving and near death, Le Phung was rescued along with several hundred others; George Sullivan, the CO of that ship was in attendance. She subsequently attained her PHD in molecular biology and does research at the University of Chicago. She re-made contact with the ship through the internet. What a reunion and what a *special story*!

On August 18, with the tremendous work of our membership chair, Connie Jeremiah, our Directory, (re-published every 3 years) with a revised introduction and by-law corrections along with the rest of the summer mailing was a go for our printer!! Please keep Connie informed of any address changes.

On September 18, I attended the christening of the CARL BRASHEAR (T-AKE 7) in San Diego at the General Dynamics NASSCO Shipyard. The ship is named for Master Chief Boatswain Mate Carl Brashear who was the first amputee to return to full diving status and first African American to qualify and serve as a Master Diver on active duty. He fought racism, overcame educational deprivation and erased the doubts of those who thought that he could not come back from the amputation. The principal speaker was Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Joe R. Campa, Jr.

The sponsor is Lauren Brashear, the eldest granddaughter, who broke the bottle on the first try. So many proud family members were in attendance and some were amazed that such an honor had come to their family member. Robert DiNiro who played Billy Sunday in the movie *Men of*

Honor, depicting Carl's struggle and Scott Smith, who wrote the screen play, attended all the events. Lauren, who rode the ship for sea trials, has joined the Society and has also decided to join the Navy and follow in her grandfather's foot steps. It will be *special* for the Society to have an active duty sponsor! (Update: Lauren just informed me via e-mail that she had taken and passed her physical!)

On September 27 at Quonset Electric Boat Facility. Mrs. Rebecca W. Gates authenticated the keel of the MISSOURI (SSN 780). Her initials were welded onto a plate of steel.

OCTOBER WAS A VERY BUSY AND REWARDING MONTH FOR THE SOCIETY!!!

On October 4 in Mobile, Alabama. I attended the long awaited christening of the Littoral Combat Ship INDEPENDENCE (LCS 2) at the Austal Shipyard with whom the General Dynamics LCS Team partnered. The ship is an example of transformation, capable of using different modules and crews depending on the assignment. A trimaran, the ship will have a blue and a gold crew.

The sponsor is Doreen Scott, wife of Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, Terry Scott. Doreen broke the bottle on the first try! She served as the Navy's ombudsman at large for the CNO and visited with families around the world, discussing and advocating quality of life issues. In attendance was Secretary Winter, Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama and Rep. Jo Bonner. After the breaking of the bottle, the crowd celebrated as fireworks filled the sky. Doreen has joined the Society and is anxiously awaiting INDEPENDENCE's commissioning.

On October 12, continuing a tradition begun in 1929, members attended a Navy Service of Worship at the Naval Academy Chapel. We were warmly welcomed by Chaplain Fish. Afterwards, we walked over to Buchanan House for a lovely fall luncheon graciously hosted by the Commandant, Captain Matt Klunder, (now Rear Admiral selectee!) and Mary Lee. ADM and Mrs. Fowler were out of town but so kindly invited us to their home. Collin Bickford one of our scholarship students also attended. Whenever you see Ms Price, Adm. Fowler, Capt Ackerson or Chaplain Fish, please convey our thanks and deep appreciation for all they did to facilitate our being able to continue this *special* tradition.

On October 18, in Bath, Maine at Bath Iron Works shipyard, I attended the christening of the WAYNE E. MEYER (DDG-108), 1 of 3 destroyers named for a living person. Rear Admiral Meyer is known as the Father of AEGIS, an advanced, fully integrated combat system on surface ships. The sponsor's dinner in the Haraseeket Inn in Free Port was a happy reunion of so many AEGIS program officers and civilians; the MEYER is the 85th ship with this system.

On this cold, bright sunny day, Anna Mae Meyer, wife of RADM Meyer, did a great job of breaking the bottle on the first swing, giving the photographers a perfect photo op. A different type of bottle was used, easier to break and with more bubbles for the photos. It was the political season so 2 members of the House, 2 Senators and the Governor spoke. The Chief of Naval Operations, ADM Gary Roughead delivered the principal address. Anna Mae has joined the Society. Great clam chowder at the reception! *BWI continues to pay for the lifetime membership of its ship sponsors.*

On October 25, in New England again, I attended the commissioning of the NEW HAMPSHIRE (SSN 778), a mere 4 months after the christening---and *under budget* and *ahead of schedule* as General Dynamics President John Casey, reminded all of us. The commissioning was held at the Portsmouth (New Hampshire) Naval Shipyard in Kittery Maine---but as close to New Hampshire as they could get. Sen. Judd Gregg was the principal speaker. The Commissioning Committee did a great job in such a short time as citizens from all over the state participated.

The Sponsor, Cheryl McGuinness, a gifted speaker, spoke from the heart as she again reminded the crew that they and their families are the real heroes. Escorted by the COB she enthusiastically brought the ship to life. The Commanding Officer is CDR Michael J. Stevens. More great clam chowder at this reception!

October 27 found us at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, thanks to wonderful work by Connie Jeremiah and great cooperation from the White House staff especially Anita McBride. We had 50 sponsors come from as far away as Vermont and Florida. After being greeted by Mrs. Bush and posing for a group photo, the Assistant White House Curator gave us a *special* tour. Even Roberta McCain, who took time out from campaigning for her son, was there, as was one sponsor, Kay McCrillis, who christened her ship when she was 7 years old. As you may recall, for many years the First Lady traditionally hosted the Society of Sponsors. (Perhaps our new tradition will be one visit per administration.)

October 29 was the day of the Washington DC Chapter Luncheon, planned and hosted by Claudia Natter and Rose Magnus. Attendance was up with over 70 attendees. We were honored to have the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, ADM Mullen (with our own Deborah), as guest speaker. Belle Haven Country Club was a beautiful setting.

November 8 marked the greatly anticipated commissioning of FREEDOM (LCS 1), the first Littoral Combat Ship, on Lake Michigan in Milwaukee. The area's Navy League and the city were gracious hosts; Secretary Winter was the principal speaker. The sponsor, Birgit Smith, widow of Army Sgt First Class Paul Ray Smith who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first in Operation Iraqi Freedom, brought the ship to life. Her son David passed the long glass to the Lt. who set the first watch. She had placed her husband's Saint Christopher Medal under the mast to watch over USS FREEDOM. She had also placed their wedding bands there to pass on the "absolute strength and bond to not only this ship but to all the sailors that will serve on it." In addition to her Army family, Birgit now has a Navy family. The ship has a blue and a gold crew. The Captains are CDR Mike Doran and CDR Don Gabrielson. Lockheed Martin Maritime Systems and Sensors has generously paid for a lifetime membership in the Society for Birgit.

December 13 brought the christening of the NEW MEXICO (SSN 779) in Newport News, Virginia. This 6th Virginia class submarine is named, yes, for a landlocked state, the second ship named for the state. The occasion marked the first time a submarine had been christened inside the building at Northrop Grumman, an efficiency mile stone of which Northrop Grumman President Mike Petters is very proud. The boat came in 8 months ahead of schedule. Sponsor Cindy Giambastiani broke the bottle on the first try. Cindy, the wife of Admiral Ed Giambastiani, saluted the spouses, the families, and the shipyard workers because in doing their jobs they also serve. Cindy has been very involved with the citizens of New Mexico and the commissioning

committees; she has visited the state several times, thrown out a first pitch, visited museums, and attended balls! Indeed, the state will have a *special* bond with its namesake.

On December 18, the keel of ARLINGTON COUNTY was authenticated; the sponsor is Mrs. Donald Rumsfield. She is also the sponsor of OLIVER HAZARD PERRY (FFG 7).

On December 18, Linda Bowman, Connie Jeremiah and I represented the Society at the funeral of Polly Ellis at Arlington National Cemetery. Polly was the proud sponsor of PILILAAU (T-AKR-304).

On January 10, 2009 the USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) was commissioned in Norfolk. Two events preceded the Commissioning. The first was an elegant sponsor's luncheon in the Norfolk Half Moon Cruise Terminal at which gifts were exchanged. Doro Bush Koch, sponsor and daughter of the President presented a set of Royal Copenhagen china for use in the Flag Mess and 400 books signed by the respective authors to the ship library, continuing a tradition of fostering literacy begun by her Mother.

The second event was the Captain's Gala, a grand affair in a huge tent at Vista Point on the Navy base. One end of the tent featured huge plastic windows through which the assembled guests had a night view of the BUSH. Sensational and *special*. This event was sponsored by the Hampton Roads Navy League, which raised over 4 million dollars, about 90% of which was used to upgrade quality of life on board the carrier.

Washington officialdom as well as many celebrities attended the commissioning. President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of State Condi Rice, SECDEF Robert Gates, Senator Mark Warner, Chris Evert, Greg Norman, and several members of the Society joined with the other 10-15 thousand on the festooned pier. When Doro gave the order to bring her ship to life, the crowd enthusiastically responded as the sailors ran aboard to thunderous applause. President George H.W. Bush was thrilled to see a fly by of a TBM Avenger, the plane he flew in WWII. The Commanding Officer of the BUSH is Captain Kevin O' Flaherty.

January 15—Dianne Reason, Connie Jeremiah and Lucy Mustin kindly represented the Society at the retirement reception for Joe Hanna who orchestrated many of your ship's commissionings. Joe and I so appreciate it.

On January 24, after a rainy morning in Long Beach, California, the clouds cleared and the sun came out almost exactly as the commissioning ceremony for the GREEN BAY (LPD 20) began. Over 5000 were in attendance including 2 Medal of Honor winners. The principal speaker was former Deputy Secretary of Defense, Gordon England. The sponsor and your new President, Rose Magnus, paid tribute to military families and then donned her GREEN BAY cap, averred that she was ready and emphatically gave the order to "Man my ship and bring her to life." She had ridden the huge ship from San Diego to Long Beach. An Oneida Indian tribe offered a *special* blessing of the ship. Present were school children from Green Bay who challenged the crew to a geography bee. The Commanding Officer is CDR Joseph R. Olson.

The citizens of Long Beach led by the local chapter of the Navy League hosted the Captain's Gala in the ballroom of the Queen Mary. Interestingly, A WWII veteran who made a war time crossing

of the Atlantic on the Queen Mary was in attendance. The sponsor presented a *special* gift of a Marine and a Navy sword, crossed to the ship

On March 8 in San Diego, as the sun rose on the first day of Day Light Saving Time, at precisely 7:50 AM, (yes, AM) Josephine Schirra, widow of astronaut Wally Schirra, christened the USNS WALLY SCHIRRA (T-AKE 8), a dry cargo and ammunition ship. Her namesake was the only astronaut to fly on Mercury, Gemini and Apollo missions; he was among the original 7 who had the *Right Stuff*. Later, he was an analyst with Walter Cronkite for many of the space missions. The bottle broke on the second swing and the bubbles flowed-----but the ship did not move. (Ships are still launched after christening at the NASSCO yard.) It was determined that the grease to “grease the skids” was too thick because of the cool *early* morning temperature. NASSCO President Fred Harris and Jo and her party pushed as hard as possible on the ship but to no avail. Finally, and only 6 or 7 minutes later, which seemed like an eternity, and with a little help to warm the grease, the WALLY SCHIRRA gently slid into the harbor—such a large ship and such a beautiful sight.

A lovely reception and breakfast followed at which 4 of Wally’s astronaut friends Scott Carpenter, James Lovell, William Anders and Tom Stafford, told funny stories---how he was a practical joker---always had a “got cha” and they insisted that the delayed launch of his ship was his last “gotcha” and the sponsor, Jo Schirra agreed. *Whether or not it was his last gotcha it made for a dramatic launching*. Jo has joined the Society. Jo also wrote to me that she was a matron of honor in the 60’s when her mother, Mrs. James Holloway, Jr., christened the USS PARGO.

April 18 was a great Navy day and an inspiring Navy day as the USS STOCKDALE (DDG 106) was commissioned in a crisp, but moving ceremony beneath a deep blue California sky at Ft. Hueneme. Also inspiring was the work and the hospitality of the Santa Barbara Navy League; members, some of whom had lost their homes in recent forest fires, were there to greet and direct guests at each event.

At the commissioning, Ross Perot, with whom ADM Stockdale ran for President, began the inspiration with an introduction to *The Star-Spangled Banner* when he told the story of how at Alcatraz Prison where many of the Viet Nam POWs were held, that one prisoner was released from solitary after many months. To celebrate the POWs decided to hold a church service and sang *Onward Christian Soldiers* which angered the guards who were going to lock him up again. The group, led by a Medal of Honor winner, stepped forward and began singing the *National Anthem*. Mr. Perot asked us to always remember their sacrifices when we sang it. He also pointed out that the last line is a question? “Oh, say does that.....?”

The principal speaker was ADM Keating who asked us to stand up, close our eyes and grasp our wrists as hard as we could. He used this as an example to remind us of the pain suffered by the POWs, suffering multiplied by a time span of millions.

Sybil’s granddaughter, Elizabeth, with Sybil by her side gave the order to “Man my ship and bring her to life.” After the ship came to life, there was the inspiring conclusion, as 3 busloads of former POW’s with their families arrived to stand in solidarity onboard STOCKDALE!! The Commanding Officer is CDR Fred Kacher.

On April 16 Rosalie Calhoun and Mary-lin Ryan presented the check for our scholarships to the USNA Foundation at the spring meeting in Annapolis.

On April 25, the 6th USS TRUXTUN (DDG 103) was commissioned in charming Charleston, SC. (You may notice that STOCKDALE DDG 106 (built in Maine) was commissioned before TRUXTUN DDG 103 and DEWEY DDG 105 because of the damage Katrina did to the Mississippi shipyard, the homes of workers, high level managers and even their Congressman Gene Taylor so the Commissioning of TRUXTUN is quite a triumph.)

The ceremony was held at the Naval Weapons Station where Commodore Truxtun's great, great granddaughters, Susan Martin and Carol Leigh Roelker gave the order to "Man our ship and bring her to life." The CNO, Admiral Roughead, delivered the principal address pointing out that this Aegis destroyer, the 53rd of the class, barely resembles the first in her class because technology has so increased her capabilities. The Commanding officer is CDR Timothy R. Weber.

At the Captain's gala on board the WWII carrier YORKTOWN, now a museum, Susan and Carol presented their gifts to the ship, including a small family oil painting of Commodore Truxtun and a picture of the Lone Sailor that included a first day postage stamp commemorating the statue. Attending the christening of TRUXTUN was my first duty as President so it was *special* to see the ship put into commission.

On May 1, Mrs. Donna Willard, sponsor of CALIFORNIA (SSN 781) authenticated the keel in a ceremony at the Northrup Grumman shipyard in Newport News.

May 8 Annual Meeting and Luncheon (covered in my letter).

On May 16, before a huge crowd who came to celebrate the successful journey of the first African American admiral, Samuel E. Gravely, Jr., his youthful 88 year-old widow, Alma, christened GRAVELY (DDG 107) in Pascagoula, Mississippi---and she smashed the bottle on the first try! VADM Gravely and Alma are so widely respected and beloved that Northrop Grumman received 300-400 extra requests for tickets to the event. Alma, whose zest and love of the Navy is transparent, said of the destroyer, "She's just beautiful. My husband would love her." She paid tribute to the craftsmanship and skill of all those who built her.

Admiral Paul Reason, the Navy's first African American four star admiral, spoke of VADM Gravely's role as a pathfinder whose belief-- *education plus motivation plus perseverance equal success*-- influenced a generation of African American sailors. As an example of that influence, ADM Reason recalled how as a junior officer he was aware of every step in VADM Gravely's career pattern and that knowledge, along with championing modern technology as VADM Gravely demanded, has served him well.

In addition to these *special* events, your Board has held well attended and fruitful meetings; your Treasurer, Barbara Morgan and your Finance Committee, chaired by Muff Phillips, have been careful stewards of your monies; your Scholarship Committee, chaired by Martha Donovan, has selected your scholarship winners.

Submitted by Janet J. Gehman