**SHIP CHRISTENINGS AND COMMISSIONINGS**

**May 2017—May 2018**

**USNS CITY OF BISMARCK (EPF 9)**

Expeditionary Fast Transport CITY OF BISMARCK (EPF 9) was christened and brought into the Military Sealift Command on May 13, 2017 at the Austal USA shipyard in Mobile, Alabama. Her sponsor, THE HONORABLE JANE HARMON, broke the traditional bottle of sparkling wine over her ship’s hull in front of the assembled guests. Congresswoman Harmon represented California’s 36th District in the United States Congress for over fifteen years, resigning in 2011 to become the President and CEO of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. During her tenure in Congress, Ms. Harmon served on all the major security committees and demonstrated her interest and expertise in national security and public policy issues. CITY OF BISMARCK will surely benefit from her sponsor’s spirit and dedicated public service in the years to come. Mrs. Jane McGregor supported her friend ably as Matron of Honor during the christening events.

 Remarks were presented by; Mr. William Patterson, General Dynamics Ship Systems; RADM Dee L. Mewbourne, USN, Commander, Military Sealift Command; Mr. Thomas Dee, performing the duties of The Under Secretary of the Navy; Mr. Mike Seminary, Mayor of Bismarck, North Dakota; and VADM Terry J. Benedict, USN, Director, Strategic Systems Programs. The principal address was given by General Darren W. McDew, USAF, Commander Unites States Transportation Command. Among the distinguished guests were; Donald C Winter, 74th Secretary of the Navy; Robert O. Wefald, Former North Dakota District Judge and former Attorney General, North Dakota; Jerry Carl, Commissioner, Mobile County, Alabama, 3rd District; Nancy Guy, Commissioner, City of Bismarck, North Dakota; and RADM, USN (Ret), Executive Director for Public Safety, City of Mobile and President of the Navy League, Mobile Chapter.

*Contributed by Linda Winter*

**USS GABRIELLE GIFFORD (LCS 10)**

 Pier 21 at the Port of Galveston in Texas was the scene of USS GABRIELLE GIFFORDS’ commissioning into the United States Navy on June 10, 2017. The day was sunny, bright and quite warm, but the assembled crowd, estimated at over two thousand, was in a celebratory mood - reflecting the colorful banners and pennants flying over the ship. The ship’s namesake, former U.S. Representative, 8th District, Arizona, the Honorable Gabrielle Giffords was present to lend her voice to those of the other speakers. Speaking strongly and without aid - still recovering from the 2011 shooting - she told of how she was honored that the ship will carry her name and that the “vessel is strong and tough, just like her crew.” Speaking to the crew on a personal note, she added, “I thought of you in my darkest days, the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of the United States of America …. you make me proud. You make America proud.” She brought her remarks to a conclusion by wishing fair winds and following seas to the ship and her crew. Certainly, USS GABRIELLE GIFFORDS’ namesake is strong and tough, just like her ship and its crew.

 Many family members, friends and colleagues were in attendance to honor Ms. Giffords, among them were; CAPT Mark Kelly, USN (Ret), former astronaut and space shuttle commander, but more importantly, Gabrielle Giffords’ spouse; the Honorable Joe Biden, former Vice President; the Honorable Hilary Clinton, former U.S. Senator, New York, former United States Secretary of State, and wife of former President, Bill Clinton; the Honorable Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Representative, 12th District, California and former Speaker of the House; Randy Weber, U.S. Representative, 14th District, Texas; and Mr. James Yarbrough, Mayor of Galveston.

 Admiral William Moran, USN, Vice Commander of Naval Operations, gave the principal speech which included these stirring words, “As we man the rails today, blood gets pumped, the ship comes alive, and the heart begins to beat. It’s the blood that is infused by the spirit, the attitude, and the courage of its namesake. We are so proud to be part of Gabrielle Giffords’ legacy to the United States.” With that, Dr. JILL BIDEN, the ship’s sponsor and spouse of former Vice President, Joe Biden, gave the command to ‘man our ship and bring her to life’ and the crew of USS GABRIELLE GIFFORDS (LCS 10) sprang into action, running on board and bringing the warship into active service for the United States Navy.

 *Contributed by Linda Winter*

**BILLINGS (LCS 15)**

 Built by Marinette Marine in Marinette, Wisconsin, LCS 15 is the eighth Littoral Combat Ship of the FREEDOM-class. BILLINGS is named after Montana’s largest city and is the first U.S. Navy ship to carry that name. On July 1, 2017, she was christened by her sponsor, MRS. SHARLA D. TESTER, wife of Senator Jon Tester of Montana. The shipyard launches these ships sideways into the Menominee River in dramatic fashion, creating quite a splash. This year, the river was running very high and the onlooking crowd had been moved safely away from the action. There was some uncertainty about just how much water would be displaced when BILLINGS ‘fell’ into the river. Mrs. Tester was unfazed, however, and from her perch on the christening platform by the bow, she had no trouble breaking the bottle of sparkling wine with one strong swing. BILLINGS was then launched, slowly leaning over and, with gathering speed, sliding into the water with even less splash than usual. The river’s high water did not bother the ship at all and she righted herself very quickly – seeming impatient to get on with her mission.

 This day was a very special one for the Tester family, as Sharla Tester was supported by both her daughter, Mrs. Christine Tester Schultz, and her granddaughter, Miss Kilikina Schultz, as Matron and Maid of Honor respectively. Mrs. Tester, along with her husband, runs a family farm in Big Sandy, Montana and a jar of soil with five seeds from that farm was deposited in the mast stepping box, further connecting the ship with her namesake city, Montana’s capitol.

 United States Senator, Wisconsin, Tammy Baldwin, delivered the principal speech, emphasizing how shipbuilding boosts the local economy and helps maintain the United States’ freedom. Others from industry, the U.S. Navy, the Department of the Navy, and the political arena contributed remarks. Among them were; Mr. Francesco Valente and Ms. Stephanie Hill; RADM James Loblein, USN; Ms. Gloria Valdez, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Ships; Mr. Thomas Hanel, Mayor of Billings, MT; Mr. Jack Bergman, U.S. Representative, Wisconsin’s 1st district, and Mr. Mike Gallagher, U.S. Representative, Wisconsin’s 8th District.

 *Contributed by Linda Winter*

**USS GERALD R. FORD (CVN 78)**

On a sweltering July 22, 2017, the USS GERALD R. FORD (CVN 78) was commissioned at Pier 11 in Norfolk. There were 10,000 excited Navy supporters. The Ford is the first in its class with a redesigned reactor plant and an advanced arresting gear; it will take 600 fewer Sailors to operate her. Neither the heat nor the security requirements put a damper on the festivities. The ceremony was held on the hangar decks with jumbotrons so all on ship and pier could witness the ceremony. Numerous misting fans provided outdoor air conditioning. It was a huge and very well run commissioning. The Commanding Officer of the Ford is Captain Richard McCormack, an enlistee who graduated from the Naval Academy.

Attendees in the hangar could watch the arrival of President Trump via helicopter, along with the decoy and press helicopters, on the big screens. Acting Secretary of the Navy, Sean Stackley recalled Teddy Roosevelt’s policy, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” Then, he told the President, “We offer you, sir, a big stick!”

SECDEF Mattis said that he knew his role—to introduce the President; which he promptly did. The President lauded the ship builders, the Sailors, the sponsor and the ship’s namesake. Then, he put the Ford into commission.

The Ford has a fantastic sponsor, SUSAN FORD BALES, and she beautifully gave the order to, “Man our ship and bring her to life.” She has visited the ship and the ship builders 17 times. In fact, the Navy made her an honorary aviator with wings of gold in 2016 for her contributions to the crew and ship. At that time, she was the only woman so named. She said, in an interview, that she had “…pulled cables, punched holes, welded, served food to the Sailors, installed phone systems,…participated in All Hands’ Calls…”.

Here is one significant quote from an article in the program book: “If my service as ship’s sponsor has helped the shipbuilders and crew in their responsibilities, if I’ve made them proud to be associated with this ship and Dad’s legacy of integrity, or, if their families have an extra gleam of happiness from activities we have done together, then mark me down as the proudest ship’s sponsor in the history of the United States Navy.”

*Contributed by Janet Gehman*

**USS RAFAEL PERALTA (DDG 115)**

In San Diego, on July 29, 2017, MRS. ROSA MARIA PERALTA gave the order to, “Man our ship and bring her to life” to the crew of USS RAFAEL PERALTA (DDG115), a ship named for her son, Marine Sgt. Rafael Peralta. Sgt Peralta was awarded the Navy Cross for heroism in the Battle of Fallujah during Iraqi Freedom. The Rafael Peralta (DDG 115) is the newest and most advanced Arleigh Burke class destroyer.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller gave the keynote address dedicating this Guided Missile Destroyer. He included in his remarks, “To our Marine Corps, to our families, to the nation, this is more than just another commissioning. It marks the commemoration of a life and, I say, the immortality of a hero.” The ship’s motto is, “Courageous to the End” which is perfect to honor Sgt Peralta’s bravery. He could not wait to become a Marine and said to his younger brother, “Be proud of me, bro…and be proud of being an American.” The dedication of this ship is an indication of the Navy and nation’s high regard for him. How wonderful his mother and siblings were part of the ceremony.

The San Diego City Council proclaimed the day, “Sergeant Peralta Day”. This was not only a celebration of the Navy’s newest warship but a celebration of Sgt. Peralta’s (and his family’s) sacrifice and patriotism.

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**CHARLESTON (LCS 18)**

 On August 26, 2017, USS CHARLESTON (LCS 18) was well and truly christened by her sponsor, MRS. CHARLOTTE DELOACH RILEY. Mrs. Riley is the wife of Joseph P. Riley, Jr. who served a noteworthy ten terms as Mayor of Charleston. Charlotte Riley partnered with her husband in service to Charleston from 1975 to 2016 and during ten election campaigns. Susanne Riley Emge, Mrs. Riley’s sister-in-law, ably assisted her as Matron of Honor.

 LCS 18 is the sixth U.S. Navy vessel to be named after the South Carolina city, with the other five ships spanning the period from 1798 to 1992. The latest was USS CHARLESTON (LKA-113), an amphibious cargo ship in commission from 1968 to 1992. The newest CHARLESTON is a Littoral Combat Ship of the INDEPENDENCE-class, built at Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama.

 The Principal Speaker was the 76th Secretary of the Navy, Richard V. Spencer, who laid out the capabilities of this newest LCS and praised the work and dedication of the men and women of the industrial force who built her. Others making remarks were; RADM Kyle Cozad, Commander Naval Education and Training Command; RADM John P. Neagley, Program Executive Officer for Littoral Combat Ships; John Tecklenburg, 61st Mayor of Charleston and Bradley Byrne, U.S. Representative, 1st District, Alabama.

 It was a splendid day all around and CHARLESTON is indeed fortunate to have Charlotte Riley as her sponsor as the ship continues on her journey to join the fleet.

 *Contributed by Linda Winter*

**TRIPOLI (LHA 7)**

 Tripoli is a storied name in U.S. Naval history, recalling as it does the first foreign land battle won by the United States and immortalized in the Marine Corp hymn with the words ‘from the shores of Tripoli.’ The U.S. Marines’ victory proved that the young United States could hold its own and stand among the nations of the world. There have been two other U.S. warships named TRIPOLI. The first USS TRIPOLI (CVE 64) was an escort carrier commissioned in 1943 and serving through two conflicts, being decommissioned in 1958. The second was USS TRIPOLI (LPH 10), an *Iwo Jima-*class amphibious assault ship commissioned in 1966. She saw extensive duty through Vietnam, Desert Storm and Somalia. Decommissioned in 1995, this TRIPOLI is now in the Beaumont Reserve Fleet in Texas. The newest ship to be named after the famous battle is USS TRIPOLI (LHA 7) and is the second large deck amphibious assault ship in the *America-*class. Fittingly, one of the missions of these ships is to carry Marines where they are needed in the fight.

 On September 16, 2017, at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, Lynne Mabus, sponsor of this latest TRIPOLI, broke the traditional bottle of sparkling wine across the strike plate with one strong swing, sending spray over the ship’s bow. Paying tribute to the real men and women who built the ship, Mrs. Mabus said the ship ‘looks like it was built by the hands of gods.’ Lynne Mabus was named the sponsor by her husband - the 75th Secretary of the Navy and 60th Governor of Mississippi - Ray Mabus, who knows well the qualities and strengths she brings to the position. Mrs. Mabus grew up not far from Pascagoula, traveling to Japan after college to teach English. Here she had the opportunity to learn from military families of the challenges they faced and to appreciate the importance of our military personnel and their families to our nation. She is trained in trauma nursing and has volunteered with the Wounded Warriors at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center during her time in Washington. Supporting Lynne as Matron of Honor, was her sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Goodwin. Mrs. Goodwin, certified as a family nurse practitioner, currently serves veterans at the VA Medical Center in Jackson, Mississippi.

 Remarks at the ceremony were given by; Steven M. Palazzo, U.S. Representative, 4th District, MS; RADM William Galinis, USN, Program Executive Officer, Ships; Major General David Coffman, USMC, Director, Expeditionary Warfare Division and VADM Walter ‘Ted’ Carter, Jr., USN, Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy. The Principal Speaker was Mr. Thomas Dee, performing the duties of the Under Secretary of the Navy.

 Other special and distinguished guests included; Secretary Mabus; state and local officials - Dane Maxwell, Ken Taylor, Stephen Burrow, Jennifer Colmer and Mike Mangum; members of the Armed Forces Retirement Home in Gulfport, MS. and crew members of the former USS TRIPOLI (LPH 10). *Contributed by Linda Winter*

**USS WASHINGTON (SSN 787)**

USS WASHINGTON (SSN 787), the third warship named for the 42nd state, was placed in commission on a clear, bright October 7, 2017, in Norfolk, Virginia. She was preceded in the fleet by an armored cruiser and a battleship by the same name. The commissioning followed long and hallowed traditions including the breaking of the commissioning pennant, the standing of the first watch and the manning of the ship. Manning the ship, as always, was the highlight; officers and crew of Washington, impeccably turned out, running onto the deck and lining the rails. Ms. ELISABETH MABUS, sponsor, gave the time honored, “Man our ship and bring her to life!” The edict wqs delivered at full volume and with enthusiasm.

USS Washington (SSN 787) is commanded. By Commander Gabriel Cavazos who exuded energy throughout the week-end, including his remarks and his directive to the crew, “Fear the Blackfish!” Washington’s nickname, Blackfish, is from the Indian name for orcas and the orca is prominent in the boat’s crest. In attendance were both Washington and Virginia officials as well as Navy hierarchy. Platform guest included Virginia’s Governor, Washington’s Lieutenant Governor and the director of the Navy Nuclear Propulsion Program.

Elisabeth Mabus was introduced by her father, former Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, who emphasized that he was there in the best role of his life, that of “Dad”. She received a warm welcome and enjoyed a round of applause when she mentioned that women would serve in Washington. Her intellect and grace will certainly support Washington well as it sets sail and becomes part of the United States Navy.

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**SOUTH DAKOTA (SSN 790)**

On October 14, 2017, the submarine, SOUTH DAKOTA (SSN 790), the newest Virginia class nuclear attack submarine, was christened at a ceremony at the General Dynamics Electric Boat facility in Groton, Connecticut. The submarine, honoring the state of South Dakota, is the first one named for the state since the famed World War II battleship.

The ship’s sponsor, MRS. DEANIE DEMPSEY, and General Dempsey (retired), former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have two daughters and a son, all of whom served in the Army. Their two daughters and a daughter in law served as matrons of honor. Mrs. Dempsey remains a powerful advocate for members of the Armed Forces and their families through such organizations as TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors).

There were many notable leaders present at the ceremony. Representing the industrial complex were leaders from General Dynamics Electric Boat Quonset, Rhode Island and Groton, CT as well as Newport News Shipbuilding. Representing political support were elected officials from Connecticut, Rhode Island and South Dakota. The governor of South Dakota, Dennis Daugaard, gave the keynote address. Representing the Navy were VADM Johnson, Research Development and Acquisition and VADM Tofalo, Commander, Submarine Forces. All praised the builders and crew for the outstanding job they had done in producing the submarine ahead of schedule and on budget.

Mrs. Dempsey expressed gratitude for her husband and three children and nine grandchildren. She thanked the many members of her family and friends who traveled to be with her to share the day. She praised the shipyard workers and especially praised the crew who, she said, would really, “bring her to life”.

When the time came for her to christen South Dakota, in deference to the state’s history, she turned to the crew and called out the ancient Sioux Battle cry, “HOKA HEY”. The crew responded in a loud cheer, “HOKA HEY”. With one decisive blow, she cracked the bottle and christened South Dakota.

*Contributed by Barbara Pilling*

**USNS HERSHEL “WOODY” WILLIAM (ESB4)**

USNS HERSHEL “WOODY” WILLIAMS (ESB 4) was christened by Hershel “Woody” Williams’ two daughters, TRACIE ROSS AND TRAVIE ROSS (both from West Virginia) on October 21, 2017 at General Dynamics NASSCO in San Diego. The former Marine Chief Warrant Officer 4 was in attendance and was celebrated as a Medal of Honor recipient (Iwo Jima) by Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia who described him as a, “true American hero, humble and understated”. The family was joined by other Medal of Honor recipients and USS Arizona survivors. CWO4 Williams is the last surviving recipient from the Battle of Iwo Jima.

The ship is a flexible platform designed to support various missions as well as accommodate 250 personnel. Besides Senator Manchin, in attendance were Major General Eric Smith, RADM William Galinis, VADM Dixon Smith, RADM Dee Mewbourne, and Ms. Gloria Valdez. The Ross sisters were noted as having a grand time and making, “quite a splash”. The connection between father and daughters made this a happy, intimate event that will long be remembered by all who attended and participated.

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**DELBERT D. BLACK (DDG 119)**

 Delbert D. Black was named the United States Navy’s first Senior Enlisted Advisor

in 1967. At the time, he was a Master Chief Petty Officer and had been in the Navy for twenty-six years. He began his seagoing years on USS MARYLAND and was on board during the attack at Pearl Harbor. The Senior Enlisted Advisor role evolved into that of the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) and Delbert Black is considered to be the first to take on that position, setting the standard for those who follow.

 On November 4, 2017, Pascagoula, Mississippi, the destroyer which bears his name was christened by Ima J. Black, his partner in life and in all things Navy. Mrs. Black was herself in the Navy as a WAVE (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service.) Mrs. Black and her late husband received the prestigious Lone Sailor Award as a couple in 2017. Supporting the sponsor as Matron of Honor was her good friend, Marilyn Kendall.

 Fittingly, the Principal Speaker at the event was current MCPON, Steven S. Giordano, USN, who spoke of trailblazing done by both Delbert and Ima Black saying, “This ship is a fitting tribute to the master chief who set the tone for all of us to follow as authentic, competent and courageous leaders.” Other speakers were; Gregg Harper, U.S. Representative, Mississippi’s 3rd District; VADM Jan Tighe, USN; Ms Gloria Valdez and RADM William J. Galinis. Among the state and locl officials present were the Mayors of Pascagoula and Gautier, Dane Maxwell and Phil Torjusen, respectively. Other distinguished guests were; Donald C. Winter, 74th Secretary of the Navy; MCPON Duane R. Bushey, USN (Ret), 7th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy; MCPON John Hagan, 8th Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy and former crew members of USS Black (DD 666), who had come to honor the DELBERT D. BLACK.

 Ima J. Black swung the bottle of sparkling wine strongly and, with a little aid from MCPON Giordano, bathed her ship in sparkling foam, transforming DDG 119 into the formidable USS DELBERT D. BLACK.

*Contributed by Linda Winter*

**USS LITTLE ROCK (LCS 9)**

For the first time in 242 years, a Navy ship was commissioned alongside its namesake. On December 16, 2017, in Buffalo, New York, USS LITTLE ROCK (LCS 9) was commissioned as USS Little Rock (CG4) stood guard in Canalside Park. Sponsor, JANEE BONNER, gave the order to, “Man our ship and bring her to life” as a huge crowd thundered applause. The city of Buffalo turned out in force to welcome the Navy’s newest littoral combat ship.

The festivities surrounding the commissioning demonstrated the excitement generated by the event. Representatives from both Buffalo and Little Rock, New York and Arkansas, Navy and civilian enjoyed evening parties on the 15th and a massive breakfast on Saturday. The venues were all near the commissioning site making for an easy (if cold) walk. There was a blizzard on Friday night and snow in the air on Saturday for the ceremony. Guests came dressed warmly and, all but the feet, managed to stay warm. Chairs were situated on snow covered grass; no tent, no heat but great joy.

The many speakers were considerate of the crowd and limited their remarks. Notably, the mayor of Buffalo and the mayor of Little Rock both spoke about the honor associated with Little Rock. Coordination was apparent as there was a commissioning committee representing each city. They keynote address was delivered by Senator John Boozman of Arkansas. The most impassioned speech was the Commanding Officer’s, CDR Todd Peters. He gave a wonderful tribute to the ship, the crew, the families and especially to his wife, Mary Beth.

This was a one of a kind commissioning because of the outdoor location on a blustery day and the presence of the cruiser, USS Little Rock. Many of the ushers were retired Navy…docents from the museum ship and they added character and humor. Buffalo and Little Rock could not have been more proud in the acceptance of a new ship into the United States Navy.

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**USS OMAHA (LCS 12)**

USS OMAHA was placed into commission for the United States Navy by Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer on Saturday, February 3, 2018 in San Diego, California. The commissioning took place on Broadway Pier in the shadow of the USS MIDWAY, now a museum, but retaining still the looming presence of a famed warship. MIDWAY’s flight deck was also the location of the Chairman’s Dinner the night before, during which the famed Beach Boys performed a concert of their California surfer music. With the sun setting behind the carrier’s island bridge, one could not help but feel the presence of the men and women who had served on the ship and whose efforts had for the weekend’s festivities.

OMAHA’s sponsor, Ms. Susan A. Buffett gave the order to bring her ship to life and looked on as the crew ran to their stations on board. The Principal Speaker for OMAHA’s commissioning was former U.S. Senator from Nebraska and Medal of Honor Recipient, Bob Kerrey. Among others contributing remarks were; Secretary Spencer; Governor of Nebraska, Pete Ricketts; U.S. Representative, Nebraska’s 2nd District, Don Bacon; ADM Scott Swift, USN, Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet; VADM Richard Brown; Mayor of Omaha, Jean Stothert; and RADM John Neagley. Assuming command of OMAHA was Commander Michael Toth, who also spoke during the ceremony. The sponsor’s father, Warren Buffett, was present as a very special guest, while other special guests attending were former U.S. Senator from Nebraska, Ben Nelson and former Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, who had made the decision to name the ship OMAHA and had named Ms. Buffett her sponsor. With the steady support of Susan Buffgett and buoyed by the goodwill of those present, OMAHA will sail into the future to serve the country and make her namesake proud.

*Contributed by Linda Winter*

**USNS BURLINGTON (EPF 10)**

On a warm, sunny day in Mobile, Alabama, Expeditionary Fast Transport 10 became United States Naval Ship BURLINGTON as Mrs. Marcelle Pomerleau Leahy swung strongly and broke the traditional bottle, bathing the ship in a bubbly spray. USNS BURLINGTON (EPF 10) carries the name of the largest city in the Green Mountain State. Although the ship is the second Naval vessel to be called BURLINGTON, this is the first one to be named after Burlington, Vermont.

Mrs. Leahy, a first-generation American born of Canadian parents, was introduced by her husband of 55 years, Senator Patrick Leahy, who spoke warmly of her career as a Registered Nurse in Vermont and Virginia, her support of the Vermont National Guard Readiness and Support Program as honorary chair, and her active contributions to civic organizations. In her own remarks, the sponsor related how fitting it was that EPF 10 should carry the name of Burlington, VT, saying ”Vermonters have long heeded the call in service to this nation. From the original pre-Revolution Green Mountain Boys to Vermont’s National Guard and members of the Armed Forces today. Vermonters have responded when the duties of the nation have called.”

Other speakers that day were; RADM Dee L. Mewbourne, USN, Commander, Military Sealift Command, VADM David C, Johnson, USN, Principal Military Deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition, and VADM Dixon R. Smith, USN, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Fleet Readiness and Logistics.

The music was most ably provided by the Murphy High School Band, while Miss Jamelen Spain performed the duties of Flower Girl with panache and a wonderful smile. February 24, 2018 was just a perfect day for a christening and after being imbued with the character and spirit of her sponsor and basking in the well-wishes of everyone present, BURLINGTON, captained by Captain Curtis Smith, USMM, was well and truly started on her USNS journey.

*Contributed by Linda Winter*

**USS COLORADO (SSN 788)**

Carrying the spirit and character of MS ANNIE MABUS, the USS COLORADO (SSN 788) was commissioned on windy and cold St. Patrick’s Day, March 17, 2018 in New London, CT. The newest Virginia class submarine, it will carry out the 6 core competencies of submarines: anti submarine warfare, anti surface warfare, delivery of Special Operations Forces, strike warfare, irregular warfare, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, mine warfare. CDR Reed Koepp will command this 4th ship to bear the name of Colorado.

Along with 2000 guests, there were 6 veterans and 2 widows who served on (or whose husband served on) USS Colorado (BB 45). Ken Jones, one of the veterans, passed the long glass to the first watch, an important tradition in commissioning ceremonies. There were many notables from Connecticut and Colorado including Governor Hickenlooper of Colorado. Senator Cory Gardner gave the keynote address and Ms. Mabus spoke eloquently and directly to the plank owners.

A Colorado themed reception, including buffalo sliders and a new beer named, “Pride Runs Deep”, was held at the head of the pier following the commissioning .

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**USS RALPH JOHNSON (DDG 114)**

On March 24, 2018, at Columbus Street Pier in Charleston, SC, USS RALPH JOHNSON (DDG 114) became the 64th Arleigh Burke Class destroyer to join the United States Navy. It will conduct operations from peacetime presence and crisis management to sea control and power projection. It carries 2 helicopters, missiles, torpedoes and 338 crew.

MRS. GEORGEANN MCRAVEN gave the order to, “Man our ship and bring her to life” in front of a crowd of 6000; igniting enthusiasm in the crew and the crowd. Mrs. Mc Raven has long been an advocate for military families and service members. Her fortitude, her grace, her compassion, her love of Navy and nation will be part of the ship forever.

The ship honors Marine Corps Pfc Ralph Henry Johnson, a Medal of Honor recipient from Vietnam. He earned the MOH at only 19 when he threw himself on a grenade, saving two two Marines next to him. His sister, MS Helen Richards, spoke of the honor of the ship, “We are both inspired and forever grateful for the generosity of love shown toward us.” Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, the keynote speaker, declared Pfc Johnson a model of bravery and sacrifice for Charleston and the nation.

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**INDIANAPOLIS (LCS 17)**

Cold and blustery, drifts 2 to 3 foot deep, gale force winds were the order of the day for the christening and launch of the INDIANAPOLIS (LCS 17) in Marinette, Wisconsin. Winter Storm Evelyn postponed the launch but not the christening nor the spirit on April 14, 2018 as MRS. JILL DONNELLY shattered the sparkling wine bottle on the bow of LCS 17. The fourth ship to be named for Indiana’s capitol, she carries a notable heritage including the legacy of those who served during the final days of World War II on board USS Indianapolis (CA 35). That ship won 10 battle stars for her service.

 This fast, agile ship is designed to operate closer in shore than other ships. It is extraordinarily flexible to operate in the three important areas of anti submarine warfare, mine warfare and anti surface warfare.

 Mrs. Donnelly, surrounded by stalwart family, friends, Navy personnel and shipyard workers, said, “As a native Hoosier and daughter of two World War II veterans, there is no greater honor than to serve as sponsor of the future USS Indianapolis.” She also noted that the ship and her crew would be supported and encouraged by the residents of Indianapolis and all of Indiana. The Honorable Richard Lugar gave the principal address and was joined on stage by the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Richard Spencer.

Mrs. Donnelly not only christened Indianapolis on Saturday, during the the snowstorm, but she returned on Tuesday to launch the ship, pressing the button that sent the ship sideways, dramatically, into the Menominee River. She became our first sponsor to, not only christen, but launch her ship.

*Contributed by Ellen Roughead*

**USS PORTLAND (LPD 27)**

Saturday, April 21, 2018, dawned bright and sunny in Portland, Oregon, after a week of more typical on-off rain. It was a beautiful day to welcome a new ship into the United States Navy and a crowd of over five thousand people was present to celebrate USS PORTLAND’s commissioning. The night before had seen the Commissioning Chairman’s Dinner take place at the Multnomah Athletic Club, during which, speeches had been made, gifts to the ship had been presented and a general sense of pride, good humor and gratitude had prevailed. The ship’s motto is ‘First Responders Brave and Determined’ and both the Portland Fire Department and the city’s Police Department - first responders all - gave large medallions representing their organizations to be hung on PORTLAND’s structure as a visible sign of their connection and support. PORTLAND’s sponsor is MRS. BONNIE AMOS, wife of General James “Jim” Amos, USMC (Ret), 35th Commandant of the Marine Corps, and throughout the evening she and her Matrons of Honor (daughters Mrs. Linda Valerga and Mrs. Jamie Nielsen and daughter-in-law, Mrs. Molly Amos) wove a special kind of magic around and between the officers and crew of the USS PORTLAND, the hard-working Commissioning Committee, the local political establishment and others present. It was clear to everyone that USS PORTLAND will always enjoy a very special bond with her sponsor.

That Saturday, having sailed from her home port of San Diego to her berth on the Willamette River, PORTLAND loomed above the crowd, awaiting her sponsor’s command to ‘Man our ship and bring her to life.’ The commissioning ceremony follows a tradition up to that point though, and there were speeches to be made and orders to set the first watch to be given by Commanding Officer, CAPT Jeremy R. Hill, USN. Among the platform speakers were; The Hon. Ted Wheeler, Mayor of Portland; Brian Cuccias, Ingalls Shipbuilding; MajGen David Coffman, USMC, Director, Expeditionary Warfare, Office of the CNO; VADM Richard Brown, USN, Commander, Naval Surface Forces/Commander Naval surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet; VADM Dixon Smith, USN, Deputy CNO, Fleet readiness and Logistics; The Hon. Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon; and James Guertz, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition. The Principal Speaker was The Hon. Patrick Shanahan, Deputy Secretary of Defense. It was a tribute to this ship and others of the *San Antonio* class that so many responsible for the country’s defense were present on this day.

Of particular note were the words spoken by MajGen Coffman, who spoke of PORTLAND’s primary mission – that of defending the United States and her citizens. He reminded all present of the valor, courage, dedication, and sacrifice that had been demonstrated by the nation’s armed forces in the past and would be required of those serving now and in the future. We were reminded that, although PORTLAND will go on to carry out many humanitarian missions, the ship and those who sail in her, do so primarily to protect us all, a necessary and praiseworthy mission.

Finally, after the ceremony had concluded and USS PORTLAND had been placed into commission, Mrs. Bonnie Amos called to the crew and ordered them to bring our ship to life. With the sounds of ‘*Anchors Aweigh’* ringing out, the crew and officers of PORTLAND, along with an embarked contingent of Marines, ran to their stations on board, lined the rails, and saluted their fellow citizens below. Saturday, April 21, 2018 was truly a fine Navy Day!

*Contributed by Linda Winter*