**President’s Report**

**Society of Sponsors of the United States Navy Annual Meeting**

**May 5, 2016**

***USS LITTLE ROCK (LCS 9) – July 18, 2015***

In Marinette, Wisconsin, on 18 July 2015, at the Marinette Marine shipyard, a new Littoral Combat Ship was balanced high on the ways, waiting to be given her name, ***USS LITTLE ROCK (LCS 9)***, and be launched into the Menominee River a few yards away. Her sponsor, Janée Lambert Bonner, the wife of former Congressman Jo Bonner, had traveled from her home in Alabama to carry on the tradition of christening her ship with a bottle of champagne. Her daughter, Jennifer Lee Bonner, ably performed her duties as Maid of Honor to her mother. The summer day was bright and beautiful and there was a good crowd to watch the ceremony. The Menominee River is not at all wide and some officials worried that the splash from the ship’s entering the water would be dangerous for any watching on the other shore. The Freedom variant of the LCS class, built at Marinette Marine, is launched sideways into the river and, although mishaps are very few, the dramatic entry into the river means care must be taken. Mrs. Bonner is not a woman to back away from a challenge, as evidenced by her lifetime of achievements in the charitable, volunteer and business worlds. She is as active in her present home in Tuscaloosa, Alabama as she was in Washington, D.C. during her husband’s term of office. The platform where she was to stand when christening the ship stands a good twenty feet high and quite near the prow of the ship and the sponsor is warned to hold onto the railing, as the movement of the huge, near ship can impart a feeling of vertigo. Janée handled everything with aplomb and, after speaking the words to give her ship her rightful name, swung the bottle strongly and bathed ***USS LITTLE ROCK*** in a shower of bubbles and spray. Slowly at first, then with gathering speed the ship leaned over and began sliding into the water. One worried that something was wrong, as it looked so odd to see a large ship apparently keeling over on her side. With a gigantic splash, water seemingly going up in the air, out over the river and everywhere on shore, ***LITTLE ROCK*** went into the Menominee and began the serious business of righting herself. She violently bobbed back and forth, while tugs in the river, tied to her with guide ropes, made sure she didn’t get too far out of line. In a short time, ***LITTLE ROCK*** settled down and it was hard to believe that she had been launched in so dramatic a fashion just a few minutes before. Mrs. Bonner laughed and smiled and everyone present joined in as well.

Besides the incredible launching of the ship, the day was special as the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, was there to give the Principal Remarks. As a former crew member and officer of the previous ***USS LITTLE ROCK (CL-92)***, his address was quite touching and he was able to join with many other former shipmates as they all watched the christening of the latest ***LITTLE ROCK.*** Other dignitaries present were The Honorable Tammy Baldwin, United States Senator (D-WI), The Honorable Reid Ribble, U.S. Representative, Wisconsin’s 8th District, The Honorable Mark Stodola, Mayor of Little Rock, Alabama, VADM Joseph P. Mulloy, USN, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Integration of Capabilities and Resources and RADM Brian Antonio, USN, Program Executive Officer, Littoral Combat Ships. In a short time ***USS LITTLE ROCK (LCS 9)*** will go on to be commissioned into the United States Navy and that will be a grand event, but no on present at her christening will ever forget that day.

***USS ILLINOIS (SSN-786) - October 10, 2015***

In Groton, Connecticut, on October 10, 2015 at General Dynamics Electric Boat, First Lady Michelle Obama christened ***USS ILLINOIS (SSN-786)***, named after her home state. The weather was glorious, the crowd of over 7,000 onlookers was happy to be present at such a historic event and the submarine looked magnificent as she lay quietly, but watchfully, in her berth. The pre-ceremony entertainment was presented by *The Blues Brotherhood*, the selection of the band being a nod to Mrs. Obama’s Chicago roots and Blues Brothers style sunglasses were place on the seats. ***ILLINOIS*** is the thirteenth submarine of the Virginia class and this was the fourth time that a First Lady had christened a ship at Electric Boat; the first being Mamie Eisenhower, followed by Jacqueline Kennedy and Hillary Clinton. Mrs. Obama showered the boat with champagne after a strong swing of the bottle and ***USS ILLIONOIS*** seemed to roll slightly in appreciation. In her remarks from the platform, Michelle Obama thanked the military family members for all that they are doing for their service members and for each other every single day, adding that their service often goes unrecognized – ‘that folks across the country don’t always see the courage and strength and dedication of our military spouses and our military children’. She took a moment to thank them and highlight their service publicly. There were many political and military leaders present, some of them follow here; The Honorable Jack Reed, U.S. Senator (Rhode Island); The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse U.S. Senator, (Rhode Island); The Honorable Richard Blumenthal, U.S. Senator, (Connecticut); The Honorable Christopher Murphy, U.S. Senator, (Connecticut); The Honorable Bruce Rauner, Governor, State of Illinois; the following U.S. Representatives from Illinois - The Honorable Jim Langevin, The Honorable Joe Courtney and The Honorable Robin Kelly, as well as ADM James Caldwell, Jr., Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion and The Honorable Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy. The Principal Address was given by Secretary Mabus. A great day was had by all present as ***USS ILLINOIS (SSN-786)*** was given her rightful name by her Sponsor, a true native of her namesake state.

***USS RAFAEL PERALTA (DDG 115) - October 31, 2015***

On a bright, cool Saturday morning, at Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, ship’s sponsor Rosa Maria Peralta bestowed her late son’s name on ***USS RAFAEL PERALTA (DDG 115)***. Sergeant Rafael Peralta of the United States Marine Corps gave his life to protect his fellow Marines in Fallujah, Iraq. Sergeant Peralta was awarded the highest honor the United States Navy can bestow, the Navy Cross, for his actions that day, November 15, 2004. In 2012, Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, announced that SGT Peralta would be forever memorialized by having a U.S. Navy destroyer named after him adding, “Wherever ***USS RAFEL PERALTA*** sails, it will carry the message “Fortis ad Finem” meaning “Courage to the End”. The night before he was killed, SGT Peralta wrote these words to his younger brother – ‘Be proud of me, bro…and be proud of being an American.’ It was very clear on this October morning in Maine, that the Peralta’s are a close knit family and deeply loved their son and brother and are very proud to have a U.S. Navy ship carry his name and carry on his sense of honor, respect and duty. So it was, that on Saturday, October 31, 2015, Rosa Mairie Peralta lifted up the bottle of champagne and broke it surely across the bow of her ship, transferring some of her spirit and surely that of her son to **DDG 115**, now ***USS RAFAEL PERALTA***. Mrs. Peralta’s two daughters, Icela Peralta David and Karen Sarahi Peralta will support their mother and the ship as Matron and Maid of Honor, respectively. Ricardo Peralta, her son and a former Marine as well, also supported the ship and his mother through his remarks and reminiscences of his brother given from the platform. The Principal Speaker was General Robert B. Neller, Comandant, U.S. Marine Corps, while remarks were offered by The Honorable Susan Collins, United States Senator, (Maine), The Honorable Angus King (Maine), The Honorable Chellie Pingree, U.S. Representative, (Maine), The Honorable Bruce Poliquin, U.S. Representative (Maine), VADM Robin Braun USN, Chief of Navy Reserve, and The Honorable Sean Stackley, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition. ***USS RAFAEL PERALTA (DDG 115)*** will continue to be supported by the Peralta family, the shipbuilders at Bath Iron Works, and her prospective officers and crew as she continues on the path towards her commissioning, whereupon she will join the fleet, carrying the name of SGT Rafael Peralta wherever she sails.

***USS MILWAUKEE (LCS 5) - November 20, 2015***

The weather in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Friday, November 20, 2015 was cold, blowy and in the end, snowy, but the welcome for Sylvia Marie Panetta, the sponsor of ***USS MILWAUKEE (LCS 5)*** was as warm as it could be. Mrs. Panetta, the wife of The Honorable Leon Edward Panetta, was there for her ship’s commissioning along with her husband and many members of her family. Her Matrons of Honor, all present, are; Elizabeth Watts Panetta, Elizabeth A. Bisinov, M.D. and The Honorable Carrie McIntyre Panetta. The Friday Evening Reception, hosted by The Milwaukee Commissioning Committee, with VADM Dirk Debbink USN (Ret.) at the helm, took place at the Discovery World Pier, right next to the ship’s berth. The night was filled with good food, good friends, spectacular ice sculptures of ***MILWAUKEE***, and culminated in a ‘Come Sail With Me Dance Party’. Truly the city of Milwaukee pulled out all stops to welcome the ship, her sponsor and her crew. Saturday morning dawned with snowflakes falling none too gently, the city streets were dressed in Holiday finery as the ‘Milwaukee Holiday Parade’ was also scheduled for that morning. Crews of Sea Cadets and Boy Scouts cleared the snow off the seats in front of the ship in an attempt to make them more hospitable. When the large crowd assembled though, the weather didn’t matter and the Commissioning Ceremony went on with the Navy Band demonstrating their fortitude in the face of what could easily be described as ‘Arctic’ conditions. Among others, the ***USS MILWAUKEE*** ***(LCS 5)*** Official Commissioning Party was comprised of The Honorable Scott Walker, Governor, State of Wisconsin; The Honorable Tammy Baldwin, United States Senator, (D-WI); The Honorable Ron Johnson, United States Senator (R-WI); The Honorable Gwen Moore, U.S. Representative, Wisconsin’s 4th District; The Honorable Reid Ribble, U.S. Representative, Wisconsin’s 8th District; ADM Michelle Howard USN, Vice Chief of Operations; The Honorable Tom Barrett, Mayor, the City of Milwaukee and Ms. Allison Stiller, Principal Civilian Deputy, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition. Senator Baldwin gave the Principal Remarks and stated how much the shipbuilding efforts of the Navy benefitted both Wisconsin and the nation. ADM Howard then placed ***MILWAUKEE*** into commission and Commander Kendall Bridgewater, who was assuming command of the ship, invited Sylvia Panetta to give the order to ’Man Our Ship and Bring Her to Life’. In spite of the difficult weather, particularly for a native Californian such as Mrs. Panetta, ***MILWAUKEE***’s sponsor’s voice rang out strong and true and the ship’s crew ran through the falling snow and up the gangway to bring their ship to life. It was truly an absolutely inspiring and wonderful day for the City of Milwaukee, her citizens, the Commissioning Committee, the crew and officers of the ship and for ***USS MILWAUKEE (LCS 5)*** and her sponsor, Sylvia Marie Panetta.

***USS JACKSON (LCS 6) – December 5, 2015***

On a cool, but sunny day, ***USS JACKSON (LCS 6)*** was placed into commission by The Honorable Ray Mabus, the Secretary of the Navy, in Gulfport, Mississippi on December 5, 2015. ***JACKSON*** had been christened by her sponsor, Dr. Katherine Cochran, on March 22, 2014. Dr. Cochran is the daughter of Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS) and the late Rose Clayton Cochran and had previously served as Maid of Honor for her mother, who sponsored ***USS BARRY (DDG 52)***. Continuing the family’s tradition, Dr. Cochran’s Maid of Honor is her niece, Elizabeth. There were many family members and fellow Mississippians in attendance as ***JACKSON*** officially joined the United States Navy with a partial list following: The Honorable Phil Bryant, Governor, State of Mississippi; The Honorable Thad Cochran, United States Senator, (R-MS); The Honorable Ray Mabus, the Secretary of the Navy and previous Governor of Mississippi; The Honorable Tony Yarber, Mayor, City of Jackson, MS; The Honorable Billy Hewes, Mayor, City of Gulfport; ADM James Caldwell, Jr., Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program and ADM Brian Antonio, USN, Program Executive Officer, Littoral Combat Ships. Secretary Mabus gave the Principal Address, as he had at the ship’s christening, while CDR Allen Adkins, assuming command of ***USS JACKSON***, asked Dr. Cochran to give the order to “**man the ship and bring her to life**”, which she did with *elan*. Dr. Cochran is currently an associate professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, where she directs the South Mississippi Writing Project. Fittingly, her gift to the ship was a library of books related to Mississippi, the cities in the area and other subjects of interest to the men and women who will serve on board. ***USS JACKSON (LCS 6)*** is blessed to have the support of the entire state of Mississippi, the cities of Jackson and Gulfport and the whole Cochran family, as she moves into the fleet and the years ahead.

***USNS CARSON CITY (EPF 7) – January 16, 2016***

***USNS CARSON CITY (EPF 7)*** is the seventh ship in the SPEARHEAD-class of Expeditionary Fast Transports and has a most unusual hull, being essentially an aluminum twin-hull catamaran. She was christened on January 16, 2016 in Mobile, Alabama at the Austal USA shipbuilding facility. Her proud sponsor is Susan Asbury Crowell, wife of the Mayor of Carson City, Nevada, the Honorable Robert Crowell. Mr. Crowell is also a Vietnam Veteran and retired Navy Captain. Susan Crowell’s Matron of Honor is Carolyn M. Southard of Carson City, a life-long supporter of the US Navy. Due to the way this class of ships is built and launched, the christening took place inside the warehouse-like construction facility, with the audience sitting on rows of chairs directly underneath the hull of **CARSON CITY**. Mrs. Crowell had to climb up to a platform set-up next to the ship’s tall bow in order christen her ship with the traditional bottle of champagne, which she did with no lack of foam and spray. Interestingly, the Master of the ship will be Captain Robert T. Wiley of the United States Merchant Marine, who is a long-time resident of Carson City. Other platform guests and speakers included The Honorable Mark Amodei, United States Representative, Nevada’s Second District; Ms. Gloria Valdez, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Ships Programs; VADM Joseph Mulloy, USN, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for the Integration of Capabilities and Resources; and RADM Thomas K. Shannon USN, Commander Military Sealift Command. VADM Mulloy gave the Principal Speech, while RADM Shannon welcomed ***CARSON CITY*** and her crew into the Military Sealift Command. With so many from Carson City, NV attending and taking part in the ceremony, it’s very clear that ***USNS CARSON CITY*** will have wide support from the citizens of her namesake’s city right from the start and on into her future.

***USS SIOUX CITY (LCS 11) – January 30, 2016***

It was a bright, but frigid morning in Marinette, Wisconsin on January 30, 2016, when USS SIOUX CITY (LCS 11) was christened well and truly by Mary Winnefeld, the wife of ADM James “Sandy” Winnefeld. The ship was perched on the ways, broadside to the Menominee River, banners flapping in the wind, her pointed prow facing the christening platform. Mary stood high atop the platform and with a mighty swing showered SIOUX CITY with champagne and set in motion the launching of the ship. Carefully placed explosives allowed the ways to shed their load - SIOUX CITY leaned over and then, with gathering speed, slid sideways into the ice covered river. Once in the water, she rolled wildly back and forth until she found her stable upright position. The LCS 11, a Littoral Combat Ship was in her rightful place at last. Dr. Sarah Werner, the sister of the sponsor, and Ms. Jennifer Brusstar were Mrs. Winnefeld’s Maids of Honor and share her interest in charitable and volunteer activities. Mary Winnefeld has a rightly acclaimed reputation as a tireless advocate for military families and their sailors and soldiers and SIOUX CITY is fortunate to have such an accomplished and caring sponsor. ADM Winnefeld clearly enjoyed introducing his wife as she rose to give her remarks on the platform. Among the platform guests and speakers were; The Honorable Tammy Baldwin, United States Senator (D-WI), The Honorable Robert E. Scott, Mayor of Sioux City, Iowa, ADM Michelle Howard, VCNO, RADM Brian Antonio, and Ms. Gloria Valdez, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Ships. The Mayors of Marinette, WI and Menominee, MI, Steve Genisot and Jean Stegeman respectively, were also present at the festivities. The Principal Speaker was ADM Howard who praised the ship and her crew as well as the shipbuilders, who constructed the ship with such careful attention. Quite a families and people of all ages made the long trip from the ship’s namesake city in Iowa to be part of the day’s celebration and it was clear from their enthusiasm that USS SIOUX CITY and all who sail in her will always be loved and supported by the citizens of Sioux City.

***USS RALPH JOHNSON (DDG 114) – April 2, 2016***

On April 2, 2016, the ***USS RALPH JOHNSON (DDG 114)*** was christened with one swing of the champagne bottle at Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, by her sponsor, Georgeann McRaven., the wife of retired Admiral William McRaven. Private First Class Ralph Henry Johnson, USMC, the ship’s namesake, was awarded the Medal of Honor for his act of heroism in giving his life to protect his patrol team by covering a grenade with his body on Hill 146 in Vietnam on March 4, 1968. Many members of Ralph Johnson’s family were able to be at the christening and Mrs. McRaven ensured and welcomed their participation in every way during the heart and soul touching event. Helen Richards, Ralph’s older sister told of how when she had gotten “the message that Ralph had hurled himself onto the grenade, it didn’t come as a surprise. He was always giving of himself. Ralph wasn’t selfish. His life speaks to that.” Mrs. McRaven’s daughter, Kelly Marie McRaven, was Maid of Honor and was just as gracious and thoughtful as her mother. Admiral McRaven and the McRaven’s two sons, Major Bill McRaven USAF and Dr. John McRaven were also present. Platform participants included The Honorable Roger Wicker, United States Senator (R-MS), The Honorable Steven Palazzo, U.S. Representative for Mississippi’s 4th Congressional District, VADM Ted Branch, USN, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information Warfare and Director of Naval Intelligence, Lieutenant General Ronald L. Bailey, USMC, Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies and Operations, and Mrs. Helen Richards. The Principal Speaker was The Honorable Sean Stackley, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development & Acquisition, who gave a stirring speech acknowledging the tremendous debt our country owes to heroes such as Ralph Johnson. Although the night before the christening, the heavens had opened up and the rain had come down in torrents, the day of the christening dawned with the sun pouring through and around the clouds as ***USS RALPH JOHNSON*** proudly received her name, that of a true American hero.