

Christmas came early for the Navy's newest attack submarine, PCU *Mississippi* (SSN 782). The ninth submarine of the *Virginia* class celebrated her christening on Dec. 3, 2011, at General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn. Electric Boat President John Casey presided at the late-morning ceremony on *Mississippi's* deck, with the Thames River gleaming in the background beneath a cloudless late-autumn sky.

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus was the principal speaker. A native of Ackerman, Miss., who was elected in 1987 as Mississippi's youngest governor in more than 100 years, Mabus said it is no accident that this is the fifth ship to bear his home state's name. "The long history of naming ships *Mississippi* is a testament to the state's history in shipbuilding and to the resilience, the patriotism and the strength of the people of Mississippi."

Mississippi began construction on Feb. 18, 2007, with keel authentication occurring June 9, 2010, and pressure hull completion in April 2011. She is the first submarine to be named after the nation's 20th state, which is named after the Mississippi River and known as the "Magnolia state."

"Mississippi" is a Native American word meaning roughly "Father of Waters," certainly an appropriate name for a submarine. The state motto—which is now the ship's motto as well—is equally appropriate: "Virtute et Armis" is Latin for "By Valor and Arms." Vice Adm. John Richardson pointed out that this is "a true warrior salutation; something said before going into battle."

Mississippi will be battle-ready earlier than previous ships of her class. At her christening, she was 97 percent complete and



Photo by John Narewski

Crisp Air and Clear Skies for Christening of PCU *Mississippi*

and scheduled to be delivered about a year ahead of schedule—and over 50 million dollars below the contracted cost—a testament to the work ethic of the crew, the shipbuilders, and the industrial base. "The ship before you is the product of a team defined by a commitment to innovation, quality and execution excellence," said Casey. "This team is truly a singular group, comprising

the most dedicated, capable and talented people I know."

An example of the shipbuilders' innovation is a group of 50 Electric Boat employees, nicknamed the "Steam Team," who used a new technique to test the flow of steam in the engine room before the submarine was in the water. Electric Boat leased a large boiler to create the steam needed to test pipes and valves and run the



Photo by John Narewski



Photo by Olivia Logan



Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Virginia K. Schaefer

(Opposite, top) Ship sponsor Allison Stiller christens *Mississippi* by breaking a bottle of sparkling wine against the sub. (Opposite, bottom) Sailors assigned to PCU *Mississippi* file off the ship after the conclusion of the christening ceremony. (Above, left) Vice Adm. John Richardson, Commander, Submarine Forces, speaks at PCU *Mississippi*'s christening. (Above, right) (from left to right) Lt. Cmdr. Daniel Reiss, *Mississippi*'s Executive Officer, Capt. John McGrath, commanding officer, and Master Chief William Stoiber, chief of the boat, listen to remarks during the boat's christening ceremony.

generators that produce electricity while *Mississippi* remained on the blocks in the main building shed. This new procedure shortened *Mississippi*'s construction time by a month because it is easier to work on her while she is still on land.

Electric Boat plans to buy the boiler and use it for future submarines, a move that would save the *Virginia*-class program \$24 million. "It's a smart investment," said Rear Adm. David Johnson, Program Executive Officer for Submarines. "We both share in the reduced cost of that ship, and the Submarine Force community gets the ship that much earlier."

Mississippi's sponsor, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Ship Programs Allison Stiller, broke the traditional bottle of sparkling wine against the submarine. *Mississippi* is unique in having a sponsor who has worked professionally with submarines since 1985, supporting the *Trident*, *Seawolf* and *Virginia* classes. *Mississippi*'s christening marked the 38th time Stiller has attended a ship christening, proof of her longstanding commitment to Navy shipbuilding.

Rep. Joe Courtney, of Connecticut's 2nd District—known in the submarine and

political community as "Two-Subs Joe," for his push for a production rate of two submarines per year—praised Stiller's public service in her current job. "As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I've had the opportunity to watch Allison perform her duties as deputy assistant secretary of the Navy," he said. "She is smart, knowledgeable, completely ethical, and committed to ensuring that the taxpayer receives the best value for public investment in Navy shipbuilding."

As if *Mississippi* didn't have enough to celebrate, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert awarded her crew the 2011 Navy Community Service/Project Good Neighbor award in the small sea command category two days prior to her christening.

"I'm so proud of the crew of PCU *Mississippi* for this important achievement," said the ship's commanding officer, Capt. John McGrath, who leads a crew of about 142 officers and enlisted personnel. "In addition to their shipboard duties, our dedicated volunteers donated over 90 hours of cumulative community service per month since 2010." Capt. McGrath was also celebrating his promotion to captain, which took place Dec. 1.

There is still a lot to accomplish before *Mississippi* is ready to join the fleet. "We will be loading out the ship with stowage, finishing all of the living spaces, making the ship habitable, and moving the crew aboard," said Harry Haugeto, the Electric Boat manager for *Mississippi*. "In parallel, we will be finishing up the testing and turning over operational control of the remaining systems to the crew."

Once complete, *Mississippi* will proceed with sea trials. When contractual requirements are met and the Navy Board of Inspection and Survey is satisfied, she will be delivered to the Navy. Her commissioning is scheduled to take place in June, in Pascagoula, Miss.

"Today is a day to celebrate," commented Matt Mulherin, President of Newport News Shipbuilding, Electric Boat's partner in building *Mississippi*. "Tomorrow we go back to work and back to building history."

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