

# TWO

## Commissionings Make

# 2010

### a Banner Year

The commissioning of USS *New Mexico* (SSN-779) in late March and USS *Missouri* (SSN-780) at the end of July made 2010 only the second year since 1996 that the Navy has commissioned two submarines of the same class.

“We will commission two submarines this year because the Navy and its industrial partners are delivering boats ahead of schedule,” said Rear Adm. William Hilarides, the former Program Executive Officer for Submarines. *New Mexico* was delivered seven months earlier than the contract delivery date, while *Missouri* was delivered in only 65 months, nine months ahead of the contract delivery date.

The U.S. Navy welcomed the newest member of the state-of-the-art *Virginia* class, USS *New Mexico* (SSN-779), in a March 27, 2010, commissioning ceremony at Norfolk Naval Station in Norfolk, Va. Among the roughly 3,000 guests invited to witness the commissioning were senior Navy officials, national and state legislators, and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who owns a ranch near Taos, N.M.

Director of Naval Reactors Adm. Kirkland Donald delivered the principal address. Cindy Giambastiani, the submarine’s sponsor and wife of retired Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice Chairman Adm. Edmund Giambastiani, gave the time-honored order, “Officers and crew of *New Mexico*, man our ship, and bring her to life!” The crew then ran aboard, marking the sub’s official entry into active service.

*New Mexico* Commanding Officer Cmdr. Mark A. Prokopius leads a crew of approximately 134 officers and enlisted personnel. Current and future crewmembers will continue to honor the ship’s Spanish motto, “Defendemos Nuestra Tierra” (We Defend Our Land), for the next 30 years. In June, the submarine proceeded to her homeport at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Conn.

*New Mexico* was built under a unique partnership between Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding and General Dynamics

“The *Virginia* program,” Hilarides added, “is fulfilling its primary requirements of getting this needed capability to the fleet as soon as possible and is on track to meeting our stated goal of reducing its construction span to 60 months by fiscal year 2012.”

*New Mexico*, the sixth submarine of the *Virginia* class, and *Missouri*, the seventh, joined the fleet with all the pomp and spectacle of traditional commissioning ceremonies. Distinguished speakers spoke words of welcome, crewmembers ceremonially boarded the new ships, and the latest *Virginias* embarked on their service lives with well wishes from citizens of their namesake states and the appreciation of the American people as a whole.



Photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Christian Martínez

Electric Boat. Under that partnership, the two yards are now scheduled to build at least 12 more *Virginia*-class submarines for the Navy. *New Mexico* is the third boat to be delivered by Northrop Grumman’s Newport News shipyard.

The sub’s keel was authenticated in April 2008, followed by a christening in December. It took 1,300 shipbuilders over five years to build her. After completing her sea trials in the fall of 2009, she was delivered to the Navy in December, four months ahead of schedule—and with one million fewer man-hours than her predecessor from Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding, USS *North Carolina*. After two sets of sea trials, *New Mexico* required no major repairs or alterations.

“We’re all excited,” said Kay Weisskopf, a rigging general foreman with more than three decades at Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding’s Newport News shipyard, which built the sub. “Any time we finish a quality product ahead of schedule and with [reduced man-hours], that’s a great thing to be proud of.”

Although the Newport News shipyard built its first submersible roughly a century ago, its role as a major submarine builder began 50 years ago, when it launched the *Robert E. Lee* (SSBN-601), America’s fourth strategic ballistic missile submarine. “That officially began our long partnership with the United States Navy’s submarine program,” Matt



Photo by John Whalen, NGSB



Photo by Alan Baribeau

Mulherin, general manager of the Newport News shipyard, said at the commissioning, “Building submarines is an important part of our tradition at Newport News.”

Thanks to residents of the “Land of Enchantment,” reminders of *New Mexico’s* ties to the 47th state appear throughout the boat. Bunk curtains with an Aztec print were made in the city of Las Cruces, N.M. Albuquerque resident Emilee Sena designed the ship’s crest in 2007, placing representations of a New Mexico sunset, the Sandia Mountains, and the Zia symbol from the state’s flag around a drawing of the submarine.

“I was a senior in high school and never thought of the importance and the impact my painting would have,” said Sena. “I am proud of being part of this submarine and the life of the Sailors on board who defend our country.”

“Even though we’re a long way away in New Mexico, and we’ll never get the sub up the Rio Grande to visit us, this is very important to us, and we’re very happy,” noted Dick Brown, chairman of the *New Mexico* commissioning committee. “It’s just a great honor for the state of New Mexico.”

Even the ship’s galley has a New Mexico flare. It is affectionately known as “La Posta,” after a famous 70-year-old restaurant in Mesilla, N.M., which is currently owned by retired Navy Capt. Tom Hutchinson. La Posta won the honor 18 months ago in a statewide competition with other restaurants.

“We’ve had several mess specialists visit New Mexico and work side by side to learn our recipes,” said Hutchinson. “They’re underway six to nine months at a time. Every other week, they’ll have La Posta night, and they’ll prepare

a lot of our dishes.” In addition to donating recipes, La Posta presented the ship with a \$1,200 check from the sale of *New Mexico* items in the restaurant’s gift shop.

The only other ship named after the state was a battleship (BB-40) that was in service



Photo by John Whalen, NGSB

(Opposite) Sailors assigned to USS *New Mexico* (SSN-779) run to the *Virginia*-class attack submarine after getting the order to “bring the ship to life” during a commissioning ceremony. (Top left) Director of Naval Reactors, Adm. Kirkland Donald delivers the ceremony’s principal address. (Top right) *New Mexico* ready for her commissioning ceremony at Naval Station Norfolk on March 27, 2010. USS *George H.W. Bush* (CVN-77) can be seen in the background. (Above) Cindy Giambastiani, the wife of Adm. Edmund Giambastiani, USN (ret.), served as ship’s sponsor and gave the traditional order to “man our ship and bring her to life.”

from 1918 to 1946. Battleship *New Mexico* earned six battle stars in World War II service and provided shore bombardment support for landings in the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, and at Guam, Tinian, Saipan, the Philippines, and Okinawa.

Today’s *New Mexico* carries some mementos from her predecessor. In 1917, the New Mexico state Senate commissioned Tiffany & Co. to make a 56-piece sterling silver set for the battleship’s wardroom. After BB-40 was decommissioned, the Navy returned the set to the state. It is now in the collection of the New Mexico State History Museum at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe, and the museum has loaned the submarine two dessert plates, each engraved with a scene from the state.

The sixth member of the *Virginia* class, *New Mexico* is 377 feet long, displaces 7,800 tons and is armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles and MK-48 torpedoes. She can dive to a depth in excess of 800 feet and operate at speeds in excess of 25 knots while submerged.

Like other members of her class, *New Mexico* is designed to dominate both littoral and deep water and conduct special operations; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; irregular warfare; and mine warfare missions. She is the first of her class to go into commission fully certified in anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface ship warfare and strike. Her intrinsic stealth, endurance, firepower, and sensor capabilities enable her to directly support five of the six core capabilities of the Maritime Strategy: sea control, power projection, forward presence, maritime security, and deterrence.

The Next  
**MIGHTY  
 MO**  
 Joins the Fleet

Under sunny skies, nearly 3,000 invited guests witnessed the commissioning of USS *Missouri* (SSN-780) July 31 at Naval Submarine Base New London, in Groton, Conn. *Missouri* is the newest boat of the *Virginia* class and the fourth American warship to bear the name of the “Show Me State.” Becky Gates, the submarine’s sponsor and wife of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, gave the traditional first order, “Man our ship, and bring her to life.”

*Missouri* had aced her Alpha and Beta sea trials earlier in July. Departing Groton July 2 for her Alpha trails, her crew evaluated the ship’s capabilities through several different testing evolutions, including diving to test depth, conducting an emergency surfacing and testing the propulsion plant. The submarine returned to Groton July 4 ready to begin her Bravo sea trials the following day.

“*Missouri* and her crew lived up to our highest expectations,” said Capt. Michael Jabaley, program manager for the *Virginia* class. “Cmdr. [Timothy A.] Rexrode and his team performed flawlessly and were constantly ahead of schedule. The material condition of the ship was outstanding, a testament to the quality of its construction, allowing us to perform a rapid turnaround and get the ship back out on Bravo trials the next day.”



Photo by Olivia Logan

The keynote speaker at *Missouri*’s commissioning, Rep. Ike Skelton of Missouri, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said of the ship, “There is none better. This amazing submarine and the other submarines of this class are vital to our national security.” Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead also spoke at the ceremony.

The building of *Missouri* commenced in December 2004. Her keel was authenticated in a Sept. 27, 2008, keel-laying ceremony at Electric Boat’s North Kingstown, R.I., facility. Becky Gates christened the boat by breaking the traditional champagne bottle against her sail in a late-morning ceremony at Electric Boat’s Groton Shipyard Dec. 5, 2009. On April 16, 2010, the submarine’s “In Service Day,” crew members moved aboard, brought her systems to life, and began general day-to-day operations in preparation for the usual pre-commissioning sea trials and work-ups.

Cmdr. Rexrode, *Missouri*’s commanding officer, who hails from Spencer, W. Va, leads a crew of approximately 134 officers and enlisted men. They include five native Missourians: Petty Officer 1st Class John M. Tyhurst, of Joplin; Seaman Benjamin A. Bowers, of Green Ridge; Lt. Patrick Donovan, of Springfield; Petty Officer 2nd



Photo by John Narewski



Photo by Olivia Logan



Photo courtesy of Bob O'Neill

(Left) Cmdr. Timothy Rexrode, *Missouri's* commanding officer, fields questions from the media in the control room of the submarine during Media Day, two days before the commissioning ceremony. (Right) Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Rick West visits *Missouri* the day before her commissioning to award 15 Sailors the Dolphin insignia, signifying qualification in submarines.

Class Nicholas C. Koblick, of St. Louis; and Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan J. Thruston, of Jefferson City.

Citizens of Missouri played a central role in the USS *Missouri* Commissioning Committee, an IRS-designated 501(c)3 nonprofit charity created to increase awareness of the submarine's commissioning. In partnership with Grantham University, the Commissioning Committee presented a four-year full scholarship to one of the "plank owners" in *Missouri's* commissioning crew.

Retired Rear Adm. Karen Harmeyer, a member of Grantham University's Board of Directors, presented the scholarship to Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph Amick during

the commanding officer's reception hosted by the committee in Mystic, Conn., the evening before the ceremony.

The scholarship, which can be used to earn an undergraduate or graduate degree at Grantham, covers tuition, required textbooks and software, and a laptop computer. "This is a perpetual scholarship," said Harmeyer. "There will always be one scholarship available to a member of USS *Missouri's* crew. What better way to grow our leaders of tomorrow."

Interestingly, each of the previous American warships that bore the name *Missouri* has been one of the most advanced and powerful fighting ships of its time. The first, a frigate equipped with paddle

wheels, helped usher in the age of the steam propulsion for warships. The second was one of the revolutionary ironclads built by the Confederacy during the Civil War. The third was BB-63, one of the famous *Iowa*-class fast battleships. It was on the deck of the third *Missouri* that Fleet Adm. Chester Nimitz, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and other senior U.S. and Allied officers gathered on Sept. 2, 1945, to accept the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire, bringing World War II to an end.

The Navy's newest attack submarine, a powerful "battleship" of today's fleet and a worthy successor to her famous forebear, is currently homeported at Groton.

(Opposite, top) Sailors march toward *Missouri's* brow to set the first watch, formally beginning her life as a commissioned ship. (Opposite, bottom) The crew of USS *Missouri* (SSN-780) man the rails and bring the ship to life following commissioning at Naval Submarine Base Groton. (Below) *Missouri* Congressman Ike Skelton, principal speaker of the commissioning, addresses the crowd. On stage with him are (from left to right) Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, Connecticut Congressman Joe Courtney, Missouri Governor Jay W. Nixon, Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell, *Missouri* Commanding Officer Cmdr. Timothy A. Rexrode, ship sponsor Mrs. Becky Gates, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead, and Commander, Submarine Forces, Vice Adm. John J. Donnelly.



Photo by Olivia Logan