



Photo by Jim Sillman



Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Peter Lawlor

## Magnolia State Plays Host as USS *Mississippi* Joins the Fleet

The people of Mississippi, famous for their hospitality, welcomed the commissioning of their state's namesake submarine in a morning ceremony at the Port of Pascagoula June 2. More than 7,500 people braved tropical humidity with bright sun and temperatures in the mid-80s to see USS *Mississippi* (SSN 782) join the fleet. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus served as the keynote speaker, while *Mississippi's* sponsor, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Ship Programs Allison Stiller, gave the traditional order, "Man our ship, and bring her to life!"

"The Submarine Force and the fleet have eagerly anticipated this day," said Rear Adm. David Johnson, program executive officer for submarines. "USS *Mississippi* provides the Navy with unique and unparalleled capabilities and joins the fleet at a time when submarines are being called upon to perform vital national security tasking around the globe."

Built by General Dynamics Electric Boat in partnership with Huntington Ingalls Industries' Newport News Shipbuilding,

*Mississippi* was delivered in just over 62 months, the fastest yet for a *Virginia*-class submarine. Construction began in February 2007; the keel was laid on June 9, 2010; and the ship was christened on Dec. 3, 2011. The Navy accepted delivery in early May, 12 months early and \$60 million below contract.

*Mississippi* is the fifth Navy ship, and the first submarine, to be named in honor of the Magnolia State. The most recent USS *Mississippi* was a nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser (CGN 40) that was in service from August 1978 to July 1997.

Strong local support was a significant factor in the Secretary of the Navy's decision to name a submarine after the Magnolia State. Enthusiasm continued to grow as the ship was built, with Mississippi news media featuring stories on her progress and interviews with crewmembers and others involved in the process.

As *Mississippi* neared completion, local submarine veterans lobbied hard for the Navy to send her down to be commissioned in one of the state's Gulf Coast ports. Capt.

John McGrath, her commanding officer, made two trips to the state to help scope out potential commissioning sites. Gulfport was the first venue chosen, but the ceremony was shifted to Pascagoula when it proved difficult to get the facilities at Gulfport dredged to sufficient depth in time for the event.

Mabus, a native Mississippian and former governor of the state, spoke of his enthusiasm for *Mississippi's* commissioning. "I am so glad to be home to commission the wonderfully named *Mississippi*," said Mabus. "When you look at *Mississippi*, you know that American exceptionalism, to paraphrase Mississippian William Faulkner, will not only survive, it will prevail."

Also on hand to congratulate *Mississippi* were Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert and Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant, both of whom lauded the ship's captain and crew.

"Along with ships that are well built and resilient, we must have bold and innovative leaders such as Captain McGrath," said Adm. Greenert. "Most importantly, we need

(Opposite, left) Sailors of USS *Mississippi* (SSN 782) stand at attention aboard their newly commissioned ship. (Opposite, right) Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert speaks at the commissioning ceremony. (Below, left) Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus delivers the keynote speech. (Below, right) *Mississippi* Sailors run to man the ninth *Virginia*-class attack submarine and bring her to life.



Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class W.B. Swoboda



Photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Peter Lawlor

crews that are confident and proficient in our craft. This superb crew has been well trained, and they are ready for this magnificent warship.”

Gov. Bryant said that *Mississippi* and her Sailors reflect the determination and patriotism of the state. “This great warship reflects the personality and resilience of all Mississippians,” he said. “How proud we might be to also know that our state motto “Virtute et Armis” will go with it—By Valor and Arms... Peace through strength! Let the world know, from this moment on, *Mississippi* sails for freedom.”

After the commissioning, *Mississippi* departed Pascagoula June 4, returning to her homeport of Groton, Conn., where she will begin her post-shakedown availability this fall.

Other upcoming major submarine acquisition milestones in 2012 include the start of construction on Pre-Commissioning Unit (PCU) *Indiana* (SSN 789) and the christening of PCU *Minnesota* (SSN 783), both planned for this fall.

## A Hometown Boy's Return to Mississippi's Capital



Photo by Brian Leshak

One of the most notable events leading up to *Mississippi's* commissioning was a late-March visit to Jackson, Mississippi's state capital, by a native son, Rear Adm. (sel.) Michael Jabaley, the *Virginia*-class program manager. Jabaley was in town as part of the 50-50 Program, a new outreach program featuring visits by flag officers and senior Navy civilians to engage local leaders in business, government, education, non-profit organizations, and the media.

“The Navy belongs to the people of Jackson just as much as to those who live along the ocean,” said Jabaley. “We need to continue to share the great things our Navy does and foster a better understanding of the Navy's role in protecting our country and maintaining freedom of the seas.”

At Jackson State University, Jabaley received briefings on ship-related research efforts funded by the Office of Naval Research. He also returned to Jackson's Murrah High School, from which he graduated in 1980.

On March 29, he had the rare honor for a serving naval officer of addressing a joint session of the Mississippi State Legislature (*above*), telling the assembled lawmakers about the Navy's mission and the goals of the service's science, technology, engineering and mathematics initiatives.

State Sen. Brice Wiggins, who chairs the Mississippi Senate's Ports and Marine Resources Committee, presented Jabaley, Pascagoula Mayor Robbie Maxwell, and *Mississippi* Commissioning Committee Chairman Jerry St. Pé, with a Senate resolution saluting the upcoming commissioning.