Austal USA Launches First Steel Ship, the Future USNS Billy Frank



MOBILE, Ala. –Austal USA successfully launched the company's first steel ship, the future USNS Billy Frank Jr. (T-ATS 11), on June 14. Named after a native American Korean War veteran who, as an activist, fought for justice and environmental preservation in the Northwest United States, Billy Frank Jr. is a Navy Towing, Salvage and Rescue Ship – one of 3 under construction at Austal USA and the first steel product of the company's state-of-the-art automated steel panel line.

"It was amazing to see the flawless rollout of our first steel ship," said Harley Combs, vice president of surface ship programs. "The completion of this milestone is the result of the hard work and dedication of our talented workforce. I am so proud of all they have accomplished."

At 3,100 metric tons, T-ATS 11 is the heaviest ship Austal USA has launched to date. The launch was executed using the proven

process used to launch most of the 32 Navy ships the company has built and delivered to the Navy over the last 15 years.

T-ATS will provide ocean-going towing, salvage and rescue capabilities to support fleet operations. T-ATS will be a multi-mission common hull platform capable of towing U.S. Navy ships and will have 6,000 square feet of deck space for embarked systems. The large, unobstructed deck allows for the embarkation of a variety of stand-alone and interchangeable systems. The T-ATS platform will combine the capabilities of the retiring Rescue and Salvage Ship (T-ARS 50) and Fleet Ocean Tug (T-ATF 166) platforms. T-ATS will be able to support current missions including towing, salvage, rescue, oil spill response, humanitarian assistance, and wide-area search and surveillance. The platform also enables future rapid capability initiatives such as supporting modular payloads with hotel services and appropriate interfaces.

With the ship over 85 percent complete at the time of launch, the future USNS Billy Frank Jr. will now prepare for her next major milestone, engine light off, as she gets ready for sea trials and delivery.