Ceremony Culminates 12 Months of Centennial Activities

DAHLGREN, Va. – Navy and congressional leaders joined Naval Surface Warfare Center Dahlgren Division (NSWCDD) personnel to celebrate a centennial of technological innovation that revolutionized surface warfare at a grand finale ceremony here, Oct. 19.

Over the past year of centennial activities – from a concert and picnics to podcasts and a rocket contest – government civilians, defense contractors, and military personnel working at NSWCDD travelled down memory lane leading up to the 100-year mark this month.

“The first shot of the new base was fired from a 7-inch, 45-caliber, tractor-mounted gun, just like the one over there,” said Capt. Godfrey “Gus” Weekes, NSWCDD commanding officer, while pointing to the century-old gun on display.

Since that shot was fired on Oct. 16, 1918, Dahlgren scientists and engineers rose to the occasion time and again to provide the Navy with innovative solutions based on their technical capability to integrate sensors, weapons, and associated weapon and combat systems into surface ships and vehicles.

“The men and women of Dahlgren are dedicated to the mission and have always answered the bell,” Weekes told the audience which included 65 distinguished visitors. “We answered the bell in 1918 and we’re answering the bell today. Just like during the Cold War or the Korean War, we’re up against near peer or peer threats. The need for Dahlgren is never more apparent.”

Today, NSWCDD leads in the research and delivery of technological solutions that enable warfighters to counter

emerging threats. The command leverages core naval warfare systems development and integration capabilities in electric weapons such as the electromagnetic railgun and high-energy lasers, mission engineering and analysis, and cyber warfare engineering.

“I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to recognize our workers who have given so much to this institution,” said Weekes, recounting that he has presented scores of certificates recognizing Navy civilians for 30 and 35 plus years of federal service. “I’ve been privileged to recognized employees who were pioneers in GPS, to those who pioneered Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense and the Standard Missile as well as any advanced weaponry which the U.S. Navy is now in the process of realizing or advancing.”

As participants celebrated the division’s impact upon the Navy and nation, a time capsule – 10 105 mm shells surrounding a 16-inch shell – was unveiled and all in attendance had the opportunity to write notes and share their thoughts with future generations.

The writers conveyed how they personally met the challenges of our time and solved them through innovative collaboration, placing their letters inside the capsule that will be displayed on base. Dahlgren personnel can write notes to be placed inside the capsule until the end of 2018 when it will be sealed and opened on Oct. 16, 2068, at the command’s 150th anniversary.

“Think about the contributions Dahlgren has made over the past 100 years,” said John Fiore, NSWCDD technical director. “We have over 500 patents to our name thanks to the men and women here who have done that work. When the Navy struggles with challenges, it is often that they come to Dahlgren to ask what they should be doing, what they should be thinking about, what we should be working on. Our innovations that have become programs of record are changing the face of warfare systems

today.”

Since June 1918, when U.S. President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation to acquire nearly one thousand acres to create the original ordnance proving ground during World War I, through today, Dahlgren has served as the center for the scientific research and development that led to hundreds of patents, innovations, and scientific breakthroughs for the U.S. Navy. Dahlgren, today, hosts nine different commands with an expansive array of scientific research and development, and is one of the hubs of naval weapons and weapon system development nationwide.

“There is no technical director who does not appreciate what has happened in the past but let’s think about where we are headed in the future – the kinds of systems and solutions the Navy needs in the future,” said Fiore, speaking to a crowd of more than 700 people – government employees, military personnel, defense contractors and visitors, including former NSWCDD technical directors and commanding officers.

“As I thought about that, I thought about our values. Values that we hold dear at Dahlgren – integrity, courage, imagination, esprit de corps, and urgency. We here overcome change, and we overcome the things we need to do to in order to make a difference in warfare systems throughout the Navy, and that takes courage. The value that I’m the proudest about is urgency, and I think Dahlgren exemplifies that. We’ve been talking urgency and that’s been a core value of Dahlgren for years.

“Recently, I’ve had the privilege of hearing the secretary of the Navy talk. He signs his name, ‘urgently, Richard Spencer’ – understanding that we live in a time when what we do is urgent. If we do not do what we do in developing warfare systems, we’re not enabling our Sailors and Marines to go out and do their mission effectively and come home safe to their families and loved ones – that’s critical.”

Dahlgren’s enduring success in research, development, test, and evaluation stems from its ability to handle complex mathematics and engineering associated with ballistic weapons and projectiles. Moreover, the command’s civilian scientists and engineers always had the capability to test their ideas in collaboration with military personnel on base to produce proven technological solutions.

“This is an installation where a great deal of innovation and collaboration take place,” said Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., describing Dahlgren’s development of technologies revolutionizing military capabilities over the past 100 years. “We’re going to need that same level of collaboration, cutting edge experimentation as we move forward for the next 100 years, not only to protect our country but to make sure that we’re able to match the innovation and have the kind of protections that will keep this nation strong, safe and free. So, for all you’ve done for the last 100 years, I say thank you.”

Warner cited Dahlgren’s role in the development of long guns for World War II followed by the development of Naval warfare systems, the super computer (Naval Ordnance Research Calculator) during the 1950s, the Naval Space Surveillance Center in the wake of Sputnik, GPS technology, and technological advancements impacting ballistic missile systems.

“How are we going to do more with the resources that we have than our adversaries do with the resources that they have?” U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., asked the audience. “How are we going to do more with our unit of currency than they do with their unit of currency?”

The congressman – focusing on technological solutions required to meet complex threats to U.S. national security – answered his questions.

“We’re not going to have the ability to out-resource people anymore,” said Wittman. “Today, it’s about the creation and innovation that goes into doing more with what we have than anybody around the world. We have done that, we can do that, and we will continue to do that to make sure that our nation’s Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Army and indeed our Coast Guard, continue to be the greatest the world has ever known because we have the best and brightest men and women serving our nation both in uniform and here at the base in making sure that we have what we need to defend our nation’s interest. And you will do it better than anybody else in more creative and innovative ways than anybody else, that’s what has made Dahlgren great in the first 100 years and that’s what will make it great in the next century.”

At one point in the ceremony, Virginia State Sen. Richard Stuart and Virginia Delegate Margaret Ransone read and presented the Virginia General Assembly Resolution proclaiming Oct. 16 as Dahlgren Day.

“NSWC Dahlgren Division is the largest employer in central Virginia and the Northern Neck with over 8,000 civilian and military and contract personnel,” said Stuart. “The workforce – composed of 14 counties in Virginia and five counties in Maryland – contributes more than $6.5 billion to the local economy. That is incredible to a boy who grew up in the small town of Montross and understands how important Dahlgren is to this entire region. For your economic activity, for your amazing technological advancements, and for your invaluable contributions to modern warfare systems, we thank you.”

As the U.S. Navy band played “Stars and Stripes Forever” to conclude the ceremony, people from the audience began making their way up for a closer look at the time capsule. They took pictures and in response to the invitation to share their thoughts with future generations – wrote letters to be placed in the capsule.