

HII Christens Guided Missile Destroyer George M. Neal (DDG 131)



PASCAGOULA, Miss. – HII christened the future USS George M. Neal (DDG 131), the fourth Flight III Arleigh Burke-class destroyer to be built at the company's Ingalls Shipbuilding division.

The ship is named for Aviation Machinist's Mate Third Class George M. Neal, a Korean War veteran and Navy Cross recipient. In 1951, Neal's helicopter crashed during a rescue attempt in the North Korean mountains. He evaded enemy forces for nine days before being captured and held as a prisoner of war for two and a half years. He was released and returned to the United States in 1952 along with more than 320 fellow prisoners of war.

Performing the duties of the under secretary of the Navy, William Toti delivered the keynote address. "The future USS George M. Neal honors a legacy of extraordinary courage and sacrifice," Toti said. "As we christen this ship, we mark another step toward building the Navy our nation needs. Flight III destroyers are critical to our nation's security, and we are proud to accept each one built by the skilled workforce at Ingalls."

Toti's remarks highlighted the deep connection between the Navy's mission and the dedicated Americans who design and build the ships that carry it forward. Building on that message, HII President and CEO Chris Kastner underscored the unique skill and commitment of the Ingalls Shipbuilding team.

"As a company, HII does a lot of amazing things, but only people – human beings – build ships. They build ships with their hands, their minds and toughness. The people of Ingalls Shipbuilding are among the finest craftsmen and craftswomen on the face of the Earth," Kastner said. "When she is delivered, DDG 131 will be the most powerful surface combatant in the world. She will be ready. She'll be ready because the United States of America makes a conscious choice, generation after generation for now 250 years, to invest in U.S. Navy ships, built by Americans, in America."

The ship's sponsor and daughter of the namesake, Kelley Neal Gray, performed the traditional bottle-breaking ceremony against the bow to formally christen DDG 131. In her remarks, she honored her father's legacy and expressed gratitude to those who built the ship.

"On behalf of my family, I express my deepest gratitude to the United States Navy, to the incredible honor, for this magnificent destroyer after my father, George Milton Neal," Gray said. "We are forever grateful that his life of service, sacrifice and courage will be remembered through a ship that will one day defend our nation and carry his legacy throughout

the world.”

U.S. Rep. Mike Ezell, representing Mississippi’s 4th District, also addressed ceremony attendees.

“Today’s christening of the future USS George M. Neal is a proud moment for Mississippi and our nation,” Ezell said. “George M. Neal’s courage, sacrifice, and service represent the very best of America, and it is fitting that this warship will carry his legacy for generations to come. I’m grateful to the hardworking men and women of Ingalls Shipbuilding whose craftsmanship strengthens our Navy, supports our Gulf Coast economy, and helps keep our nation safe.”

To date, Ingalls has delivered 36 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, including the first Flight III, USS Jack H. Lucas (DDG 125), and Ted Stevens (DDG 128). Flight III destroyers currently under construction include Jeremiah Denton (DDG 129), George M. Neal (DDG 131), Sam Nunn (DDG 133), Thad Cochran (DDG 135), and John F. Lehman (DDG 137). Ships in pre-planning include Telesforo Trinidad (DDG 139), Ernest E. Evans (DDG 141), Charles French (DDG 142), Richard J. Danzig (DDG 143), Intrepid (DDG 145), Robert Kerrey (DDG 146), and Ray Mabus (DDG 147).

Flight III Arleigh Burke-class destroyers represent the next generation of surface combatants and incorporate a number of design modifications that collectively provide significantly enhanced capability. Upgrades include the AN/SPY-6(V)1 Air and Missile Defense Radar (AMDR) and the Aegis Baseline 10 Combat System required to keep pace with the threats well into the 21st century.

Video of the ceremony, along with additional information on DDG 131 and the Arleigh Burke-class program, is available at www.hii.com/events/DDG131.