Huntington Ingalls Industries Christens Destroyer Frank E. Petersen Jr.

PASCAGOULA, Miss. – Huntington Ingalls Industries' Ingalls Shipbuilding division christened the guided-missile destroyer Frank E. Petersen Jr. (DDG 121) Oct. 6 with approximately 900 guests in attendance, the company announced in a release. The ship is the 71st in the Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) class of destroyers and the 33rd built by Ingalls.

Alfred Gray, a retired general and former commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, was the keynote speaker.

"We're here to honor a great American, a great ship and a great shipyard as well," Gray said. "Frank is the person who really gave all of the people that you've met here today their inspiration to go forward, to be tough about everything, to be disciplined and to never forget that above all, you're a Marine warrior. It is that kind of spirit and that kind of belief that we honor today by naming this great ship Frank E. Petersen Jr."

DDG 121 honors Frank Emmanuel Petersen Jr., who was the Marine Corps' first African-American aviator and the service's first African-American general. After entering the Naval Aviation Cadet Program in 1950, Petersen would go on to fly more than 350 combat missions throughout the Korean and Vietnam wars.

"We are here to christen this ship to the life and service of a true pioneer in the Navy and Marine Corps, Frank Petersen," said Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert Neller. "The USS Petersen is now a reality, and it is a ship that will be in service to our nation for decades to come. DDGs play a vital role, not only in the Navy and defense of the United States, but for our allies around the world. To the shipbuilders, we

really appreciate your efforts, skill, professionalism and hard work in building this ship. Thank you so much for that."

DDG 121 is co-sponsored by Alicia Petersen, widow of the ship's namesake, and D'Arcy Neller, wife of Gen. Neller. Together, Petersen and Neller officially christened the ship by successfully breaking two bottles of sparkling wine across its bow. Petersen spoke on behalf of both sponsors at today's ceremony.

"Our family has been in Pascagoula for about two days now, and the love and friendship that we have felt from everyone has been so contagious," Petersen said. "We believe that you are our family now and feel so happy that Frank's ship is here in your home being built under the wonderful leadership of Ingalls. Ingalls not only does great work, but they take great pride in its ownership."

Over the course of 30 years, Ingalls has built and delivered 30 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. The shipyard currently has five DDGs under construction, including Jack H. Lucas (DDG 125), the first Flight III ship, which started fabrication in May. Ingalls was recently awarded a $5.1 billion multi-year procurement contract to build six more destroyers.

"All Ingalls ships are built for men and women like General Petersen with one goal in mind: to protect the brave Americans who defend our freedom, and Frank E. Petersen Jr., the ship, will be no exception," said Ingalls Shipbuilding President Brian Cuccias.