

# Keel Laid for Future USNS Thurgood Marshall



San Diego, Calif. – USNS Thurgood Marshall (T-AO 211) Keel Laying Ceremony.

By Team Ships Strategic Operations, Dec. 5, 2024

SAN DIEGO – The keel for the future USNS Thurgood Marshall (T-AO 211), a John Lewis-class Replenishment Oiler, was laid during a ceremony on Dec 5 at General Dynamics (GD) NASSCO.

The ship's namesake, former Justice Thurgood Marshall, was the first African American justice to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. As an Associate Justice for nearly 25 years, Marshall fought for affirmative action, opposed the death penalty, and supported a woman's right to choose. Prior to becoming a Justice, Marshall was a civil rights lawyer, who

argued cases against racial disparity. Marshall argued a variety of civil and human rights cases including; *Smith v. Allwright*, which found that states could not exclude Black voters from primaries; *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which struck down race-based restrictive housing covenants; and *Brown V. Board of Education* where the Supreme Court ruled that racially segregating children in public schools was unconstitutional.

“Thurgood Marshall’s legacy is one of unwavering courage, intellectual brilliance, and an unyielding commitment to justice,” said Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro. “His efforts helped to shape a more equitable society—and the future USNS Thurgood Marshall will carry that legacy forward.”

Each keel laying ceremony represents the joining together of the ship’s modular components at land level. During the ceremony, the keel will be authenticated by the ship’s sponsors welding their initials into the keel plate. The ship’s sponsors are Justice Marshall’s granddaughters, Cecilla L. Marshall and Melonie Tibbs, and his granddaughter-in-law, Alissa Kamens Marshall.

“USNS Thurgood Marshall honors the legacy of an extraordinary civil and human rights leader who is an example of perseverance to all,” said John Lighthammer, Program Executive Office, Ships (PEO Ships) program manager for Auxiliary and Special Mission Ships. “This keel laying marks the first of many significant milestones for this ship and we will work with a sense of urgency to deliver this ship to the Fleet.”

John Lewis-class ships (T-AOs) are operated by Military Sealift Command and feature substantial volume for oil; significant dry cargo capacity; and aviation capability. T-AOs provide additional capacity to the Navy’s Combat Logistics Force and are a cornerstone of the Navy’s fuel delivery system.

PEO Ships, one of the Department of Defense's largest acquisition organizations, is responsible for executing the development and procurement of all destroyers, amphibious ships and craft, and auxiliary ships, including special mission ships, sealift ships and support ships.