Navy to Christen Guided-Missile Destroyer Frank E. Petersen Jr.

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will christen the newest guided-missile destroyer, the future USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. (DDG 121) Oct. 6 at Huntington Ingalls Industries shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi, the Defense Department said in an Oct. 4 release.

The future USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. is the first ship named in honor of Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Frank E. Petersen Jr., the first African-American Marine Corps aviator and the first African-American Marine Corps officer promoted to brigadier general. When he retired in 1988 after 38 years of service, he was, by date of designation, the senior-ranking aviator in the Marine Corps and the U.S. Navy.

At the ceremony, the principal speaker will be Gen. Alfred Gray, 29th commandant of the Marine Corps. D'Arcy Neller, wife of Gen. Robert Neller, commandant of the Marine Corps, and Dr. Alicia J. Petersen, widow of Frank E. Petersen Jr., will serve as ship's sponsors. In a time-honored Navy tradition, the two sponsors will christen the ship by breaking a bottle of sparkling wine across the bow.

"The future USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. will serve for decades as a reminder of Lt. Gen. Petersen's service to our nation and Navy and Marine Corps team," said Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer. "This ceremony honors not only Petersen's service but also the service of our nation's industrial partners, who, for centuries, have helped make our Navy the greatest in the world."

The future Frank E. Petersen Jr. will be the 71st Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, and is the fifth of 21 ships currently

under contract for the DDG 51 program. The ship will be configured as a Flight IIA destroyer, which enables power projection, forward presence, and escort operations at sea in support of low-intensity conflict/coastal and littoral offshore warfare, as well as open ocean conflict.