



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 29, 2023

Historic christening of “USNS Navajo” Navy ship honors the service of Navajo Veterans and the Navajo Code Talkers



PHOTO: Delegate Dr. Andy Nez, Delegate Shawna Ann Claw, and Delegate Danny Simpson stand before the newly christened USNS Navajo at the Bollinger Shipyard in Houma, LA.

HOUMA, LA. – 25th Navajo Nation Council members joined U.S. Navy officials and Navajo veterans to celebrate the historic christening of the USNS Navajo, a new class of rescue, towing, and salvage ships that honors the service of Navajo Veterans and the Navajo Nation Code Talkers, during a special ceremony held on Aug. 26 at the Bollinger Shipyard in Houma, LA.

“The presence of the 25th Navajo Nation Council at this event is fitting. We began the day with the Nitsa’hakees of the former members of the Navajo Nation Council. Honorable Danny Simpson and I represent our families that have active-duty soldiers,” said Council Delegate Shawna Ann Claw (Chinle). “When the event concluded, Honorable Dr. Andy Nez and I joined former Navajo Nation Speaker Lorenzo Bates in offering corn pollen to bless the vessel for a safe and productive life. This was a historic achievement for the Navajo Nation.”

Delegate Claw said that ship sponsor Jocelyn Billy-Upshaw comes from her community, and that she wanted to show her gratitude for the sponsor of the USNS Navajo.

The USNS Navajo (T-ATS 6) combines two classes of ships into one that is more capable for rescue missions than any other class of salvage ship in the Navy.

Rear Admiral Jeffrey Spivey, Deputy Commander Military Sealift Command, said the Navajo is no stranger to the Navy.

Historically, five other ships have been named after the Navajo Nation. The first Navajo ship, the USS Navajo (AT-52), came into service in 1908 and served until 1937. The USS Navajo III served from 1917 to 1919. The Navajo (AT-64) served from 1940 to 1943. The Navajo (ATR-138) served from 1945-1962, and most recently the USNS Navajo (T-ATF-169) served from 1980 to 2016.

"It's a great testimony to the commitment from the U.S. Navy and the Military Sealift Command for this ship to bear the Navajo name," Spivey said. "This christening ceremony is a public display to tell the world that this ship has come to life."

The process for naming the ship began in 2015 when the Navy notified the 23rd Navajo Nation Council that they were considering naming a ship after the Navajo Nation. 23rd Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lorenzo Bates, who attended the christening ceremony, said his staff worked with the Secretary of the Navy and late U.S. Sen. John McCain to support the naming.

In 2017, Sen. McCain supported the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2018, which included the naming of the new class of ships as the "USNS Navajo."

"We finally got to a point where the Navy said they would name the ship the USNS Navajo," Bates said.

The Navajo Nation Council recommended to the Secretary of the Navy that Jocelyn Billy-Upshaw be the USNS Navajo civilian sponsor. As a sponsor, she undertakes the responsibility to instill the essence of Navajo culture and history to all who will staff the ship.

Billy-Upshaw honored all veterans in her address before christening the ship.

"Today, our veterans, this is for you. I want to say thank you for recognizing the Navajo Veterans. As a civilian sponsor, I look forward to learning more, to telling and sharing our stories, and to ensuring that all our veterans heal," she said. "Today, from this moment forth, we move forward strong. A mighty thank you for this great honor."

Assistant Secretary for the Navy for Energy Installation and the Environment, Meredith Berger, said that the naming recognizes the strength and resilience of the Navajo Nation and its contributions to national defense.

"In World War II, the Navajo Code Talkers deployed with the Marines and used their language to transmit thousands of messages that the enemy never broke," she said. "These acts of valor were decisive in the United States. Our sponsorship is an act of balance to keep our equilibrium and protect the elements that are our foundation."

Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) said that rescue and salvage responsibilities of the USNS Navajo were reciprocal in nature to the service of the Navajo Code Talkers.



PHOTO: As a sponsor, Jocelyn Billy-Upshaw undertakes the responsibility to instill the essence of Navajo culture and history to all who will staff the ship.

“Much like how the Navajo Code Talkers protected the United States during their service in World War II, the USNS Navajo will serve to protect and rescue aircraft carriers and submarines that need emergency assistance. The Navajo Nation and the 25th Navajo Nation Council are honored to have this class of ships named after us,” he said. “The motto for the USNS Navajo is ‘The Vessel of the Protector of Life.’”

Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Lake Valley, Nahodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint), who is a veteran, said that the USNS Navajo will protect and empower the U.S. Navy’s submarine and aircraft fleet.

“We learned that this ship is an enabling vessel which means it is powerful enough to tow an aircraft carrier or recover a submarine. As these ships are important to our national defense, the USNS Navajo is critical in its rescue capacities of submarines and aircraft carriers,” Delegate Simpson said.

The christening ceremony was attended by representatives from the U.S. Navy and Bollinger Shipyard, United Houma Nation Principal Chief Lora Ann Chaisson, Assistant Secretary of Tribal Affairs, U.S. Dept of Transportation, Arlando Teller, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration Executive Director Bobbie Ann Baldwin, Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director Justin Ahasteen, the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council, former Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director Lashawna Tso, and former Navajo Chairman and Navajo Code Talker Peter MacDonald.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council and Speaker Crystalne Curley thank the Secretary of the Navy for honoring the Navajo Nation by naming this new class of ships the USNS Navajo.

###

For the latest news from the Navajo Nation Council, please visit <https://www.navajonationcouncil.org> or search for “Navajo Nation Council” on social media.