

Captain's Log

The crew of 60 that stood proudly to watch our boat sponsor Mrs. Deanie Dempsey's initials being welded into the ceremonial keel plate has now doubled in size to over 120 men. I have assigned approximately 1/3 of those to other operational submarines to gain much-needed experience that they will need to operate SOUTH DAKOTA for the first time underway for sea trials, estimated to take place in March 2018. This date represents a slip of 2 months from the original schedules due to delays in the shipyard construction process. However, in the meantime the crew has been feverishly working on qualifications, and learning everything they can about the thousands of shipboard components and systems.

The crew has also made great strides in our initiative to build our relationship with the local community, and with the State of South Dakota. We recently "adopted" Claude Chester Elementary School, entering into a partnership to support student excellence. Crewmembers have also supported Special Olympics events throughout the state. Many of our top-performing sailors accompanied the Chief of the Boat (COB) and me in July to the State of South Dakota, where we participated in Navy Week in Sioux Falls. Several crewmembers also participated in Military Appreciation Day at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in August, and as I write this, I am looking forward to taking several crewmembers to participate in the Governor's Pheasant Hunt next week. We greatly appreciate the support and hospitality of the people of the State of South Dakota, as well as the hard work by the Commissioning Committee and US Navy Public Affairs in making this possible.

All of these visits have allowed us to inform and educate the public of the Navy, the Submarine Force, and the submarine SOUTH DAKOTA, while also forging a strong relationship with the SOUTH DAKOTA Commissioning Committee, who volunteers to raise funds to help pay for the Commissioning and associated events. The crew's relationship-building has extended back home as well, where our command softball team, Rebekah's Warriors, proudly represented Rebekah Spader, a terminally ill young girl from Sioux Falls SD. We had the honor of being able to visit her and her family during Navy Week, and she was very happy when I bestowed upon her the title "Honorary Submariner." Sadly, Rebekah recently passed away, but not before leaving an indelible impression on all of us. Her courage, laughter, and the love of her family inspired us, and her and her family will always be in our thoughts and prayers.

With over 120 crew members having reported for duty, we are focused ship-wide on training and qualifications necessary to operate and maintain the submarine as the shipyard construction progresses and they turn over portions of the boat to us. I have temporarily assigned many to duty on other completed submarines so that they may gain valuable experience and qualifications which will not only make them more successful, but the SOUTH DAKOTA as a whole. For the junior personnel on their first sea tour, this will also make their transition to at-sea operations following our delivery to the Fleet smoother. Here on SOUTH DAKOTA, nuclear-trained watchstanders will begin standing watch and executing duty section rotation in early November; an important milestone culminating from many months of training and qualifications.

And now for an update on the construction process: in August, the final section of SOUTH DAKOTA was delivered by barge from Huntington Ingalls-Newport News Shipyard in Virginia. Over the course of the next 6-7 months, the five different modules will be welded together to make the hull pressure tight; referred to as “pressure hull complete.” Next will be “float-off” approximately three months later, where the boat to be floated into the water. It will remain waterborne throughout the remainder of the construction process. Shortly after float-off, we will welcome Mrs. Deanie Dempsey back to officially name our boat at the christening ceremony. In approximately July 2017, we will stand up forward watch standing. At this point, the entire watch will be manned on the boat, approximately six months prior to sea trials in 2018.

Hoka Hey! Let’s Roll!

CDR Ron Withrow
Commanding Officer
PCU SOUTH DAKOTA (SSN 790)