

Keel Authenticated for Future USS George M. Neal

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By Team Ships Public Affairs

The keel for the future USS George M. Neal (DDG 131), a Flight III Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, was ceremonially laid at HII's Ingalls Shipbuilding division, December 15.

The ship is named for the late Aviation Machinist's Mate 3rd Class George M. Neal, who was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroic actions during the Korean War. As a volunteer crewman on a helicopter mission, Neal flew deep into the North Korean mountains to attempt the rescue of a Marine aviator. After his rescue helicopter was disabled and crashed, he assisted his helicopter's pilot and rescued Marine aviator in evading enemy forces for nine days before being captured and held as a prisoner of war.

The contemporary keel laying ceremony represents the joining together of a ship's major modular components at the land level and is a significant milestone in the production of a ship. The keel is authenticated with the ship sponsors' initials etched into a ceremonial keel plate that is later incorporated into the ship. Kelley Grey, the daughter of Aviation Machinist's Mate Third Class Neal, participated in the ceremony.

"The late George M. Neal inspired his fellow servicemen, and we are honored to have his daughter with us as we marked this important milestone in the life of the ship," said Capt. Seth

Miller, DDG 51-class program manager, Program Executive Office (PEO) Ships. "The future USS George M. Neal will provide our Sailors with the latest air and missile defense capability."

The DDG 51 Flight III upgrade centers on the AN/SPY-6(V)1 Air and Missile Defense Radar and incorporates upgrades to the electrical power and cooling capacity plus additional associated changes to provide greatly enhanced warfighting capability to the fleet. Flight III is the latest Flight upgrade in the more than 30-year history of the class, building on the proud legacy of Flight I, II and IIA ships before it.

Ingalls Shipbuilding division is also in production on future destroyers USS Ted Stevens (DDG 128), USS Jeremiah Denton (DDG 129), USS Sam Nunn (DDG 133), and USS Thad Cochran (DDG 135).

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