


SECNAV Names Future Navajo-Class Towing, Salvage, and Rescue Ship Solomon Atkinson



[Release from the Secretary of the Navy Public Affairs](#)

07 August 2023

Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro announced today that a future Navajo-class Towing, Salvage, and Rescue (T-ATS) ship will be named in honor of Solomon Atkinson, a pioneering Navy SEAL and an Alaskan Native of the Metlakatla Indian Community, Annette Islands Reserve. Del Toro made the announcement on the Metlakatla's Founders Day, Aug. 7.

 The name selection of USNS Solomon Atkinson (T-ATS 12) follows the tradition of naming towing, salvage, and rescue ships after prominent Native Americans or Native American tribes.

"I am honored to name the next T-ATS after Solomon Atkinson, a man who achieved many firsts, even in the face of adversity, and continued to lead," said Del Toro. "Atkinson's achievements as a SEAL have left behind an enduring legacy, not just in the Special Warfare Community, but with our nation's astronauts as well. I am pleased to ensure that his name will extend globally to all who views this great ship."

Born in 1930 in Metlakatla, Alaska, Solomon Atkinson was raised by his parents on the sole Indian Reserve in Alaska. Atkinson worked as a commercial fisherman before enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1952. A year later, Atkinson volunteered for the underwater demolition teams and became a frogman, the

precursor to present day SEALs. In 1962, Atkinson became one of the first Navy SEALs and was a plank owner for SEAL Team 1. As a SEAL, he deployed to Korea and completed three combat tours in Vietnam. His Vietnam service-related awards include a Bronze Star, a Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V," and a Purple Heart. Atkinson also had the distinction of training numerous astronauts, including Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, in underwater weightless simulations at the Underwater Swimmers School in Key West, Florida. Atkinson retired from active naval service in 1973 as a Chief Warrant Officer 4 and returned to Metlakatla, where he continued to serve his people and state on the Indian Community Council and Board of Education, as founder and president of the first veterans' organization on Annette Island, and as mayor of Metlakatla. Upon his passing in 2019, an honor guard from SEAL Team 1 served as pallbearers at his funeral.

"Chief Warrant Officer 4 Solomon "Sol" Atkinson embodied the spirit of dedication to family, community, and country," said Rear Adm. Keith Davids, commander, Naval Special Warfare Command. "His pioneering role as one of the first U.S. Navy SEALs, and his unwavering commitment to service both in and out of uniform, serves as an inspiration for the entire Naval Special Warfare community. Naming the USNS Solomon Atkinson in his honor is a testament to his remarkable legacy and the enduring impact he has left on NSW, the Navy, and the nation."

Along with the ship's name, Del Toro announced the sponsors for the future USNS Solomon Atkinson as his widow, Joann Atkinson and their two daughters, Michele Gunyah and Maria Hayward, who, in their role, will represent a lifelong relationship with the ship and crew.

"There exists a long-held Tsimshian tradition, 'akadi lip a'algyaga sm'ooygit,' loosely translated 'a chief never speaks for himself'," said sponsor, Maria Hayward. "Through all of his time as a U.S. Navy UDT and SEAL, as well

as a leader of veterans and Native Alaskans, Sol lived this ethos. And, here today, in the shadow of Sol's death, he holds to it still. Thank you to the U.S. Navy for speaking to Solomon's honor and helping his family and fellow Frogmen shout his legacy to the seven seas!"

Navajo-class ships will provide ocean-going tug, salvage, and rescue capabilities to support Fleet operations. The current capabilities are provided by Powhatan-class T-ATF Fleet Tugs and Safeguard-class T-ARS Rescue and Salvage vessels, which began reaching the end of their expected service lives in 2020. Navajo-class ships will be capable of towing U.S. Navy ships and will have 6,000 square feet of deck space for embarked systems.

More information on our towing, salvage, and rescue ship programs can be found [here](#).