

USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. Commissioned in Charleston



USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. is named after the first black U.S. Marine Corps aviator and the first black Marine to become a three-star general. *U.S. NAVY*

CHARLESTON, S.C. – The Navy commissioned its newest Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Frank E. Petersen Jr. (DDG 121), May 14 in Charleston, South Carolina, said a Navy spokesperson in a May 14 release.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro attended the ceremony. He began by thanking the Petersen family for their lifetime of service to the nation. “All of us join you in honoring Lt. Gen. Frank E. Petersen Jr.”

Del Toro also recognized the plankowners bringing the ship to life. “As Secretary of the Navy I contribute all that I can to make sure that you and your families are equipped for the many challenges that lie ahead. That starts with making sure that you have the very best ship that our nation has to offer.”

The principal speaker was Carlos Campbell, naval aviator and former assistant secretary of Commerce for Economic Development, who served alongside Petersen and relayed stories exemplifying the general’s strength and dedication. Recalling Petersen’s ethic, Campbell said, “He received a frag wound, he was treated in the field, and returned to combat.”

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday also attended the ceremony. “It’s fitting that a name synonymous with service and sacrifice be emblazoned on the steel of this American warship,” said Gilday. “Sailors aboard this mighty warship will deploy wherever, whenever needed, with General Petersen’s fighting spirit and tenacity, for generations to come.”

Gen. David Berger, commandant of the Marine Corps, also attended the ceremony. "General Petersen was a man of many firsts," said Berger. "There's a saying that ships take on the characteristics of their namesakes, and if that's true, then God help any adversary to ever confronts the Frank E. Petersen Jr."

Gayle Petersen, Lt. Gen. Petersen's daughter, expressed thanks on behalf of her family and made a special recognition. "We would not be having this ceremony today if not for a gentleman named Robert Adams. When my dad was shot down in Vietnam he was rescued by Robert Adams." Gayle continued, "I would like to thank all who had a hand in building this ship, from stem to stern."

Guest speakers for the event included Rep. Nancy Mace, R-South Carolina; John Tecklenberg, mayor of Charleston, South Carolina; and George Nungesser, vice president of Program Management, Ingalls Shipbuilding.

The ship's sponsors are D'Arcy Ann Neller, wife of former commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Robert Neller, and the late Dr. Alicia J. Petersen, Lt. Gen. Petersen's wife at the time of his passing in 2015. Dr. Petersen passed away in September 2021. Both sponsors participated in the keel laying, mast stepping and christening ceremonies.

D'Arcy Ann Neller thanked the families. "Our service members can't do what they do without you and your love and support. To the officers and crew: A ship without a crew is like a body without blood. You will all make this ship come alive."

During the ceremony, USS Frank E. Petersen's commanding officer Cmdr. Daniel Hancock reported the ship ready. Assisted by Lt. Gen. Petersen's daughters, Gayle Petersen, Dana Petersen Moore, Lindsay Pulliam and Monique Petersen, Neller

gave the traditional order to “Man our ship and bring her to life!”

Lt. Gen. Petersen continues a family legacy of service begun by his great grandfather. Private Archibald (Archie) Charles McKinney enlisted in 1863 and served in the Massachusetts 55th Regiment, Company E during the Civil War. McKinney’s trip home included traveling aboard a steamship, disembarking at the Port of Charleston.

The future USS Frank E. Petersen, Jr. honors Lt. Gen. Frank E. Petersen, Jr. Petersen was the first black U.S. Marine Corps aviator and the first black Marine to become a three-star general. Petersen served two combat tours, Korea in 1953 and Vietnam in 1968. He flew more than 350 combat missions and had more than 4,000 hours in various fighter and attack aircraft. Petersen passed away in Aug. 2015 at the age of 83.

Retiring in 1988 after 38 years of service, Petersen’s awards included the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit with Combat “V,” Distinguished Flying Cross; Purple Heart, Meritorious Service Medal, Air Medal, Navy Commendation Medal with Combat “V;” and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

Arleigh Burke-class destroyers are the backbone of the U.S. Navy’s surface fleet. These highly capable, multi-mission ships conduct a variety of operations, from peacetime presence to national security providing a wide range of warfighting capabilities in multi-threat air, surface and subsurface.