



PCU SOUTH DAKOTA (SSN-790)

From the Desk of the Commanding Officer

February 9th, 2017

Greetings,

Happy New Year everyone! We are excited to kick off the New Year, especially considering everything 2017 will have in store for us. My 2017 vision for the crew, closely linked to the shipyard's new construction (NEWCON) milestones, is that we are fully qualified to stand our in-port and at-sea watches, and in fact standing watch aboard SOUTH DAKOTA ship-wide. Watch standing is the process by which a specified team of personnel monitor and operate equipment and systems necessary to provide propulsion, electrical power, maintain ship's habitability (e.g., temperature, atmosphere, drinking water, sanitation systems, etc.), sensors and weapons systems, and ship control (i.e., driving the submarine) etc. Each specified team stands watch for 6-8 hrs, and is then relieved by another team who repeats the process.

Now back to my "vision." My vision is closely linked to our NEWCON schedule because one of our primary missions is to be ready to support the shipyard key events that occur throughout the construction process. This is necessary because, while the shipyard builds submarines, the Navy operates them, to include conducting the testing needed to verify the myriad of shipboard system work as designed. This means we all must train extensively to learn how to operate the ship, and completing necessary watch station qualifications. I like to think of it as "the shipyard builds submarines, but we build watch standers and watch teams." Some of those key events we must be ready for include:

- Post Core Hot Operations: this is a nuclear propulsion plant key event which is supported by the nuclear-trained personnel. This event, which begins around August, spans several weeks, and will require personnel to complete qualifications and extensive training beginning several months before the event.
- Rollout and Float-off: this is a ship-wide event which occurs after the hull is welded together to make the boat watertight. Rollout is when the boat is rolled out of the immense building it is currently housed in, and onto the pier. The boat is then prepared for float-off, where it is placed in the water next to the pier. There it will remain for the rest of the construction process. Expect rollout to occur in early November, followed by float-off in late November.
- Christening: this ceremony, conducted by the shipyard, is steeped in tradition. The entire crew, their families, dignitaries from the States of CT, RI, and SD, senior government and military leaders, and representatives of our SOUTH DAKOTA Commissioning Committee will also be in attendance. While there will be several speakers representing the States of CT, RI, and SD, the culminating event is the Christening ceremony, where our ship's sponsor, Mrs. Deanie Dempsey, breaks a bottle of champagne on the side of the boat and officially names her "SOUTH DAKOTA." Mrs. Dempsey is the wife of retired General Martin Dempsey, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The date has not been set for this event, but it will either occur before rollout, or after float-off.

It is only through the dedication and hard work of the shipyard, crew, and the support of our family and friends that we will be able to achieve our milestones for 2017, and I want to share some of what the crew has accomplished thus far. The nuclear-trained personnel in the Engineering Department stood up the watch for the first time back in December, and continue to press on through our first milestones of reactor plant testing. There have been several unexpected delays in this testing due to various equipment failures, resulting in us falling several months behind schedule. However, we the crew, and the newly assigned shipyard management team are committed to recovering some of the lost schedule so SOUTH DAKOTA is still delivered to the Navy ahead of schedule (no later than August 31, 2018). I am confident we can do this, achieving victory in the same manner the Patriots did in the Super Bowl (sorry for those rooting for the Falcons, of which I was one!) The remainder of the crew continues to diligently work on their training and qualifications in support of standing up the watch in the remainder of the submarine sometime in November/December. You may recollect in my last letter that I anticipated standing up the remaining watch in July, but this date has slipped due to construction delays. To assist in watch station qualifications, I have assigned many crew members to other submarines where they receive valuable hands-on training. Some, such as Ensign Hampton Black, were able to not only qualify on other submarines, but support them on deployment abroad in support of missions vital to national security. And one other Sailor, Petty Officer Third Class Pembroke Fitzhugh, a Machinist Mate Auxiliaryman, not only supported an entire 6-month deployment, but also received his coveted Submarine Warfare insignia, referred to as "Dolphins," after successfully completing arduous qualifications in Submarines.

We look forward to returning again to the great State of South Dakota, but as I look outside my window watching New England get pummeled by Winter Storm Niko, I am reminded of our inaugural trip to South Dakota in February 2016 – right after a winter storm rolled through your neck of the woods. That said, we look forward to visiting AFTER winter is over! I am sure our awesome Commissioning Committee will have some great trips lined up for us, where we can get out and meet as many people as possible. Signing off for now.

Hoka Hey! Let's Roll!

Sincerely,
CDR Ron Withrow
Commanding Officer
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