WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy commissioned USS North Carolina (SSN 777), the newest Virginia Class attack submarine May 3, 2008, in Wilmington, N.C. Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter delivered the ceremony’s principal address and ship’s sponsor Linda Anne Rich Bowman, wife of retired Adm. Frank Bowman, former director, Naval Reactors, proudly ordered North Carolina’s crew to, “Man our ship and bring her to life.”

North Carolina is named in honor of the thousands of Sailors and Marines who serve in the state. Like the other ships of the Virginia Class, North Carolina is designed to operate across the full spectrum of warfare in open-ocean and littoral environments. These stealthy multi-mission platforms will launch, support, and recover Special Operation Forces (SOF); launch precision strikes against inland targets; perform anti-submarine and anti-surface ship warfare; conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions; and provide assured access and battlespace preparation.

“Virginia Class submarines form a strong foundation for today’s and tomorrow’s Submarine Force,” said Rear Adm. William Hilarides, Program Executive Officer for Submarines. “They provide the right mix of capabilities now and the flexibility to ensure undersea superiority far into the future.”

Virginia Class submarines are constructed under a teaming agreement between General Dynamics Electric Boat (GDEB) in Groton, Conn. and Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding (NGSB) in Newport News, Va. North Carolina, the fourth ship of the class and last of the Block I contract, was authorized for construction in Fiscal Year 2002 and delivered to the Navy on Feb. 21, 2008. The Block II contract, awarded in August 2003, called for six additional Virginia Class submarines, all of which are under construction.

The Navy is currently preparing to negotiate the terms of the Block III contract for the next eight ships of the Virginia Class. Under this Multiyear Procurement contract, the first of these, SSN 784, would be purchased in Fiscal Year 2009. The Block III contract is expected to be awarded in December 2008.

The Navy / shipbuilder team continues to realize construction span improvements with each successive Virginia Class submarine. North Carolina, Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding’s second Virginia Class delivery required 10 months less time to build than their first – USS Texas (SSN 775). New Hampshire (SSN 778) and New Mexico (SSN 779), to be delivered by GDEB and Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding respectively, are projected to be completed approximately eight months ahead of their contract delivery dates. Commissioning for New Hampshire is scheduled for Oct. 25, 2008 at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine.

“Our industry partners have shown a strong commitment to driving down the construction span for the Virginia Class submarines. As a result we will commission two submarines this year. That is something the Navy hasn’t done in more than a decade,” said Rear Adm. (sel) Dave Johnson, Virginia Class submarine program manager.

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