Future USS Somerset (LPD 25) Keel Authenticated

WASHINGTON — Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding authenticated the keel for the future USS Somerset (LPD 25) during a Dec. 11 ceremony at its New Orleans shipyard in Avondale, La. Somerset is the ninth ship in the San Antonio class to start construction on the Gulf Coast.

The keel was authenticated to be “truly and fairly laid” by the ship’s sponsor, Mary Jo Myers, the wife of retired Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Keel laying is the ceremonial milestone signifying the start of ship construction, and it is marked by the shipbuilder conducting a keel-authentication event. The shipyard began constructing portions of the ship earlier this year and assembled some of the ship’s bottom units and casting of LPD 25’s bow stem. The Navy’s Program Executive Office (PEO) Ships is managing the construction of this and three other ships of the class at Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding facilities in Pascagoula, Miss., and New Orleans.

LPD 25 is named in honor of the courage of the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93. Their actions prevented terrorist hijackers from reaching their destination only to have the airplane crash near Shanksville in Somerset County, Pa., on Sept. 11, 2001.

Over the days and weeks following the Flight 93 crash, recovery personnel retrieved more than 95 percent of the airplane’s wreckage from the crash site. Shortly after the crash, an American flag was hoisted on the top of a power shovel or “dragline” on a hill dominating the area. The dragline had been used in coal stripping at one time, and the equipment with the flag became a symbol of the effort. In the summer of 2008, steel from the dragline’s bucket was melted down and cast into LPD 25’s bow stem.

LPDs, or amphibious transport dock ships, are used to transport and land Marines, their equipment and supplies by embarked air cushion or conventional landing craft; by amphibious assault vehicles; or by helicopters or vertical-takeoff-and-landing aircraft. These ships support amphibious assault, special operations or expeditionary warfare missions and can serve as secondary aviation platforms amphibious ready groups. San Antonio-class ships are approximately 684 feet in length, have a mixed gender crew of 360 Sailors, are able to support an embarked landing force of 699, and can surge to support up to 800 Marines.

PEO Ships is responsible for the development and acquisition of U.S. Navy surface ships, and is currently managing the design and construction of 11 major ship classes and a wide range of small boats and craft. These platforms range from major warships such as frontline surface combatants and amphibious assault ships to air-cushioned landing craft, oceanographic research ships and special warfare craft. Since its creation in November 2002, PEO Ships has delivered more than 35 major warships and hundreds of small boats and craft from more than 20 shipyards and boat builders across the United States.