

The Navy Honors a Civil Rights Pioneer

Posted by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus on October 09, 2009 at 05:55 PM EST

Today in Jackson, Mississippi, I was privileged to honor a civil rights hero and the millions of Americans who have furthered the cause of liberty. As Secretary of the Navy, I am responsible for naming our ships. Today, I announced that the first ship I will name will be the USNS Medgar Evers.

The ship that will carry Medgar Evers name around the world for a generation is a T-AKE, a critically important supply ship. They are traditionally named for famous American pioneers, explorers, and visionaries. They celebrate the dreams and bold action of the American spirit and they honor men and women who have changed our country and the world for the better - men and women like Alan Shepard, Sacagawea, Carl Brashear, and Amelia Earhart. The ships' namesakes represent the rich tapestry that is America.



(The future USNS Medgar Evers (T-AKE 13) is designed to provide replenishment services to U.S. Navy ships at sea, to include collation ships from other nations. U.S. Navy Illustration by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jay Chu/Released)



(Charles Evers, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, Myrlie Evers-Williams, Jackson State University President Ronald Mason Jr. and Miss. Mayor Harvey Johnson at the Medgar Evers ship naming event on October 9, 2009.)

Medgar Evers carried on that proud tradition as a pioneer and visionary of the civil rights movement. As a young man, he served in France during the Second World War. Upon returning to the United States, he took up the cause of freedom, rose to become the Field Secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi, and campaigned tirelessly to end segregation and ensure equal treatment for every American.

No less so than the heroes who have fought and died for our country overseas, he gave his life to defend America and its principles when he was assassinated in his own driveway in June of 1963.

It was an emotional ceremony today when I announced my choice, speaking at the Fannie Lou Hamer Institute on Citizenship and Democracy at Jackson State University. The Institute honors another civil rights leader from Mississippi. I was proud to be joined today by the widow of Medgar Evers, Mrs. Myrlie Evers-Williams, as well as by Congressman Bennie Thompson, Jackson Mayor Harvey Johnson, former Mississippi Governor William Winter, and a score of other civil rights activists and Mississippians. Sharing the moment with them was a humbling experience for me. It reminded me of how far we have come, but also of how much others who went before us sacrificed on our behalf, just like the Sailors and Marines I'm proud to serve as Secretary.

I believe today we honored the work of legends and in a small way reaffirmed the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that "one day the nation would rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed - that all men are created equal."