

man who loved his family and country, and gave his life as a sacrifice for freedom.

USS "PONCHATOULA"

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, today I wish to honor a naval vessel and crew that served with distinction during an important chapter of U.S. military history.

The Navy's modernization program of the 1950s included construction of a new class of fleet tankers that combined speed and an enlarged capacity to deliver fuel to the fleet. One of the vessels ordered in this modernization effort was named the USS *Ponchatoula*, AO-148. The vessel was laid down in Camden, NJ on March 1, 1954. The new fleet tanker displaced 38,000 tons when fully loaded greatly exceeding the capacity of tankers used during World War II. The ship had a complement of 324 officers and men. Although the USS *Ponchatoula* was a support vessel rather than a combat warship, she was armed with two 5-inch guns and twelve 3-inch antiaircraft guns.

The launching of the USS *Ponchatoula* into the waters of the Delaware River took place on July 9, 1954, at Camden, and she subsequently sailed across the river to Philadelphia, where the vessel was commissioned on January 12, 1956.

Assigned to the Pacific Fleet, USS *Ponchatoula* made the long voyage to the west coast. Following her arrival at Long Beach, CA, on March 10, 1956, the oiler conducted her shakedown cruise off the California coast.

In the fall of 1956, USS *Ponchatoula* was ordered to the western Pacific, her home waters for most of her active career. While en-route to Sasebo, Japan, to join Seventh Fleet as a unit of Service Squadron Three, she assisted a disabled Panamanian merchant ship that had been battered by two typhoons.

USS *Ponchatoula* accompanied the Seventh Fleet in early 1958 as the Navy sailed into harm's way in the Formosa Strait off the coast of the People's Republic of China, PRC. PRC forces were threatening to occupy several small islands off the coast of China, notably Quemoy and Matsu. President Eisenhower ordered the Navy to the area to symbolize American determination and support Taiwanese forces holding those small islands. President Eisenhower's tough stand and the presence of the Seventh Fleet off shore forced the PRC to back down.

In late April and early May of 1962, USS *Ponchatoula* replenished ships in the task force that participated in the atmospheric nuclear test Operation Dominic near Christmas Island.

In September 1962, the oiler sailed to Midway Island to supply ships involved in the recovery of CDR Wally Schirra's Project Mercury Space Capsule *Sigma 8* and in May 1963 supported the recovery of the then-Major Gordon Cooper's Mercury Space Capsule *Faith 7*. USS *Ponchatoula* also supported recovery

operations for *Gemini 4*, *6*, and *7* in 1965 and *Apollo 7* in 1968.

When hostilities began to escalate in Vietnam during the summer and fall of 1964, USS *Ponchatoula* was deployed to the South China Sea to support fleet operations off the coast of Vietnam. She refueled numerous warships in those waters during the 1964 and 1965 bombing campaign against targets in North Vietnam.

In the summer of 1969 and into 1970 the USS *Ponchatoula* returned to Pearl Harbor and served the fleet in Hawaiian waters.

During the 1970s USS *Ponchatoula*'s area of operations expanded into the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, reflecting growing U.S. Navy activity in that part of the globe. In September 1980 the ship was transferred to the Military Sealift Command, becoming USNS *Ponchatoula*, T-AO-148 and beginning operation with a mainly civilian crew. Based at Subic Bay for most of the next decade, she continued her underway replenishment work, helping maintain the Navy's mobility and striking power in an often troubled region. USNS *Ponchatoula* was inactivated in February 1992 and laid up at Suisun Bay, CA. Though stricken from the Naval Vessel Register at the end of August 1992, she remained in Navy custody until transferred to the Maritime Administration for disposal in May 1999.

During the 43 years between her commissioning in 1956 and her transfer to the reserve fleet in 1999, the USS *Ponchatoula* rendered meritorious service to her country, helping to stop aggression in the Taiwan Strait, assisting the space program and supporting U.S. forces in Vietnam. She and the thousands of Navy sailors who served aboard her over the decades deserve the accolades of a grateful nation.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

PIERMONT, NEW HAMPSHIRE

• Ms. AYOTTE. Mr. President, I wish to honor the town of Piermont, NH, which is celebrating the 250th anniversary of its founding this year. I am delighted to recognize this very special milestone.

Piermont, a town in Grafton County, lies in the shadow of Piermont Mountain and is bordered by the Connecticut River and the magnificent White Mountain National Forest.

The town of Piermont has a unique history. It was chartered on November 6, 1764, by colonial Governor Benning Wentworth, and the town derives its name from the "Piemonte" region of Italy, which in Italian means "at the foot of the mountain." Piermont's location in the Connecticut River Valley played an important role in the development of its proud agricultural heritage.

Piermont is home to Lake Tarleton, named after Colonel William Tarleton,

who served as a delegate to the 1791 Constitutional Convention. Two well-known summer camps are located on the lake—Camp Walt Whitman and Kingswood Camp for Boys. Each year, campers come to Piermont to enjoy the great outdoors and have some good old-fashioned summer fun.

Throughout the town's history, Piermont residents have been well known for their commitment to serve our great Nation. One distinguished Piermont resident, Ira Hobart Evans, a Civil War hero, was awarded the Medal of Honor, our Nation's highest military honor.

As the town marks its 250th anniversary this year, Piermont citizens are demonstrating their pride and community spirit with many special events in celebrating this historic occasion—including a parade in August that brought together residents, businesses, and community organizations. I am pleased to join all Granite Staters in congratulating Piermont citizens on reaching this milestone and in thanking them for their contributions to the State of New Hampshire. Congratulations, Piermont.●

RECOGNIZING SUNSHINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

• Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a school that is celebrating its 150th year of service to students in Springfield, MO. Sunshine Elementary School began serving young people during the Civil War. The wooden one-room country school house was originally located at what is now the major intersection of Campbell Road and Sunshine Lane. During the Civil War, students often witnessed the movement of troops along the road known at the time as the Old Wire Road. Later, the adjacent Sunshine Drive took its name from the school.

According to "So That All May Learn," a history of the Springfield Public School system published in 1995, Sunshine Elementary School was annexed into the Springfield School District in the mid-1920s, and the one-room school was relocated and replaced with a larger structure at its current location. The original school site, close to what is now the headquarters of Bass Pro Shops, was sold by the district in 1930.

In the boom years following World War II, student growth surged with the start of the baby boomer generation. In the late 1940s, student enrollment at Sunshine Elementary School grew by 430 kids in a single year, creating an overcrowding issue. The solution involved moving students in grades five and six to the nearby Phelps School. The first major addition to the Sunshine School came in 1950 when six new classrooms were built, along with a multipurpose room. Forty years later, new restrooms, two classrooms, and a library were added. More recently, Sunshine Elementary School became the last traditional school building equipped with air conditioning.