

Navy Commemorates 50th Anniversary Of First SSBN Deterrent Patrol

By Lt. Ed Early, Commander, Submarine Group 9 Public Affairs, Nov 17, 2010

BANGOR, Wash. (NNS) -- When the ballistic missile submarine USS George Washington (SSBN 598) departed Charleston, S.C., 50 years ago, it marked the beginning of a new era in strategic deterrence.

On Nov. 15, 1960, the USS George Washington (SSBN 598) began the U.S. Navy's first SSBN deterrent patrol. As the Navy commemorates the golden anniversary of the George Washington's historic deployment, the ballistic missile submarine remains a key component of our nation's strategic deterrent.

On Nov. 15, 1960, the "Georgefish" – a converted attack submarine – began the U.S. Navy's first SSBN deterrent patrol. With her stealth capability and the 16 Polaris missiles she carried, the George Washington provided the United States with a forward presence unprecedented in naval history.

As the Navy celebrates the golden anniversary of the George Washington's historic deployment, the ballistic missile submarine remains a key component of our nation's strategic deterrent. Today, the Navy employs 14 Ohio-class Trident SSBNs in its deterrent force – eight at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, Wash., and six at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga.

"USS George Washington revolutionized the way we conduct both submarine warfare and strategic deterrence," said Rear Adm. Bob Hennegan, Commander, Submarine Group 9. "The legacy of that first patrol is the strong, capable deterrent force you see in today's Navy."

Commissioned on Dec. 30, 1959, the George Washington was originally laid down in 1957 as the Skipjack-class attack submarine Scorpion (SSN 589). However, the decision was made to add a 130-foot section behind the sail that would carry 16 Polaris A1 missiles, resulting in the world's first ballistic missile submarine.

Following her commissioning, George Washington would successfully carry out the first submerged Polaris launch on July 20, 1960 at the Atlantic Missile Test Range, launching two missiles. Later that year, she left her homeport of Groton, Conn., for Charleston to load her full complement of Polaris missiles.

Cmdr. James Osborn Jr. and his Blue Crew took George Washington out of Charleston on Nov. 15 to begin her historic first patrol, which concluded Jan. 21, 1961 at New London, Conn., after 66 days submerged. George Washington's Gold Crew followed with its first patrol from February-April 1961.

George Washington was the first of the "41 For Freedom" – the Navy's first 41 ballistic missile submarines. Together, they paved the way for future Polaris, Poseidon and Trident submarines that continue to maintain the nation's strategic deterrent today.