

USS NEW JERSEY (SSN-796) SUPPORT ORGANIZATION · QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER · ISSUE 2

BUILT TO GO WHERE OTHERS CAN'T

IN THIS ISSUE

The Journey to Earn the Dolphins

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Source: U.S. Navy photo (via L3Harris)

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

250 Years On, the Crew Front and Center

What better time to send a newsletter than now, timed to help us celebrate the 250th anniversary of our founding, and to recognize the people who have molded this country into the best in the world.

We have made some adjustments to this quarter's edition. Format changes are easy to see. More important is the change to content. We are committed to focusing more on the boat and her crew: their service, their professionalism, their excellence. Our readers keep telling us they want to hear about USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796), so this quarter we put the crew front and center.

You will find the story of how Sailors earn their dolphins, a look at the New Jersey industry that helps the boat listen, communicate, and see, a welcome for the new Chief of the Boat, and a roundup of what the crew has accomplished in 2026. We have no pride of authorship here. We just want to recognize the crew and keep our supporters engaged.

Thank you to the families and supporters across New Jersey who keep the home front strong. Enjoy the 4th, and thank a Sailor.

Pete Engelman, Chairman · USS New Jersey (SSN 796) Support Organization

LEADERSHIP

Welcome Aboard: A New Chief of the Boat

In May, MMACS(SS) Jared Fouke relieved ETVCM(SS) Joseph "Joey" Calhoun as Chief of the Boat aboard USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796). The COB is the senior enlisted Sailor on board, responsible for the welfare, training, and discipline of the crew, and serves as the link between the crew and the wardroom.

Senior Chief Fouke has served in the Navy for 16 years, all of it in Norfolk. He comes to USS *New Jersey* from Submarine Squadron 6, his most recent command. His last sea command was aboard USS *John Warner* (SSN-785), where he served as COB of the Auxiliary Division, known as A Gang. He was a finalist for COMSUBLANT Junior Sea Sailor of the Year in 2013. Welcome aboard, COB.

Our thanks go to COB Calhoun, who led the crew through commissioning, the Post Shakedown Availability, and the boat's first operational assignments. Joey is headed to USS *Barb*. Fair winds and following seas, and thank you.



MMACS(SS) Jared Fouke, Chief of the Boat, USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796)

The Submariner Qualification Process

Take a nuclear reactor, a weapons system, a power plant, a city's worth of mechanical complexity, miles of piping and cable, high pressure air, hydraulics, electronics, life support, and the quiet confidence of nearly 135 Sailors. Wrap it all in a steel hull, send it over the horizon, then do the one thing every instinct says not to do: take it under the sea on purpose. That is the world of USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796), and earning dolphins means proving you understand that world well enough to be trusted inside it.

Among the many traditions of the United States Navy, few are as respected as qualifying in submarines. Every Sailor assigned to a submarine must earn the right to be called a submariner, a distinction that signifies technical competence, dedication, and the ability to contribute to the safe operation of one of the Navy's most complex and demanding platforms.

Why Qualification Matters

Life aboard a submarine places Sailors in a uniquely challenging environment. A submarine operates far from immediate assistance, often submerged for extended periods, carrying out missions critical to national security. Every crew member must understand not only their own job but the basic operation of nearly every major system on the boat.

The qualification process ensures each Sailor can respond effectively during normal operations and emergencies alike. Whether dealing with flooding, fire, or propulsion casualties, every crew member must be prepared to act quickly and confidently. The program builds that readiness while fostering teamwork and accountability among the crew.

The Qualification Process

When a Sailor reports aboard, the journey toward qualification begins immediately. The Sailor receives a qualification card, commonly known as a "qual card," outlining the systems, equipment, and operational knowledge to be mastered:

- Propulsion systems
- Electrical distribution systems
- Hydraulic and pneumatic systems
- Damage control equipment
- Navigation and communications
- Life support systems
- Weapons and combat systems

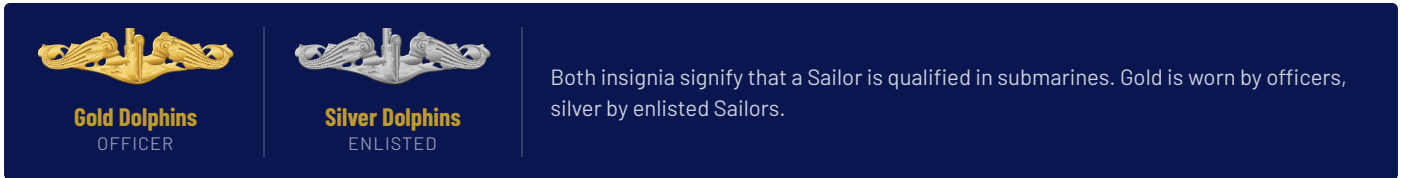
As Sailors study these systems, they demonstrate their knowledge to experienced crew members who are already qualified. These experts question the Sailor, verify understanding, and sign off specific portions of the qualification card once proficiency is demonstrated.

Beyond classroom-style learning, qualification requires extensive hands-on experience. Sailors must physically locate equipment throughout the submarine, understand its operation, and explain how it functions during both routine and emergency conditions.

Once all required signatures are obtained, the Sailor faces a qualification board. During this oral examination, senior qualified submariners evaluate the candidate's overall knowledge of the submarine and assess readiness to join the ranks of fully qualified crew members. The board can be challenging, but it serves an important purpose: making sure that every Sailor aboard can contribute to the safety and success of the submarine and its crew.

The Significance of the Dolphins

Successful completion of the qualification process is marked by the awarding of the Submarine Warfare insignia, commonly known as the “Dolphins.” The insignia features two dolphins flanking the bow of a submarine and is one of the most recognizable symbols in the Navy. More than a badge, the Dolphins represent months of hard work, perseverance, and the trust of fellow crew members.



Receiving the Dolphins signifies that a Sailor has demonstrated the knowledge, professionalism, and commitment required to operate as a member of the submarine force. It is an achievement earned through effort rather than rank, which makes it especially meaningful among submariners. For many Sailors, the day they receive their Dolphins is one of the proudest moments of their naval careers.

A Tradition of Excellence

The submarine qualification process has remained a cornerstone of submarine culture for generations. It ensures that every Sailor possesses the knowledge needed to support the mission and protect shipmates in one of the most demanding environments in the military. The Dolphins worn on a submariner’s uniform serve as a daily reminder of that responsibility: competence, teamwork, and a commitment to excellence, the qualities that continue to define the Silent Service.

SYSTEMS SPOTLIGHT · NJ INDUSTRY

The Quietest Ship in the Room Was Built to Be Heard



Left: a Sailor mans the photonics mast controller aboard a Virginia-class submarine (Source: Reddit). Right: L3Harris integrated submarine mast system diagram (Source: L3Harris).

A Virginia-class submarine can sit off a contested coastline for weeks, listening to everything and revealing nothing. When command needs her, she receives the message at depth. When the captain needs to look, a mast breaks the surface for seconds and pulls down imagery sharp enough to read a hull number.

That triad, listening, communicating, seeing, runs on three systems: towed acoustic arrays, an integrated communications suite, and the photonics mast that replaced the optical periscope. L3Harris designs and builds all three, and is the sole source for every periscope system in the U.S. submarine fleet.

Much of that work happens in Camden, New Jersey. The Camden site engineered and produced the communications suite aboard USS *New Jersey*, and in February 2026 won a follow-on contract to deliver 26 more through 2033.

Life in Norfolk: A Busy 2026

Life in Norfolk, homeport of our favorite submarine, has been busy. Here is some of what the crew of USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796) has taken on so far in 2026.

Post Shakedown Availability Complete

On April 3, 2026, Newport News Shipbuilding redelivered USS *New Jersey* to the Navy after an extensive Post Shakedown Availability, the phase that follows commissioning of a new warship: correcting items found during initial operations and adding upgrades before full fleet employment. The work included combat systems upgrades, electronics modernization, general maintenance, and final preparations for sustained fleet operations, marking the boat's transition from a newly commissioned vessel to a fully operational fleet asset.

Back Underway

Operational again, the boat has since returned from a series of underway periods focused on training, recertification, testing, and calibration, along with exercises aimed at sharpening readiness. Much of the crew is new, to submarines or to *New Jersey* or both, and a major effort went into helping these Sailors qualify, as the qualification story earlier in this issue describes.

There was time for some fun, too. In a message to the crew and families, the COB wrote:



USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796) returning to homeport at Naval Station Norfolk, June 5, 2026. Source: WarshipCam - Norfolk Coastal Pics.

“Last underway we had the opportunity to have two swim calls, completed a major ship's inspection, and really learned how to operate as a team. I'm incredibly proud of how well the crew handled every challenge. Firepower for Freedom!”

— COB, in a message to the crew and families

Combat Ready Romeo Flag



Congratulations to CDR Simmons and the crew on officially receiving the Combat Ready Romeo Flag, presented by Commodore Jordan. The red and yellow Romeo flag has long marked a Ready Duty Ship, a clear signal that USS *New Jersey* is prepared to answer the call.

Recognitions

The galley also earned a culinary award, the food-service equivalent of a Battle "E". And two Sailors qualified in submarines and earned their dolphins this spring. Bravo Zulu to both.



Diego Lopez Diaz

TMFA

Qualified in Submarines

May 12, 2026



Taylor Rutherford

FTSN

Qualified in Submarines

May 27, 2026

Advancements

Congratulations to the following Sailors of USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796) on their recent advancement. Bravo Zulu to all.

Claudia Veronica Casillas	STS2	ADVANCED
Erik Austin Clow	ITN1	ADVANCED
Ava Catherine Duerk	ETN1	ADVANCED
Donovin Bernard Henderson	FT2	ADVANCED
Elexis Marie Leary	TM2	ADVANCED
Kyle Shane Ozment	ITN2	ADVANCED
Alfred Mark Salinas	ITE1	ADVANCED
Makhi Jazae Sanders	ITE2	ADVANCED
Gavin Reagan Sapp	ITE2	ADVANCED
Caleb Troy Vickers	FT2	ADVANCED
Taylor Rae Watson	MMN1	ADVANCED

Before the Dolphins: Turtle and America's First Submarine Attack

Following the defeat of the British Army in Boston in March 1776, General George Washington marched his Continental Army south to defend New York City. British General William Howe followed Washington to New York, and by June, the British Navy under Admiral Richard Howe, his brother, began amassing ships and troops in New York Harbor. By mid-summer, the British Navy had assembled 400 warships and transports off New York. By the end of the summer, the British controlled New York City.

Late in the evening of September 7, 1776, Sergeant Ezra Lee slipped into the top of the egg-shaped vessel bobbing low in the Hudson River. Admiral Howe's flagship, HMS *Eagle*, lay at anchor off Governor's Island. Quietly and under darkness, Sergeant Lee guided his vessel into the harbor and set a course for the *Eagle*. A blow to the flagship of the British fleet would be a huge boost to morale and could help break the blockade of the city.

This strange contraption, named *Turtle*, was the creation of David Bushnell and Isaac Doolittle. Bushnell, while a student at Yale, proved that gunpowder could explode underwater, and reasoned that a vessel that could covertly plant an explosive device on an enemy warship would be a formidable weapon of war. At the urging of Connecticut Governor Trumbull, General Washington bankrolled Bushnell's efforts starting in 1771. At ten feet long, six feet tall, and three feet wide, the oak hull was just big enough to fit one man, who controlled propulsion and depth with foot- and hand-cranked brass propellers, believed to be the first of their kind used on a ship. The first pilot was Bushnell's brother, Ezra, who perfected the vessel's operation in the Connecticut River.

As the siege of New York intensified, Ezra became ill, and Sergeant Lee was picked as the substitute pilot. With only two weeks of training, Lee would pilot *Turtle* on its inaugural mission. The harbor was dark and the currents swift, but Lee found his target after two hours of transit. On the surface, he lit the fuse of the explosive and submerged. A screw was meant to affix the "torpedo" to the wooden hull, but after multiple attempts, Lee could not get penetration near the rudder. With only about 30 minutes of air remaining, he was forced to disengage and scuttle the charge. As it floated away, Lee reported it exploded with tremendous violence, throwing large columns of water and pieces of wood high into the air.

Lee attempted one more mission in New York Harbor on October 5 but aborted after being spotted. *Turtle* was lost days later when the sloop serving as her tender was sunk by British warships. Bushnell continued his work on underwater mines throughout the war.

As the United States celebrates 250 years, we remember the ingenuity of David Bushnell and Isaac Doolittle and the bravery of Ezra Bushnell and Sergeant Ezra Lee, the team that realized the vision of a combat submersible. It would take until 1900, another 124 years, for the Elizabeth-built USS *Holland* (SS-1) to be commissioned as the first submarine of the U.S. Navy.



Full-size model of Bushnell's Turtle submarine. Photo by Geni, via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

From BB-62 to SSN-796: Honoring Paul Robbins



On June 15, aboard Battleship *New Jersey* in Camden, 101-year-old Paul Robbins returned to the ship he once called home. Mr. Robbins is believed to be the last known living World War II plank owner of USS *New Jersey* (BB-62). He reported aboard the battleship on her commissioning day in 1943 and served in the Pacific during World War II. More than eight decades later, he was welcomed back aboard the “Big J” to be recognized for his service, his place in the ship’s history, and the generation he represents.

The ceremony also created a meaningful connection between the battleship and today’s USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796). LT Matthew Dods, USN, represented the submarine and presented Mr. Robbins with an Honorary Plank Owner plaque on behalf of Steven Halle, USN (Ret.), the commissioning commanding officer of USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796).

“It was a simple moment, but a powerful one: a Sailor from today’s *New Jersey* honoring a Sailor from the *New Jersey* that carried the name through World War II.”

For our Support Organization, this story belongs here. BB-62 and SSN-796 are separated by generations, technology, and mission, but they are tied by name, state, service, and legacy. Bravo Zulu to Mr. Robbins, to Battleship *New Jersey* Museum & Memorial, and to all who helped bring this moment together.

UPCOMING

Events for the Next 90 Days

Navy and maritime happenings that supporters and families can enjoy this summer, with a strong New Jersey tie.

JULY 3 TO 9, 2026

Sail4th 250: Parade of Sail and International Naval Review

Port of New York and New Jersey

The largest international maritime event in U.S. history anchors America's 250th birthday: more than 50 tall ships from over 20 nations, 40-plus allied and U.S. naval vessels, and the U.S. Navy Blue Angels. Strong New Jersey viewing from Liberty State Park in Jersey City, the Palisades near Fort Lee, and Sandy Hook Bay in Monmouth County.

JULY 4, 2026 · 7:30 PM

America's 250th Birthday Fireworks aboard Battleship New Jersey

Battleship New Jersey (BB-62), 62 Battleship Place, Camden, NJ

Watch fireworks over the Delaware River from the decks of the Navy's most decorated battleship, the namesake that connects generations of New Jersey Sailors. General admission is fifteen dollars; ship touring earlier in the day is ticketed separately.

THROUGH ABOUT JULY 8, 2026

Free Public Tall Ship Tours

New York and New Jersey waterfront

Once the visiting tall ships are berthed, many open for free public visitation at sites around the harbor. A memorable, low-cost outing for families who want to step aboard a working sailing vessel and meet crews from around the world.

Always confirm dates, times, and ticketing on the official event sites before you go.

Support the Boat and Her Crew. Every bit of support back home helps the Support Organization keep morale high and families connected to USS *New Jersey* (SSN-796). Grab a piece of gear from the Ship's Store, share this newsletter, or reach out to get involved.

Ship's Store · ussnjcc.myshopify.com | Get Involved · submarinenj.org/#contact

Across

1. David ____, the Yale man who built *Turtle* (8)
3. What a boat flies; the crew flew a Combat Ready Romeo one (4)
6. A boat's primary weapon, fired from a tube (7)
8. Old way to look topside while staying under (9)
9. The branch SSN-796 belongs to (4)
10. Tanks you flood to descend and blow to surface (7)
13. Status of a boat that has left the pier (8)
15. New Jersey county and famous 1778 battle (8)
16. Backbone of the hull, laid first (4)
17. Support ship that services a sub (6)

Down

1. The two dolphins on the insignia flank this end (3)
2. Sergeant Ezra ____, *Turtle's* stand-in pilot (3)
4. Where the award-winning culinary team feeds the crew (6)
5. British brothers, a general and an admiral, off New York in 1776 (4)
6. Bushnell's 1776 submersible, America's first attack sub (6)
7. First name of Sergeant ____ Lee (4)
9. Garden State's largest city (6)
11. Where the Garden State's lawmakers meet (7)
12. Short for the thing at 15-Across (5)
14. The watertight body of the boat (4)

Answer key in the next issue.

USS NEW JERSEY (SSN 796) SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

ONE CREW · ONE MISSION · ONE STANDARD

Was this newsletter passed along to you? The USS New Jersey (SSN 796) Support Organization sends a free quarterly update on the boat, her crew, and ways to help. Sign up to get the next issue, and feel free to forward this one to family, shipmates, or anyone who supports our Sailors.

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