

SMALLTALK

about big ideas

Give Thanks to Those Who Pack Your Parachute

By Jennifer Boykin

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Recently, someone relayed a story to me about Capt. Charlie Plumb, a former Navy fighter pilot, who, after 100 carrier landings and 74 successful combat missions over North Vietnam, was shot down and imprisoned for six years. After his release, Capt. Plumb was approached by a complete stranger who knew the details of his story. Confused, the Navy captain asked how he knew.

The man answered, “I packed your parachute.”

Oftentimes, we take for granted the people who pack our parachutes. We have partners in shops across the shipyard and in supplier facilities in 48 states who provide us the materials, pieces and parts we need to do our jobs every day. It takes the support of the entire team to build our nation’s warships.

Take steel—the foundation for every aircraft carrier and submarine we build. Before it ever makes it to the shipyard, the steel plates travel to various steel service centers to be cleaned, primed and inventoried. A portion of the plates are used by several vendors to manufacture T-bars, angle bars, channel bars and I-beams that are transported to NNS via truck.

Much of it makes a pit stop at the Steel Fabrication Shop where the steel is processed to our production requirements before going to Component Fabrication Assembly and Steel Fabrication Assembly shops around the yard to be assembled into Base As, foundations, hull structure and other assemblies.

We don’t tend to think about the many hands that touch our work before we do. Prep work and supplier contributions on the front end make installation on the waterfront possible.

At the end of the day, we are all ONE team—whether you are working in the submarine program, the aircraft carrier program, working on the waterfront or on a shop floor in Idaho.

The two-ship aircraft carrier contract, and our growth in submarine fleet maintenance, the *Virginia*-class program and the new *Columbia*-class program only amplify the need for an all-hands-on-deck approach to meeting the growing demands of our Navy.

When we succeed, we succeed as one. Our team shares the same passion and purpose. We all understand the need for urgency in support of our Navy. And we can’t do what we do without the support of each other.

Over the next two days, many of our aircraft carrier supplier teammates will lend even greater support by serving as our voices on Capitol Hill. Thousands of supplier companies from across the United States are gathered for the annual Aircraft Carrier Industrial Base Coalition (ACIBC) Supplier Days event, which includes program updates from NNS and Navy representatives before the suppliers meet with their respective congressional representatives to help keep our ships sold.

Events like these—and stories like Capt. Plumb’s—are important reminders that the Newport News Shipbuilding team is much larger than the women and men we have working behind our gates, and it’s one we should never overlook.

I hope you will remember that the next time you interact with a supplier or NNS colleague who supports your work. Be sure to thank them for the parachute they packed for you.

