

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Proud day for Springfield - both Springfields

This week, in a change of pace, I am writing about the banks of the Thames in New London instead of the banks of the Charles in Boston. Last Saturday my husband and I accepted an invitation to the commissioning of the USS Springfield, the newest submarine in the Navy. We were invited to attend because my legislative district includes a single Springfield precinct. The Springfield is named after two of the many cities of that name - our Springfield and Springfield, Ill.

The weekend provided the conclusion to last January's launch, when the submarine was christened by Labor Secretary Lynn Martin. An empty hull then floated into the Thames, and the Navy has used the intervening year to outfit the interior of the submarine, train the crew and conduct sea trials. Now the vessel has been accepted by the Navy and, after the pageantry of the weekend, it has set out on patrol. Here are some highlights of that commissioning ceremony.

Mayor Robert Markel spoke representing the city. He talked of Springfield's ties to the nation's military, beginning when George Washington sited the first armory in 1777 and continuing over many years of manufacturing precision rifles. Crossed Springfield rifles will represent the city on the ship's insignia. The mayor's comments about the weather conveyed the reality of the bitter cold we all endured for the hour-long pierside program. He said that in New England we call it a "character building" day. We shivered wrapped in blankets provided by the Navy, and we certainly admired the sailors who stood at attention on the hull for the entire ceremony.

Mayor Ossie Langfielder represented the other Springfield, which is symbolized on the ship's insignia by a profile of Abraham Lincoln. My husband Dean is an Illinois native, so we felt a connection with that city, too. The mayor spoke about his pride in the city in which the nation's 16th president developed as a lawyer and politician. His most moving words, however, came when Mayor Langfielder spoke of the greatness of our nation, demonstrated in his experience. Once a refugee from Nazi Germany, he has prospered in the United States to become mayor and to achieve the honor of official participation in the commissioning.

Secretary Martin continued the role of sponsor, which she undertook when she broke a champagne bottle over the hull at the christening. Her presence in the last days of office demonstrated the orderly transition of power in the United States. Speakers from Electric Boat and the Navy remarked on national unity of purpose in a strong defense, borne out by world events since the end of the Cold War. I was filled with pride in the nation and appreciation for the young men who protect our freedom. The ceremony ended when dignitaries were piped ashore, the first watch was set, and the Springfield prepared to embark on its first patrol.

The action-packed weekend provided sharp contrast with the conclusion a few days earlier of the legislative session in Boston. Court reform was enacted on the last day, and Speaker Flaherty has scheduled debate for education reform this month, but most legislation remained unfinished. Real achievement was sadly lacking, and I will work to make 1993 a more productive session.