



MESSAGE FROM THE VEEP



My Reflections on 2012

By Clarence M. Hatcherson

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AS I REFLECT on the events of the past year, two events that I was a part of stand out, not only in their historic significance but in the social perspective of our achievement.

On **Saturday July 9, 2012** the *USS Iowa*, made her final journey through the main channel of the Port of Los Angeles to her permanent home, Berth 87, in San Pedro, CA. Four Crowley Harbor class tugs towed the 887-foot-long ship.

After departing Berth 51-52, the tugs and ship headed bow first up the main channel, bypassing Berth 87 and then transitioned under the Vincent Thomas Bridge. It then pivoted in the turning basin and crossed under the bridge again. It then traveled down the main channel and docked on its starboard side at Berth 87. The ship's final voyage covered 3.4 nautical miles.

I was one of the approximately 800 guests invited aboard the ship as she was shifted to her final destination. The anticipated hour and a quarter voyage actually lasted over eight hours, due discussions about procedure with the Coast Guard, the Harbor Department and whichever other agency claimed jurisdiction on that day. Nevertheless there was plenty of time to walk the teak deck, and visit with fellow shipmates and chat with many veterans who had served aboard her in the past. There was also plenty of time to ponder on those who had stridden those decks in service to their country. One of those that came to my mind was **Vice-Admiral Samuel L. Gravely, Jr.**

At the peak of his career, Samuel L. Gravely, Jr. was the highest-ranking African American officer in the U.S. Navy, a three-

star vice admiral. Throughout his long career, Gravely was not only the first African American officer to become an admiral, but was also the first to serve on—and later command—a fighting ship.

Gravely enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1942. After boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois, he attended Officer Training Camp at UCLA, and then midshipman school at Columbia University. He was the first African American to reach the rank of captain, and when he boarded his first ship in May of 1945, he became its first black officer.



After serving as a communications, electronics, and personnel officer, Gravely left the navy in 1946 to return to school; in 1948, he earned a degree in history from Virginia Union University. The same year he graduated, 1948, President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order to integrate the armed forces. The following year, the U.S. military stepped up recruitment of African Americans. In 1952, Gravely returned to active duty on board the *USS Iowa*.

In 1961 Gravely became temporary skipper of the *USS Theodore E. Chandler*, making him the first black naval officer to command a ship. In January of 1962—having achieved the rank of lieutenant commander—he was assigned to the *USS Falgout*, the first fighting ship to be commanded by an African American officer. As a full commander, he again made naval history in

1966 as the first black commander to lead a ship—the *USS Taussig*—into direct offensive action. In 1976 Gravely became the commander of the entire third fleet.

THE SECOND HISTORIC event of significance took place on **Saturday October 13, 2012**. On that day, I witnessed the final voyage of the *Space Shuttle Endeavor*; this last trek however was not above the earth but through the streets of Los Angeles. The day was a picture perfect fall day in L.A. I was lucky enough to have a reserved spot on 54th Street and Crenshaw Blvd. The mood was festive and had every element of a parade. The move was a three day task; this day's leg of the move was scheduled to take about four hours. However, like with any other large undertaking, there were problems and the move took more than eight hours; which again, gave me plenty of time to talk to folks and ponder on this historic moment in time and particularly those who made contributions to this country's great history. One of those contributors is *Dr. Mae C. Jemison*.

Physician Mae C. Jemison was born October 17, 1956, in Decatur, Alabama. On June 4, 1987, she became the first African-



American woman ever admitted into the astronaut training program. Astronaut Mae Jemison became the first African-American woman to enter space when she

served on the crew of the *Space Shuttle Endeavor* on September 12, 1992. In

recognition of her accomplishments, Jemison received several awards and honorary doctorates.

One other individual that occupied my thoughts on that day was retired Marine Corps *Major General Charles Frank Bolden, Jr.* General Bolden began his duties as the twelfth Administrator of NASA on July 17, 2009. As Administrator, he leads the NASA team and manages its resources to advance the agency's missions and goals. Bolden's confirmation marked the beginning of his second stint with the nation's space agency. His 34-year career with the Marine Corps included 14 years as a member of NASA's Astronaut Office. After joining the office in 1980, he traveled to orbit four times aboard the space shuttle between 1986 and 1994, commanding two of the missions.



Though he never flew aboard the *Endeavor*, as NASA chief administrator the decision to make Los Angeles the final home for *Space Shuttle Endeavor* was to some great degree, partially

his. General Bolden is also a life member of the Montford Point Marine Association.

General Bolden, Dr. Jamison and Admiral Gravely will forever be a part of our great American history. Their success would not be possible without the sacrifices of those like our Original Montford Point Marine comrades. They and we stand humbly on their shoulders.

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