

## A Navy captain's pride



Juanito Holandez/Press-Telegram

“ I wouldn't let them board up any windows. I had them sweep the streets,” said Navy Captain Isaiah John Jones. “I made sure this base was going out with class and dignity.”

**Capt. Isaiah John Jones,** Commanding Officer of the Long Beach Naval Station, 53, will preside over the base closing ceremony on Friday. In his 34-year Navy career, Jones has held every rate and ranking, from seaman to captain.

*“A...moment” is a weekly feature where Press-Telegram photographers showcase their special pictures of community life.*

## Fighting for rights; protecting country

### Capt. Isaiah Jones was always a success

**By Neil Strassman**  
Staff writer

**LONG BEACH** — If it's broke, Capt. Jones can fix it. If you need it to go faster, he can make it go faster.



**Jones**, commanding officer of the Long Beach Naval Station, knows every spring, nut and bolt, every pump and every piston.



**L.B. NAVAL STATION  
1942-1994**

Jones, 53, who came to Long Beach in 1960 as a raw seaman, a fireman working on the boilers of a destroyer, will pre-

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# JONES: Captain to oversee Naval Station closing

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side over the closing ceremony at the Long Beach Naval Station on Friday.

"I am a mechanic at heart," said Jones, who worked on cars as a teen-ager. His pride and joy was a '49 Pontiac with a '51 Olds V-8 engine.

"It was the day of the hot rod, and we ran against Mercs and Fords. I was a car freak," said Jones.

It was also the day of civil rights.

Jones grew up in Birmingham, Ala., and from 1957 to 1960, he and his brother, Willie, led or joined in more than a dozen lunch counter sit-ins and boycotts.

The Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth's Bethel Baptist Church was the next block over. It was bombed, the parsonage was burned, and Martin Luther King Jr. often spoke there.

"There were white and colored soda fountains and no dressing rooms for blacks in department stores. They wouldn't let black women try on hats," he said. "We boycotted the buses and boycotted the merchants. We didn't

have much to lose."

In 1957, he was arrested at a lunch counter sit-in at a dime store and taken to the county jail. It was full, so Jones and the others were put in empty animal cages at the Alabama State Fairgrounds, and then transferred to a detention center.

"Everybody was scared. You knew you could get hell beat out of you, but you could see results. Stores started opening up and serving everyone," he said.

"It taught me discipline, integrity and made me believe the law can be just," said Jones. "Kids set the example for older folks. It taught me to set an example for others. It gave me a resolve that's helped me tremendously in life. It showed me the worst and the best in people."

Jones was going to do two years in the service and then head for Detroit to design cars, but he liked the Navy.

There was more strange machinery in a ship than he'd ever seen. The generators, pumps and motors fascinated the young sailor from Alabama.

He went to submarine school in New London, Conn., and nuclear-power school, working

on subs for five years. He moved quickly through the ranks, becoming a petty officer within a year, a chief petty officer in seven years and then a master chief.

"I was the kind of guy who learned my job and everybody else's," he said.

He was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer and served two 13-month tours in Vietnam.

In 1970, Jones knew only one other black warrant officer. Most of the higher-ranking enlisted African-Americans were stewards, gunner's mates or disbursing clerks, he said.

In 1971 Jones was promoted to lieutenant j.g. as a restricted line officer. That meant his assignments should have been in engineering, but his zeal for learning took him outside his career path. He learned tactics and ship handling and soon qualified as the officer of the deck, responsible for driving the ship.

He did a stint at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard and then returned to sea in 1975 as the auxiliary machinery officer on the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany and as the engineering offi-

cer on a destroyer tender.

He returned to the shipyard to work on the frigate shipbuilding program. Then came one of the great challenges he has faced in the Navy. Those years of working on cars would pay off.

In 1981, Jones was made the engineering officer on the pre-commissioning crew of the battleship USS New Jersey. After he got that battleship up and running, the Navy had him do the same for the USS Missouri. He served as Missouri's engineering officer until 1988.

He worked for two years in San Diego, and returned to Long Beach in charge of maintenance on the Navy ships here. In 1992, the former seaman was made base commander.

"This has been a professional triumph. I can't think of anything better than the 26 months here," said Jones. He is particularly proud that jobs were found for nearly all the civilian workers.

Jones, who lives in Carson, has been married 31 years. He has a son and daughter.

As you might expect, he's not retiring. He's going to Alameda in the Bay Area to work with the Military Sealift Command.