

Pat Christens New USS 'California'

NEWPORT NEWS (Va.) — (UPI) — First Lady Pat Nixon smacked a bottle of champagne across the bow of a new nuclear powered warship, the USS California, today as it almost slipped away from her and floated down the James River.

A rain-drenched crowd roared approval as she took one wide smack — with a bottle of California champagne — and hit the ship as it rapidly moved out of its braces.

She got a big kiss on the cheek from L. C. Ackerman, president of the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, which built the ship.

Heavy rain marred the

ceremony and sent scattering some of the estimated 1000 guests.

Mrs. Nixon and other dignitaries were protected with umbrellas. The Navy band tried to keep up spirits with renditions of "San Francisco" and "California, Here I Come."

The California is a 596-foot, 10,000-ton, \$20 million frigate, first of a new class. She ultimately will be equipped with guided missiles. It is expected to be commissioned about the middle of next year.

Mrs. Nixon on arrival from Washington, said of the commissioning, "It's an exciting day of America and peace."