

**Chief of Naval Operations
Admiral Mike Mullen
USS FREEDOM (LCS 1) Christening
23 September 2006**

Well good morning.

Thank you Congressman Green. Mrs. Smith, Governor Doyle, and all other greetings and salutations will remain in effect.

I'd like to extend a brief moment in recognition of my predecessor, good friend and mentor, Admiral Vernon Clark who could not be with us today due to travel complications, but he did an awful lot for our Navy.

He obviously has a special interest in today's ceremony.

Given the staggering pace of change and diverse threats that we now face – Admiral Clark, ahead of all of us, recognized that we needed this ship. The sooner the better.

He told Congress and everyone who would listen, "I need LCS tomorrow morning. We are going to push as fast as we can."

And here we are today. We did push fast. Just a little more than three years ago she was just an idea, and now FREEDOM stands before us.

And on this morning, we christen her, send her down the ways and get her ready to join the Fleet next year. It comes none too soon because there are tough challenges out there that only she can handle.

And so Admiral Clark, my greatest respect and admiration for your vision and for all you done. Your leadership made a great difference in getting us to this day.

Today is also a testament to the people of Marinette Marine and the entire Green Bay area. It is not just about football.

And many others, shipbuilders, integrators, skilled craftsmen you have made today possible.

Two of my predecessors as CNO grew up right here in Wisconsin – Admiral Jay Johnson and Fleet Admiral Bill Leahy.

The values they learned here in Wisconsin served them well in the Navy.

“You may be the boss,” Admiral Leahy once said, “but you are only as good as your people.”

It is the same for ships – they are only as good as the people who build and sail them. And I should note there are thousands of Wisconsin natives serving our Navy today all over the world.

Just last week I gave an interview to a reporter from a Virginia newspaper.

At one point, the interview turned to the topic of the old battleships.

There are still a few people out there who are trying to bring them back.

And one named for this great state sits pier side in downtown Norfolk, Virginia as part of a local museum.

I made it clear – as clear as I could – that they are not coming back.

We need new technology and new capabilities to win this long war. Capabilities exactly like the ones FREEDOM will provide.

So, I wake up the next day and I read a headline that says “WISCONSIN has no place in Navy’s future.”

My first thought on reading that line was I was taking a trip out here the following week.

Let me assure you that the headline refers only to the battleship WISCONSIN not the state.

We are grateful for all the support we receive here, in the Great Lakes region. The people of Wisconsin have a long and proud history of both serving our nation and building our Navy.

Marinette Marine as has been stated dates back to World War II and played a key role in helping us win that war. In fact, this yard along with others in Wisconsin have built superb minesweepers, submarines, anti-submarine patrol craft, Coast Guard cutters and a host of other ships that stood the test in defense of freedom.

So it is most fitting that our first new Littoral Combat Ship – a ship built to fight and win a new war – is being built here.

To the entire Lockheed Martin shipbuilding team and specifically to the workers of this wonderful yard, thank you. I appreciate what you are doing for our country.

Your hard work – your enthusiastic patriotism – your dedication to putting FREEDOM to sea is every bit as important as that of the Sailors who will take her in harm's way.

When FREEDOM sails she will carry a piece of each of you with her.

In particular I like to thank Fred Mosally. Who I know has been in this professionally, but this has also been a task of great personal importance to Fred.

And Fred your dedication, your persistence, your devotion and your courage have been a great part in what made this possible.

Today, it is also our special honor to have Birgit Smith and her son David with us.

Birgit, David, I want you to know that not far from my office in the Pentagon there is a billboard in one of the most heavily traveled corridors titled “We honor and appreciate” and it’s next to a large poster of your husband and father, Sergeant First Class Paul Smith.

Every time I pass by it, it reminds me of what he did that day in April 2003.

With complete disregard for his own safety – scrambling atop a damaged armored vehicle, he took the fight to the enemy. By his courageous actions – he bought time – killed more than 50 enemy soldiers – and ultimately gave his own life to save the lives of more than 100 of his fellow soldiers.

Some of them are here today. And you honor him with your presence you honor us all, just as FREEDOM does.

You knew Paul – how special he was. When I reflect on of his valor, his extraordinary courage and his selfless actions, I am left humbled and in quiet wonder.

When I think of his words – “I am prepared to give all that I am” and the way he did exactly that – it reminds me of the true high cost of living in America, the price of freedom.

Paul paid that debt for us. His valor reminds us that we must be ready to defend freedom whenever and wherever it is challenged.

If the attack on the destroyer Cole, the treachery of 9-11, if events across the globe from London to Lebanon, Baghdad to Bali, from Madrid to Tehran have taught us anything – it is that the fight we are in is really about two competing visions of the future.

Our vision of all freedom-loving people is one of hope, of prosperity of a secure future for our children and for all children.

The enemies we face – and will face – offer no hope at all. Theirs is a dark, extremist vision of fear, tyranny, death and despair.

They dream of closed societies and intolerance and injustice.

Theirs is a small world, led by small-minded men.

The immediate danger, of course, is that their ambitions are not small. Their ambitions are global in scope and deadly in practice. It is unrestricted warfare they preach. They crave instability and look for opportunities to exploit it. They observe no boundaries.

Poverty, crime, illness, smuggling, slavery, corruption, authoritarian governance, and disrespect for human rights all contribute to the kind of instability and insecurity from which terrorism festers and grows.

We can and must use the sea to prevent that instability – to protect our people and our values the same mid-western values that the people who built this ship – all of you – live by.

FREEDOM and the follow-on fleet of Littoral Combat Ships will defend those values not just in the deep blue but up close in the coastal regions of the world where our enemies like to hide and where so many of our friends and partners strive to prosper.

Drawing less than 15 feet and moving at speeds of greater than 40 knots – her speed, agility, flexible warfighting, and modularity will send a clear message to every tyrant and terrorist – we will stand for freedom anywhere and everywhere you threaten us.

She enables our Fleet to tackle head on tough challenges like piracy, smugglers, terrorists, mines, submarines, and swarming boats that lurk in the shallow seas and in coastal waters.

FREEDOM will know how to fight but she can also be a great friend.

Today, there are more competitors, more contingencies, and a greater range of maritime missions than ever before.

They are simply too broad and too complex for any nation to go it alone.

Our traditional approach to maritime security – national in focus, centered upon unilateral action or formal alliances – by itself, can not meet all the challenges ahead.

I believe the idea of an international “1000-ship navy,” built upon ad hoc maritime partnerships, offers real opportunities.

I am convinced – as many Navy leaders are around the world – that if we pool resources, together, as partners and friends, we can best tackle many of the tough maritime problems we face.

The FREEDOM class will fit perfectly into such partnerships.

But to do all this, FREEDOM’s Sailors must be just as good and as revolutionary as the ship in which they sail.

Sailors who are cross-trained, multi-skilled, multi-talented young men and women that will allow them to sail – to stay – and to fight in harm’s way in the littorals.

Commanders Don Gabrielson and Mike Doran are doing a terrific job leading this team and preparing them for those challenges. I look forward to you leading them at sea. We appreciate and expect a lot of you and your crews.

Aboard FREEDOM, you will be at the leading edge as we usher in a new era of Sea Power.

In doing so, FREEDOM will truly embody that essential faith in liberty that heroes like Sergeant First Class Paul Smith so nobly gave their lives defending.

Birgit, the nation will forever honor your husband's bravery, and I want to add that your Navy – that's right, you are one of us now – is also as proud of your husband as we are of you.

I know it is because you felt so strongly about how Americans embrace liberty – and how they embraced you – that you raised your hand and became a United States citizen yourself last year.

Your words following that ceremony touched me. They are worth repeating.

"We all want freedom and we want other people like Iraqis and Afghans around the world to have the same freedom to experience the same freedom we do every day."

That is what today and this ship are all about. That is why we are especially honored to have you not only as a fellow American but as FREEDOM's sponsor.

Ships really do take on the spirit of their sponsor. And I for one will take great comfort that when FREEDOM's crews sail into harm's way, your quiet strength will go with them.

God bless your family Birgit, God bless our Navy, God bless the citizens of Wisconsin and Michigan who are here, God bless our Nation and thank you all for coming here today.