

## **USS Charleston will bolster America's 'Away Team'**

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By Ray Mabus

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Today I'm here in Charleston to announce that our next Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) will be named the USS Charleston. This naming continues a long tradition of naval ships bearing the city's name and recognizes the strong connection between its people and our Sailors and Marines.

But it also continues the commitment of this administration to grow our Navy fleet. On any given day the U.S. Navy has 100 ships at sea and 30,000 Marines deployed around the world.

Uniquely, our maritime forces provide a presence around the globe.

Coming from the sea, we get there sooner, stay there longer, bring everything we need with us, and we don't ask anyone's permission.

Many times, our Navy and Marine Corps are already there. And being there - where it matters, when it matters - provides our country's leaders an array of options, from providing humanitarian assistance to our Japanese allies after the earthquake and tsunami to delivering the first strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria with F18s off the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush.

Providing that presence is why our fleet size matters. When North Korea threatens regional stability, our forward deployed naval forces are there to respond.

When the earthquake ravaged Haiti or storms tore through the Phillipines, Navy ships were the bases needed for sailors and Marines to deliver lifesaving aid. Without a properly sized fleet we cannot execute our missions when the president and the American people call.

Much has been said about the size of our fleet, but a few facts are in order.

On Sept. 11, 2001, the Navy's battle force stood at 316 ships. What followed was one of the greatest military buildups in our history, but even as other parts of the military grew, our fleet had shrunk to 278 ships by 2008.

In the five years before I took office as secretary, the Navy only contracted for 27 ships, far too few to even maintain the size of the fleet.

In the five years since I took office we have contracted for 70 ships.

We have halted the decline. In 2014 we launched nine new ships, the LCS and High Speed Vessel lines have joined Virginia class submarines in full production, and by the end of the decade our plan will return the fleet to over 300 ships.

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have a long and trusted partnership with the American people.

Our shipbuilding industry is a central part of our nation's manufacturing base. The skilled craftsmen and artisans that work in our shipyards and defense industry are an important part of our economy.

Here in Charleston there is a long history, from the decades of work at the Charleston Naval Shipyard to Charleston Marine Container Inc. building mission modules for the Littoral Combat Ship program today.

These hard-working Americans provide the ships that sail the world, offering deterrence and diplomacy; building partnerships and, above all, providing presence, in times of peace as well as war.

That's the unique contribution of the U.S. Navy and a role that only America can fill around the globe, and that's why the size of our fleet matters.

In the coming years, as we build the new USS Charleston, we will continue to grow the size of the fleet.

And we will recognize all the hard work of our Sailors and Marines.

With a focus on my four priorities of people, platforms, power, and partnership, we will address the complex issues of the new maritime century.

Tough decisions and leadership still lie ahead to ensure that, as the nation's Away Team, the Navy and Marine Corps maintain their role as the most powerful expeditionary force the world has ever known.

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