

## **Wisconsin's role in American sea power**

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Today, the littoral combat ship USS Freedom, built and commissioned in Wisconsin, is halfway around the world sailing the South China Sea. The ship's second rotating crew is working with our partners in the region, protecting the core American ideals of free, peaceful trade and freedom of navigation. Now, with four more ships under construction at the [Marinette Marine](#) shipyard and six more under contract, Wisconsin and Michigan are playing a vital role in maintaining American sea power.

On Tuesday, we commemorated the 200th anniversary of Oliver Hazard Perry's famous victory in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. The Great Lakes were a critical front in that war and a place dominated by shipyards producing fast ships designed for combat in shallower waters. The importance of the workers in our shipyards led my predecessor Secretary William Jones to write that they "are a valuable and independent class" and deserving of our respect for all that they do.

In 200 years, very little has changed. Platforms matter. The ships, aircraft and equipment our sailors and Marines depend on all over the globe are the result of American workers and American innovation.

One of the strengths of our system is the teamwork of our uniformed sailors, our Navy civilians and our industry partners, which is on display at the Marinette shipyard every single day. Marinette's relentless drive to improve construction standards and raise efficiency enables the Navy to strive toward our goal of 52 littoral combat ships.

The work at Marinette proves that acquisition excellence isn't just an empty phrase used in Washington; it is how we are building the fleet. Everyone benefits. It makes the fleet stronger, our nation safer and Wisconsin's and Michigan's economy more vibrant.

This is all possible because of the men and women who build these ships. Ship building is a demanding trade that requires highly skilled craftsmen, innovative thinking and dedicated management. Through hard work, good planning and close coordination with the Navy, our industry partners here have seen the price go down and quality go up with each successive ship built. This has caused the cost to plummet by almost half, from \$750 million for the first ship to a projected cost of \$393 million for the 10th.

Ships such as the Freedom and the people who work at the Marinette shipyard give us the technological edge. Another edge comes from our highly trained, dedicated, always strong, always faithful United States sailors and Marines. Around the world, far from their homes, far from their families, they are deployed in defense of America. From the wide expanse of the Pacific to the Eastern Mediterranean off the coast of Syria, they truly are America's "Away Team."

Today, the partnership between our men and women in uniform and the people of Wisconsin and Michigan is playing a vital role in maintaining American sea power around the world.

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