

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Declaration of War Anniversary
Ft. McHenry, Maryland
Monday, 18 June 2012

Governor O'Malley, Senator Mikulski, the entire Maryland congressional delegation, Madam Mayor, to the ambassadors from United Kingdom and Canada, I have two observances for you. One is that I had the privilege of participating in the Normandy 68th anniversary of the landings there earlier this month, and I went to three British events. I was soaked at each one. But this is also, Mr. Ambassador, Navy weather. And to our Canadian friends, on my visit to Canada earlier this year, both our countries are celebrating the War of 1812 as great victories. So it is fitting that we are here together as friends.

We declared American independence in 1776 in Philadelphia. We won our independence in 1781 at Yorktown. But we secured our independence in the War of 1812, here in Baltimore, on the Great Lakes, in New Orleans and on the high seas.

This misnamed war, which lasted not for one year, but until the peace treaty in 1815, began 200 years ago today, as you have heard, with this signing of the declaration of war by President Madison.

The lasting impact of that war is in many ways greater than the actual war, for as you've also heard, many of the symbols and successes of America, and especially the United States Navy, were born in that conflict.

War was declared 200 years ago today after years of injustices and injuries inflicted by Britain and France, Mr. Ambassador. A compromise of principle and reality, of freedom of the seas and of commerce, trade restrictions, aggressions against our ships, and even the impressment of our Sailors pushed America into a response that ignited our nation's fighting spirit and gave birth to a global United States Navy.

Many of the early engagements and American successes came at sea: battles fought by our first six frigates, including the Constellation, still moored here in Baltimore, and the Constitution earned her name "Old Ironsides" as British cannonballs bounced off her hull, made of live oak. Those early battles in 1812, which our fledgling fleet met and mastered the previously invincible Royal Navy, were defined by American ingenuity and boldness, traits that live on in today's Sailors and Marines.

But as America's early successes began to wane and as war moved into and past its second year, the British regained the initiative, even, as has been pointed out, attacking and burning Washington in the late summer of 1814.

But just a month later, American determination turned the tide once more, and the combined effort at sea and on land stopped British forces at North Point in Baltimore. While the details of these battles have dimmed, they still burn as brightly in our collective memory as the rocket's red glare of September 1814, when Francis Scott Key, in this oft-told history, stood on

the deck of a British warship, watched and waited to see if our nation's tattered flag still flew here, over Fort McHenry, after a night of unrelenting fire. When dawn showed that flag still there, his experience became a central part of our identity in "The Star-Spangled Banner."

It was also this war that gave us the enduring Navy watchword, "Don't give up the ship." And from the war emerged some of America's most memorable heroes: Andrew Jackson leading the final victory at New Orleans; the wonderfully named Oliver Hazard Perry, building a fleet and then leading it to victory in Lake Erie and in nine separate Great Lakes campaigns to help secure our upper Midwest; and Dolly Madison, risking her own life to preserve the tangible touchstones of American independence, original copies of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Much, as has been noted, has changed in 200 years. Britain, our foe then, Canada, our foe then, have become our staunchest allies. In all my Pentagon meetings with the First Sea Lord of Britain, Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope, including one last week, he ruefully points out that when he is in the office of the American Secretary of the Navy, he is surrounded by paintings of burning British ships. And he is. We then, though, both gladly note that today we stand together as inseparable friends, as we have for decades. We work together; we advance together; we fight together.

We do the same with our brothers and sisters to our north, with Canada, in war and in peace. Our relationship with Britain and with Canada have changed, and our Navy has changed as well. The mission of our fleet has expanded and grown exponentially more complex. We still keep the sea lanes open for all those who conduct peaceful commerce, but our responsibilities have spread to every corner of the globe, and we work in every corner of the globe with our allies from Britain and Canada.

The challenges of the world now, both actually and potentially, are immeasurably variable and multidimensional, ranging from conventional warfare to irregular war to cyber to piracy to humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

Two hundred years have not changed the fact that the vast majority of the world's populations live near the sea, that a vast majority of the world's commerce travels over the sea and that we are counted on to keep the peace and our sea lanes open, to deter aggression and, when needed, to win the fight.

Some of the tall sails that you've seen over the weekend represent the fleet as it existed 200 years ago: wooden ships fighting each other close-range and powered by wind. Wind gave way to coal, coal to oil and then to nuclear power. Each transformation increased our combat effectiveness and reaffirmed naval supremacy in the world.

Today we are prepared once again to lead the world in energy transformation, addressing a significant military vulnerability, our dependence on foreign sources of fossil fuels. Next month, during the largest naval exercise in the world, the Rim of the Pacific, we will demonstrate the Great Green Fleet, a carrier strike group whose planes and surface combatants are running on a 50/50 blend of regular aviation gas and diesel fuel and biofuel. I named it the Great Green Fleet as an echo of Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet, which helped usher in America as a

global power at the beginning of the 20th century, just as the War of 1812 helped usher in America as a power to be reckoned with in the 19th century.

The smoothbore cannons of 1812 you see on the Constellation have become modern naval guns and missiles and torpedoes that we use today. Awareness of the situation, once limited to the horizon based on the eyesight of lookouts high in the ship's rigging, have given way to instantaneous worldwide communications and networking. The changes we have witnessed in our Navy and in our nation over the last 200 years have almost all been for the better. We've added women to our ranks in the Navy nearly everywhere, including today on our submarines. We've greatly increased what is required of our Sailors. There are no more jobs for strong backs and weak minds.

And right now our submarines are plying the depths, our ships are under way, our Marines deployed and our aircraft aloft, in the words of the Marine hymn, "in every clime and place." And everywhere these technological marvels that are our ships and planes today – everywhere they are, they are manned by the finest, most highly trained, most skilled fighting force ever assembled, the United States Navy and Marine Corps.

When we are doing our job, we are far from home, and we're often out of the consciousness of the American people. We are America's away team. Fewer than 1 percent of our population today serves in our military, so events like this give us a chance to showcase to the other 99 percent what your military does, because one thing that has not changed over 200 years: the courage, the commitment, the dedication of our Sailors, our Marines and all our military.

This commemoration not only helps us recall that history, but it helps remind us. Those Sailors and Marines and all our military continue to live up to that great legacy bequeathed to them 200 years ago. The force that came of age in the War of 1812 continues to protect us and inspire us. Every person – every person who wears the uniform of this country has skill and courage and patriotism, and we are in the debt of everyone willing to wear the uniform of America. Our celebration today honors every man and woman who has ever worn the uniform, making sure that the star-spangled banner continues to wave and all it represents continues to endure.

So to our friends the British and our friends the Canadians, to the world, on this historic occasion, from Baltimore to Boston, New York to New Orleans, North Point to Norfolk, the Great Lakes to the Gulf, the coast of Africa to the Pacific Rim, from Tripoli to Tripoli, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Marine Corps continue to protect our interests by projecting our power around the globe. This naval heritage that we so proudly honor here today will not only persevere; we, in concert with our friends and allies, will continue to prevail.

From the Navy, "Semper Fortis" – forever courageous. From the Marine Corps, "Semper Fidelis" – forever faithful.

Thank you.