

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Introduction of Senator Carl Levin
GERALD R. FORD Keel Laying
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Thank you all for being here today. A week ago, today, I was honored to participate in the commissioning of the USS *NEW YORK*. I watched with great admiration and immeasurable pride as the crew brought that ship to life, manned their first watches, and celebrated the beginning of their operational life. In being here today to see the keel of our next aircraft carrier laid down, we see the full circle of ship construction within the Navy. One ship commissioned, another symbolically begins. The Navy goes on, and we open a new chapter in the long history of our Service.

In 1925, it was written, “It is the Navy's mission to protect our coasts, our seaborne commerce, our far-flung possessions. Naval Aviation cannot take the offensive from the shore; it must go to sea on the back of the fleet.”¹ That is the reason and the purpose for this ship. The *GERALD R. FORD* will sail abroad, it will carry the fight to the enemy, it will be the nucleus of a Strike Group around which our operations coalesce.

There is nothing as reassuring to our friends and allies, and nothing so daunting to our enemies, as the sight of an American aircraft carrier and its companion Strike Group coming over the horizon. This carrier will join the elite group of ships that are our most visible and our most versatile demonstration of American military power. Our carriers have projected force from their decks in tens of thousands of tactical aircraft sorties over

¹ Radm William A. Moffett, USN, October 1925, in the *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*

Iraq and Afghanistan. Our carriers have served as Special Forces forward staging bases during the initial assault on Afghanistan. Our carriers have hosted non-governmental aid organizations and delivered millions and millions of pounds of disaster assistance after natural calamities like the Indonesian Tsunami of 2004. And our carriers are on station today, supporting combat and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, and reassuring our allies through joint training exercises in the Pacific.

That is the legacy and that is the inheritance of the *GERALD R. FORD*, a legacy that was pointed out was born right here in Hampton Roads 99 years ago. A legacy tried and tested in the blood and heroism of the Pacific campaign in World War II, and carried on in the 11 carriers of our modern fleet. It is a legacy built by the workers of this shipyard and the thousands who have gone before in keeping America strong by building our Fleet.

It's very fitting that our next carrier, a ship that will calm the unknown crises of the future by its very presence offshore, will be named for President Gerald Ford. Throughout his life, President Ford – as a naval officer, a Congressman, as President – projected a calm competence, reassuring all those around him that all would be well. As President, he took action in the midst of a troubled time and presided over the healing of America following the bitter divisiveness of the previous few years. His example will live on in the USS *GERALD R. FORD* to inspire the generations of young Americans who will serve on that ship.

Susan Ford Bales, thank you so much for representing your father and for honoring his legacy as this ship's sponsor. You have always been part of a Navy family, but rest assured that as of today, that family has gotten a lot larger.

Senator Levin, thank you and Barbara for being here today to help honor another proud Michigander. You have always been a supporter of our men and women in uniform, you have been a strong and principled leader of the Senate Armed Services Committee. As a military and as a Navy we are grateful for your service, for your knowledge of acquisitions issues and your commitment to reducing waste in our military. Your sponsorship of the Acquisition Improvement and Accountability Act of 2007, and this year's Weapons System Acquisition Reform Act have changed the military acquisitions process for the better. It is in no small part because of your tremendous efforts that we have been able to maintain the strongest Navy in the world.

The Navy and all of us are grateful for your presence, and grateful for the friendship that you have shown to us.

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome the senior Senator from Michigan, Senator Carl Levin.