

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Mississippi Christening  
Groton, Connecticut  
Saturday, December 3, 2011

Admiral Donald, thank you so much for that introduction. And thank you for your long and very distinguished service to America. I am so happy to be here today at the christening of the wonderfully named Mississippi. A christening is a signal event in the milestone in the life of any warship. It is when a boat finally bears the name it will carry throughout its time in the fleet. It is also deeply ingrained in Navy tradition. A part of that tradition will occur when the sponsor breaks the bottle of champagne and makes it official.

You have a great sponsor in Allison Stiller. Allison, you have already shown your commitment to this ship and to her crew. And that commitment will be matched by the professionalism and dedicated patriotism of Mississippi and this crew standing before me. Wherever they go, you go with them.

So to Senator Blumenthal, Governor Haley Barbour, Representative Joe Courtney, Representative Steve Palazzo, distinguished guests, Mississippians, thank you for coming to Groton today, thank you for your service, thank you for celebrating the continuity of service and the legacy of victory that the Virginia-class submarine Mississippi represents to our Navy and to our Nation.

This is my second christening in the last two weeks honoring Mississippi. Two weeks ago I was in San Diego to christen the USNS Medgar Evers a hero from our [inaudible 3:04] state and here we are to honor the entire state. Next week, I along with some other people that are here today will be in Honolulu for the 70th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. That event reminds us of the legacy of our submarine fleet, particularly the way it operated in WWII. Our Pacific Fleet surface ships were mostly destroyed or seriously damaged in that attack, but the subs survived, and they carried the war to the enemy. And did they carry the war. Submarines, represented about 2 percent of the U.S. Navy at the time, but they destroyed over 30 percent of enemy ships. All without the help of any supporting ships.

Four decades ago, I was a surface officer in the Navy, and I know what submariners called my ship: a target.

Today's submarines like Mississippi, are as long as a football field and they're built for stealth. They are our first line of defense, protecting the United States and our global commons. And today and with this christening, we take a major step toward adding this newest sentinel to our force.

Now, despite the very obvious connection, I was not responsible for naming Mississippi. My predecessor had that distinction. But, I think it is safe to say, if he had not gotten around to it, I would have.

You've heard the history of other ships named Mississippi. The figurehead of the second USS Mississippi, a member of the Great White Fleet, sits on the capitol grounds in Jackson, which I saw every day - and I'm sure Governor Barbour sees every day - I saw when I had the honor of serving as Mississippi's governor.

More recently, during Desert Storm, the cruiser Mississippi launched Tomahawks at targets deep inside Iraq. I was governor then, and I was proud to receive the flag that Mississippi flew when it launched its first missiles. It is no accident that this is the fifth ship to bear that name. The long history of naming ships Mississippi is a testament to the state's history in ship building and to the resilience, the patriotism and the strength of the people of Mississippi.

After we commission Mississippi - and by the way, commissioning will be on June 2 in Gulf Port. I'm going to have to talk to our schedulers - Connecticut in December, Mississippi in June. When we commission Mississippi, she will join the others of the VIRGINIA class in accomplishing the incredibly wide variety of missions we ask of our modern submarines. Our lethal and our undetected, undersea force provides formidable and flexible options for America. Mississippi is built to excel in the traditional submarine areas of warfare; anti-submarine; anti-surface; strike warfare; and she is also built to excel in non-traditional ones like special operations; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and irregular warfare.

Mississippi can and most probably will, during her service, patrol the waters from the North Atlantic to the Western Pacific and under the Arctic ice. She can work with the Coast Guard and our international partners to interdict the flow of drugs into our country. She can support our Strike Groups around the world. And she can go along coastlines in very shallow water and conduct surveillance or deliver our special operators, like our SEALs, undetected. During her years of service, she will undoubtedly carry out missions unknown today.

The ability of Mississippi to fulfill all these missions is a testament to the skill and dedication of the people of Electric Boat and Newport News Shipbuilding. Some of those builders and their leadership are with us today. They represent what we cannot lose in this country - the skills of a critical industrial base.

When I was appointed Secretary of the Navy, two and a half years ago, our naval fleet was 283 ships, the smallest it had been since 1916 and down significantly from the 326 ships that were present on 9/11/2001.

For the last two years, I and the people that work with me in Navy, have made rebuilding our fleet our top priority. Before we took office, our average ship construction was less than six a year. Now, we've nearly doubled that rate, to 11 more ships for the Navy every year. I want to be known as 11-ship Ray.

But to get the ships we need, we have to get the right price and a fair value for our shipbuilding dollars, particularly during this time of budget constraints. And we are doing that, we're increasing competition and driving hard bargains to assure the American taxpayers are getting the most for their money.

And in this, we have had great, great partners in Electric Boat and Newport News.

You have heard it over and over again, but I'm going to say it again because it is so important, the subs of the VIRGINIA-class have been on or ahead of schedule and under budget. Mississippi continues and expands on that great record. We cannot thank the people who built her enough and emphasize enough how important it is that we do this under budget and ahead of schedule.

Mississippi left her port a year early, but her time in the fleet is going to stretch over decades.

The Navy is the only service that constructs these incredibly complex and technologically advanced military platforms that last for 30 to 40 years. A good example is the USS Enterprise, we just celebrated her 50th anniversary. There will be Sailors who sail on Mississippi who are not yet born today.

Mississippi will be here for a while and she continues the great line of our nuclear powered Navy. Just think of those innovators who conceived the notion of putting a nuclear reactor on a submarine, and the doubt and the skepticism that they faced. And think of the results, right here today, of their innovation. The Navy leads our nation in pioneering new energy sources and we will continue to do that.

For the men and women who built Mississippi, for those who crew her today and in the future, it is your work that provides this partnership between Navy and Industry that can keep costs under control and get us the ships that we need. It is your work – the builders, the crew – that guarantees our submarine force remains absolutely the best in the world. It is your work that assures that the Navy and Marine Corps stay as the most formidable expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known. And it is your work that guarantees that America will have freedom and freedom will be protected around the world.

When you look at this ship, you know American exceptionalism will not only survive, it will prevail.

So to Mississippi, fair winds and following seas.

God bless Mississippi and all who sail in her.