

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
235th Anniversary Celebration
Battleship NORTH CAROLINA
Wilmington, NC
Tuesday, 12 October, 2010

Thank you all so much. This is a catapult we're on. And it keeps bending and buckling and I'm afraid that one of us is going to be catapulted off.

Thank you so much for that welcome. Thank you, particularly to our veterans who are here today. Thank you, Mike McIntyre, for that generous introduction.

I'm going to talk a little bit about what Congressman McIntyre has done for the Navy later. But I did have to share one story. He's pretty proud of the fact that Mountain Dew started in his hometown. And we went down to the Pax [Patuxent] River Naval Air Station to watch the first flight – or the first supersonic flight – of the Navy's Green Hornet F-18 that were flying on biofuels. And Congressman McIntyre went with us.

And the Navy gives me a wonderful ride. We've got a great aircraft. There's only one design flaw and that is the cup holders are about that big. So if you don't hold onto your drink when you take off, it's going to get all over you. I reminded Congressman McIntyre of that as we headed out. And he very beautifully picked up his drink as we took off. On the way back, he and I both forgot. And I got to wear an entire glass of Mountain Dew to my next meeting which was at the White House.

So we were laughing about that today as we were taxiing out. And I had a glass of iced tea and was talking about it and everything. And we took off and I put it down too quick and poured the iced tea all over me.

So this is the Mike McIntyre memorial drink-spilling aircraft that we have in the U.S. Navy. I'm not flying with you anymore.

To everybody here, General Jensen, thank you for being here from Camp Lejeune, Captain Bragg, directors of the Battleship North Carolina Memorial, Dave Echevarria and the members of the Navy League here in Wilmington. Thank you for putting this on and thank you for this great weather.

I just got back yesterday from a trip to six countries in eight days. And I flew back yesterday from Greenland. We stopped at Mons and Brussels and Belgium and Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. We got to go down and see the Sailors of the USS Taylor in La Coruña, Spain. It was the ship's last port visit before coming home after six months at sea. And I spent the last day-and-a-half of the trip in Greenland talking with them about security issues in the high north.

One thing that was an absolute constant in the Baltics and Greenland and NATO and at SHAPE was the recognition of a need for more energy independence. That's why one of the things I'm doing in the Navy is trying to make this a focus. Strategically, we buy too much energy from people who may not have our best interests at heart and tactically, getting a gallon of gasoline to our frontline unit costs too much, takes too long, and is too dangerous. The Army did a study, and found that for every 24 convoys we lose a Marine or a soldier.

We've got to change the way we use and produce energy. One of the things I do want to do is express my appreciation to Congressman McIntyre for his service on both agriculture and armed services. He took the time to learn about the need for energy independence. We went to see it in action, as I told you, down in Patuxent River. And he's been a strong supporter of what we're trying to do in the Navy and what we're trying to do with energy. As well as a strong supporter - as is the entire state of North Carolina - for all the bases, the installations that we have here.

Today is a particularly poignant day to be talking about the Navy. One decade ago, 10 years ago today, the USS COLE was attacked in the Gulf of Aden in Yemen as the world we lived in began to change. I want to take just a moment to recognize the sacrifice of those 17 Sailors aboard the COLE who were killed that day. As well as the service of the tens of thousands of Sailors and Marines around the world and in Afghanistan, Iraq, and those forward deployed and those who have worn the uniform of our country; those who have answered the call, those who have made the sacrifice for America.

More than anything else, holding this event on the anniversary of the COLE bombing reminds us of the need for constant readiness, constant preparedness. The Sailors on the COLE didn't wake up that morning thinking they were going to war. But when war came, it came to them. They reacted with courage, they reacted with devotion to duty, and they reacted with loyalty to their shipmates. Those are the same traits that have been the hallmark of the United States Navy for 235 years.

The spirit of the men and women of the COLE is the very same shown by those who once walked these decks. And I can't tell you how many memories coming to a ship like this brings back to me. I served on a World War II era Cruiser - it had the same teak decks, the smells, the sights. And I can feel the notion that generations of Sailors holystoned these decks - and I think of the people who served here - and the Sailors and the Marines who have walked the decks of every ship named NORTH CAROLINA since the beginning of our country.

The story of our Navy and the stories of those who have gone down to the sea in ships, since the birth of the republic, lives on in the steel of ships like this NORTH CAROLINA, and every ship we sail today. The first NORTH CAROLINA, which there was a model of coming in, was authorized by Congress in 1816 hard on the heels of the War of 1812 - it was a 100-gun wooden ship. That first NORTH CAROLINA was a result of the lessons that we learned in that war, the experience we gained from the construction, the battle records of those first six frigates.

That NORTH CAROLINA, like this one, was one of the most powerful ships of its kind, capable of standing toe-to-toe with any ship in the world. We saw the ironclad NORTH

CAROLINA, and then at the beginning of the 20th century, the third NORTH CAROLINA. And one that spoke to the birth of a new Navy; a Navy more ready to engage the world and one ready and eager to develop and embrace new technologies.

The cruiser NORTH CAROLINA witnessed the birth of naval aviation, and in 1915 conducted the first ever underway demonstration of a steam catapult when it launched a Curtiss Model F into the bright blue skies off the coast of Pensacola.

And then came this NORTH CAROLINA. One of the last classes of ships built in accordance with the limitations imposed between the two wars, authorized in '37 and commissioned in early '41 with war looming on the horizon.

This NORTH CAROLINA, exactly like its predecessors, incorporated the latest technologies and innovations of naval architecture. She was built with four main engine rooms to improve its watertight integrity. She was welded instead of riveted. She was one of the first ships equipped with the Navy's newest technology – something called radar.

When the war finally came, NORTH CAROLOINA headed west. I realize that most of you know this story better than I do, but here's the Cliffs Notes version: NORTH CAROLINA arrived in the Pacific four days after Midway and from that point she participated in virtually every major action of the Pacific.

Her campaign across the Pacific was the map of that war: Guadalcanal, the Solomons, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, Truk, Tinian, Saipan, Guam, Philippines, Okinawa. Over the course of that war she was attacked by enemy planes and kamikazes countless, countless times. She was hit by a torpedo that should've sunk her, but her crew and damage control parties saved her. She fired tens of thousands of rounds in support of Marines onshore. She ended the war anchored in Tokyo Bay proudly displaying 15 battle scars.

Today the name NORTH CAROLINA and the legacy that this ship earned lives on. Just two years ago, right here in Wilmington, we commissioned a new NORTH CAROLINA. This one, a *Virginia*-class submarine, bears all the history and actually some of the pieces of this ship and its forbearers. She and her crew are already living up to this namesake – to the honor of the name – and representing this city, this state, this nation, proudly and with distinction.

In 235 years the Navy has been in constant motion – just like the oceans we sail. In 235 years, we have led the United States and the world in technological innovation and the ability to meet and to overcome any challenge, any obstacle, and every fight that we have faced. In 235 years we have grown, we have adapted, and we have changed when necessary. We've done it to address the ever-shifting requirements of a fluid and complex world.

You can see in the history of the five ships named NORTH CAROLINA in the different propulsion forces they used: first wind, then coal, then oil and now nuclear. You can see it in the very service that each one has. When they were commissioned, the Navy and the nation didn't know with certainty what the future would bring. Our nation didn't know what conflicts or what conditions would be required of its ships 10 years or 20 years or 30 years in the future.

We had to build ships then and we have to build ships now that are flexible and able to do a lot of things. Ships like the submarine NORTH CAROLINA.

As Congressman McIntyre pointed out the destroyer GRAVELY is being commissioned here next month. And we have to trust the integrity, the ingenuity, and the creativity of the most important thing we have in the Navy, our Sailors, our Marines. We trust them to make sure that we continue to be the most formidable expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known.

I've been Secretary almost a year now. I've visited with tens of thousands of Sailors and Marines around the world on every ship and every submarine and every squadron and every MEF [Marine Expeditionary Force] and every mobile unit, every SEAL [Sea Air and Land] team and every SEABEE [Construction Battalion] battalion. I've seen the same devotion to duty and the readiness to give everything in service of our country. For that we owe them a huge debt. We owe them our very existence. As our judge and minister said in his eloquent invocation, they are what allowed us to live the way we do.

Less than 1 percent of our country today serves in uniform. And it's a fact that we don't recognize enough and we don't thank the people who are willing to do it enough. But on this occasion, the Navy's birthday, we get to say thanks to all of those who have served, to all those who have made the Navy what it is, to their families who have supported them and sacrificed for them back home, and most importantly to those standing on the back of Poseidon - those Sailors and Marines today on station all around the world.

Thank you all, Wilmington, and Godspeed.