

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
John F. Kennedy Library  
Boston, Massachusetts  
Sunday, May 29, 2011

Tom Putnam, thank you so much for that introduction and for what this library does for our country, and thank you to every member of the Kennedy Family and to all of you for being here today in celebration of the life and service of one of our greatest Presidents on the 94<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Please let me add my welcome to those already given: welcome to Boston and the Kennedy Library.

Two days ago at Annapolis, just over 1000 midshipmen were commissioned into the Navy and Marine Corps. These young men and women, like the ones you saw in the film, entered into service voluntarily, and these midshipmen entered in a time of conflict, certain their service in defense of our democracy will send them to every corner of the Earth touched by the hand of Neptune, and in some cases, far beyond the waves.

They made their decision to enter into service consciously, four years ago, just as thousands of Americans do every year. They made their decision to wear the uniform of this country because the peace dreamed of by this library's namesake has not yet been won. As in his time, there are challenges to overcome, horizons to explore and battles for freedom to win because we remain, as he said, "unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today, at home and around the world."

President Kennedy was committed to those rights, committed to public service his entire life. Like those midshipmen commissioned Friday at Annapolis, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, as you can see from the photos, also chose naval service at a time our country faced conflict. The

son of an ambassador, he could have easily avoided combat, but instead volunteered for one of the more dangerous assignments, commanding motor torpedo boats made out of plywood in the heavily contested Solomon Islands.

The story of PT 109 is iconic and incredibly well known, but still amazes at every retelling. In August 1943, on a night patrol out of his base in the Solomons, his boat was split in half by a Japanese destroyer in Blakett Strait. Then-LTjg Kennedy gathered his crew in the water and led them to a deserted island, swimming with the life vest of one of his wounded Sailors between his teeth. After establishing them there, he swam about 2 ½ miles across open sea in search of food and rescue. For his leadership and his bravery, he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

His is one of many honors earned in military service by graduates of Harvard University, which ranks only behind Annapolis and West Point in terms of Medal of Honor recipients. That is just one reason why I was proud earlier this year to reach an agreement to restore Naval ROTC to Harvard's campus after an absence of four decades.

John Kennedy's commitment to public service carried on after the War, first in the House, then in the Senate, and in 1961 to the White House, where he became one of the most beloved Presidents in our history, both here and around the world.

In his commitment to freedom and to democratic ideals, in his strength of determination to defend those principles, and to pursue peace, John Fitzgerald Kennedy embodied the vision of our nation's founders. Kennedy's words lifted our souls and his actions lit the spirit of public service within millions.

If it is alright, I would like to take a very personal moment here. I had just turned 12 when John Kennedy was elected President. I know, Caroline that you and your family hear this

almost every day, but it was the example of John Kennedy that led me to a life of public service. He showed that public service was a noble undertaking and could uplift countless lives. He also showed that it could be done with grace, and humor, and without rancor. While my father is the greatest hero I have or will ever have, it was your father who showed me and so many others what was possible in a life.

The site of this library was chosen in part because of the enduring link between John Kennedy and the sea. He was a Sailor, in spirit as well as service. The images are strong, in our mind as well as in this building, of the courageous young naval commander as well as the vigorous and still youthful American commander at the helm of our nation.

Just as John Kennedy's ship and his shipmates were tried, tested and found equal to the challenge in the South Pacific, the U.S. Navy today sails the globe not in pursuit of domination, but in defense of freedom.

The most visible and formidable ships that the Navy has serve as beacons of liberty and those are America's aircraft carriers. Every day, every day, those carriers are on station, ready to respond to crises, ready to assist those affected by disasters, ready to protect and build the peace that President Kennedy sought.

Unique in the history of this world, these carriers stand as the first line of defense for all nations, securing the safety of the seas and maintaining the freedom of the global commons.

Within hours of the March 11 Sendai earthquake and tsunami that happened only two and a half months ago, the carrier *RONALD REAGAN* pivoted from preparing for combat operations in Central Asia to providing disaster relief to Japan. Its mission in Japan now complete, the *REAGAN* has now resumed its original mission, and joined the carrier *ENTERPRISE*; the ship is providing close air support to our Marines and Sailors on the ground in Afghanistan.

Last year, it was the carrier *CARL VINSON* which led the international response after the earthquake in Haiti, acting as a base of operations for helicopter lift and for distribution of aid.

No other country can do this. No other country except the United States can do what the Sailors and Marines of *REAGAN* and *VINSON* did, using exactly the same people, exactly the same equipment, and exactly the same training to deliver food and relief supplies that they would have used to deliver ordnance.

This is the legacy that the ship we name today will inherit – a legacy of meeting every task, completing every mission, supporting every friend, and overcoming every foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

And in doing so, our newest carrier will carry one of the great names in American history. I have no doubt that this new ship will always be equal to its tests, it shall never be weary, and it shall prevail.

For four decades, the first carrier *JOHN F. KENNEDY* saw honorable service across the Mediterranean and Middle East. Caroline, I know you remember that ship well, because as the photo shows here, one of the most memorable pictures in our Navy archives is of a nine year old Caroline Kennedy breaking a bottle across her bow. I know the first USS *JOHN F. KENNEDY* well, too, because my ship, USS *LITTLE ROCK* operated as part of her task force while I was on board. One of her former commanding officers, VADM Mike Miller, now Superintendent of the Naval Academy, is here with us today. The first USS *JOHN F. KENNEDY* was decommissioned in 2007 but today that proud name returns to the Fleet to serve this nation.

To paraphrase a quote from John Winthrop which President-elect Kennedy recalled in addressing the Massachusetts Legislature before he began his administration: the eyes of the world will be upon it.

Thank you Caroline Kennedy for hosting this event and for agreeing to sponsor this ship, your father's ship. It will add to the legacy of John F. Kennedy which already burns so brightly in the American spirit.

For everybody here, please help me welcome to the Fleet America's newest symbol of liberty, the second ship of its name, USS *JOHN F. KENNEDY*.