

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
On the Occasion of His Public Swearing-In Ceremony
Washington Navy Yard
Washington, DC
Thursday, 18 June 2009

Mr. Secretary, Admiral Mullen, Members of Congress, very distinguished American and international guests, family and friends, thank you all for being here on this day when I publicly re-up in the Navy. Last month, I had a private swearing-in ceremony so that I could be piped aboard immediately and go to work for our Sailors and Marines. Earlier today, Vice President Biden repeated the oath at the White House and now Secretary Gates has done me the great honor of administering it here with you. Mr. Secretary, I am well sworn-in ...

I have to tell you tonight, standing here, I never dreamed I would be here when I began my Naval Service nearly four decades ago as a very junior Surface Warfare Officer on the deck of USS LITTLE ROCK. Early on, I saw the sacrifices that our service members make every day to defend and secure our country.

I carried the memory and the commitment to service I gained there through all the years since and through my time as a Governor and Ambassador. I am proud of that first tour of duty on a cruiser...and proud beyond words to finally “come home” to the Department of the Navy. I am blessed and sustained by my wife Lynne, and my three children Elisabeth, Annie and Kate, who are themselves so proud now to be a Navy family.

In the month since I began this new tour of duty, what I have seen firsthand has given me new insight into the world’s most exceptional fighting force. As a young man, I experienced the friendly rivalry and the unbreakable camaraderie of our Navy and Marine Corps. I am more certain than ever that this unique combination, two distinct forces operating as one, is far greater than the sum of its parts.

I will always strive to be equal to that high standard of service—and to those who have come before me in this office. For I stand before you on the shoulders of greatness, like those of

the former secretaries here tonight. Seventy-four Americans before me have taken the oath as Secretary of the Navy. The first, Benjamin Stoddert, believed that a first-class Navy had to have first-class ships, built in first-class yards.

He created six Navy yards from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to Portsmouth, Virginia – including this very one here, in the nation’s capital. The very place we gather for this ceremony testifies to the vision and resolve of our early leaders.

We are the inheritors of a noble and storied legacy. From Jeremiah O’Brien’s raid that captured HMS *Margaretta* and the formation of the Marine Corps at Tun Tavern, our Sailors and Marines fought as one to secure our freedom. And that day was prologue to so many fateful moments since.

After independence from Great Britain in 1783, American ships no longer enjoyed the protection of the Royal Navy on the high seas. They quickly became prey for pirates operating out of the Barbary States in North Africa. At home, the Articles of Confederation had established a weak national government unable to marshal a strong Navy.

When the Constitutional Convention assembled in Philadelphia, the framers understood that America could not be free and could not be independent without a first line of defense on the seas. And in the opening words of the Constitution, enshrined in the Preamble, is their timeless pledge to provide for the common defense.

And in their time, within only a few years, the new national government of a young Republic could dispatch naval forces across the Atlantic—and Sailors and Marines together confronted and defeated the Barbary Pirates. Then and in the two hundred thirty years since, victory has come because young Americans have raised their right hands and solemnly sworn to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.

They came from all parts of our country, all walks of life, lowly and mighty, all bound together by a shared belief that ours was a great Nation, and one worth fighting for.

Again and again, they have given life to that belief—and they have risked lives for it. They upheld the oath when Lieutenant Presley O’ Bannon led Marines across six hundred miles of desert to capture the fortified city of Derna, in Tripoli, and rescued Captain William Bainbridge and the kidnapped crew of USS PHILADELPHIA.

During the War of 1812, they upheld their oath at sea and on the Great Lakes, as Isaac Hull, Stephen Decatur, and Oliver Hazard Perry commanded frigates and forces in battle and victory against the world’s most formidable naval power.

Those who came after them upheld their oath at Chapultepec and Mobile Bay; in the Philippines, and in Cuba. They gave full faith and allegiance to the same at Belleau Wood and Fallujah.

We will never forget the heroism and the last full measure of devotion of those like Commander Howard Gilmore during World War II, the commanding officer of USS GROWLER, who lay wounded on the deck of his surfaced submarine. As the enemy approached and prepared to board, Commander Gilmore ordered his executive officer to dive the sub, sacrificing his life to save those of his crew. There is a long, unbreakable line of heroism that stretches from there, back to the beginning, and on to Inchon, the Mekong Delta, the Cold War submarine patrols, and the bravery and skill of the Navy and Marine Corps in Iraq and Afghanistan today. In the ongoing struggle, we remember modern heroes like Marine Corporal Jonathan Yale and Lance Corporal Jordan Haerter.

In April of last year, these two Marines were standing their post in Ramadi when a suicide bomber tried to crash through the checkpoint. Those two Marines acted together and took the truck under fire and stopped it just short of the security point. When the explosives in the truck went off anyway, Jonathan and Jordan saved the lives of fifty people by sacrificing their own. .

For these Americans and countless more, uncommon valor is a common virtue. Those heroes are more than a faceless, nameless crowd in the passing pages of history. The heroes of our country are the heroes of our own families. They come from us; they defend us; wearing the uniform from 1775 until today, they are the shining fabric of America.

Some of you here have an ancestor who joined the patriots of the Revolution in pledging their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Others have someone, maybe from the first generation of your family to come to these shores, who charged full speed ahead with Farragut at Mobile Bay, manned the ironclads at Hampton Roads, or even now guard the Strait of Hormuz or fight in the high deserts of Afghanistan.

The proud legends of our Nation, from the Halls of Montezuma and to the shores of Tripoli, and to farther seas and more distant battlefields, are the proud legends of your own families. We think of them all on this beautiful evening in June. Maybe your grandfather did convoy escort duty in the North Atlantic, or your grandmother was a nurse in the Pacific.

Perhaps your great uncle was a Seabee; your great aunt was a WAVE. You've heard the stories again and again of how a family friend was at Pusan or a member of the "Frozen Chosin". Your father flew Phantoms from Yankee Station. Your neighbor was at Beirut. Your older brother served in Desert Storm; your sister in Iraq.

Today, you Sailors and Marines —and often your children, answer the call to serve around the globe. Inspired by this history, not just national but personal, our children's children and beyond will rise to the example of service you and others before them have given so that our Nation will not only endure, but prosper long after we are gone.

So the strands of memory may change, but our cause outlasts time and circumstance. There are grandparents or parents or even older brothers and sisters who would not recognize the equipment used today. But they all, every one of them, regardless of when they served, would recognize the flag of our Nation flying atop the mast of our ships and emblazoned on the side of our aircraft. That flag forever reflects the soul of our fighting forces.

There are words, too, words we all learned, words spoken long ago, that light our mission across the generations. On September 23, 1779, John Paul Jones, commanding BONHOMME RICHARD, in British waters off Flamborough Head engaged HMS *Serapis*. After hours of combat, Jones' ship had heavy damage. Commanding *Serapis*, Captain Richard Pearson, asked Jones to haul down the new American flag and surrender. Jones' reply to him, and to us, became the watch word of the Navy: "I have not yet begun to fight." And before the battle was over, he had captured *Serapis*.

All of our heroes, all of them, still speak to us today--many from the pages of history that they wrote, but many more from the green hillside of Arlington, from the military cemeteries of Normandy and from Château-Thierry, from their tomb inside USS ARIZONA, and from innumerable other distant places beneath the waves, with, in the words of Anchors Aweigh, only the "blue of the seven seas and gold of God's great sun" to give testament to their courage. These Sailors and Marines, all of them, look over our shoulders today as we stand watch by the example they set. To us, in countless different ways, they say: "Don't give up the ship!" And to our adversaries, they warn, we have not yet begun to fight.

We sail on now in the wake of John Paul Jones, the father of our Navy, who dared to challenge the enemy in his home waters. Today we are at war and our forces are taking on a mortal enemy. Today also, our forces deter potential adversaries. Our sea services are always forward-deployed, always forward-leaning. We do not rest or lie at anchor, waiting for the call. For the call is now, and unremitting—and so is our resolve.

In that spirit, let me affirm that my first commitment as Secretary will be our service members and to their families. This is—this must be-- more than a slogan. The law requires me to ensure that the Department of the Navy is properly manned, trained, and equipped, fully prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. I deeply believe that this involves not just what our Sailors and Marines do for us, but what we do for them and their families. As long as I am Secretary, taking care of your family is an imperative, and not an afterthought; for they who wait also serve.

We face great challenges—and we have great friends and allies. To representatives of the international community here today, welcome. I look forward to the opportunity to strengthen ties that are already strong-- and I know our collaboration will advance the interests of peace and a more just and stable world. To those of you from industry here today, thank you for coming. I hope you came with your sleeves rolled up because we have a lot of work to do together.

To those who have come to share this day, you have touched me forever with your friendship and with your caring.

And above all, to those of you in uniform and your families, on behalf of this Department and our country, let me express a depth of gratitude and admiration that pass far beyond any words I can say. I know you are up to any task, any call and every mission our Nation sets before you.

So it has been for more than two hundred and thirty years; so it is today. Conscious of this Service's long and glorious tradition, with confidence in its men, its women, and its mission, I am privileged to assume the office of Secretary of the Navy. I do so with a deep commitment to contribute every ounce of mind and energy I possess to lead the Navy and Marine Corps into a future equal to their past and equal to the skill and bravery and the unassuming greatness of those who wear the uniform today. May God bless our Navy and our Marine Corps--and may God continue to bless the United States of America.