

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
USS Cooperstown (LCS 23) Naming Ceremony  
National Baseball Hall of Fame  
Cooperstown, Ohio  
Sunday, July 26, 2015

Thank you, Jane, for that wonderful introduction. I've had an incredibly fortunate life, a bunch of very rewarding positions. But the only way I could have gotten on this stage with these folks, is through the United States Navy. But I have thrown out the first pitch now at 24 major league stadiums. So, if anybody needs help pitching down the stretch, I'm pretty sure I'm an unrestricted free agent right now. (Laughter, applause.)

And I am honored to be here today. And I'm honored to serve in my current position as the leader of the greatest expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known. Our Navy, our Marine Corps, uniquely provide presence around the globe, around the clock, ensuring stability, deterring adversaries and providing our nation's leaders with options in times of crisis. Now, we're America's away team because Sailors and Marines never get to play a home game. And equally in times of peace and of war, we're not just in the right place at the right time, we're in the right place all the time. We get on station faster, we stay there longer, we bring everything we need, and we don't have to ask anybody's permission to get the job done, and we win.

In baseball terms, I'm sort of the GM of America's away team. And I focus on four fundamentals: people, our Sailors and Marines; platforms, our ships and our aircraft; power, how we fuel those platforms; and partnerships, our strong relationships with international friends and you, the American people. And it's our long-standing partnership that the Navy and the Marine Corps have with Major League Baseball that brings me here today. Throughout countless – throughout history, countless heroes have committed and sacrificed to achieve victory on the playing field and on the battlefield. But a very select few have done both, and in doing so exemplifies what is great about this country.

As Jane noted, this marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. So thank you to the Hall of Fame for honoring that anniversary, and for those baseball players and Hall of Fame members who served. It's fitting – it's fitting that we honor the legacy of the 350 heroes who played the ultimate doubleheader – serving in combat and pro ball. We've lost a lot of these people that served in World War II. And the ones that are still here, the physical skills may have dimmed a bit, but their memory and our gratitude for what they did still burns incredibly brightly.

So today I have two announcements. The first honors these service members and their contemporaries, their predecessors, and their successors who represent common values, whether they wear military or baseball uniforms. And the second is to honor the incredible support the

Hall of Fame and Major League Baseball has provided and continues to provide to our military and our veterans.

Two years ago the Bob Feller Act of Valor Foundation began recognizing a current major leaguer, a Navy chief petty officer, and a hall of famer who embodied Bob Feller's principles and high achievement of commitment to others and to country. And you heard a little bit about Bob Feller. He left a major league career. And he did drive to Norfolk, Virginia to enlist in the Navy, starting that drive the day after Pearl Harbor. He earned six Campaign Ribbons and eight Battle Stars aboard the USS Alabama. Chief Petty Officer Feller rejoined the Indians and won a total of 266 games over 18 years. And when he was asked which of his wins he was the most proud of, he responded: World War II.

I told a story earlier today to your chair. Bob Feller was on the USS Alabama in Pearl Harbor when Chester Nimitz, the commander in chief of Pacific Fleet, showed up and said that Army was playing Navy in a baseball game, and he wanted Bob Feller to pitch. (Laughter.) Chief Bob Feller said, no, I did not join the Navy to pitch, I joined the Navy to fight. But he recommended a guy named Bob Lemon who was on another ship nearby – (laughter) – who did pitch. And just like today, we beat Army. (Laughter, applause.)

Well, the Department of the Navy is incredibly fortunate to have two branches of service. And so having an award just for Navy and not including the Marines –

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right!

SEC. MABUS: Ooh-rah. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Ooh-rah! (Applause.)

SEC. MABUS: – is like awarding the Commissioners Trophy to the American League and not the National League. Which is why I'm pleased to announce the creation of the Jerry Coleman Award, in honor of our United States Marines.

So, as Dick Enberg said: Jerry Coleman during World War II and Korea flew 120 combat missions. He earned two Distinguished Flying Crosses and 13 Air Medals. When he wasn't busy being a war hero, he found time to play for the Yankees, was rookie of the year in '49, World Series most valuable player in '50, in one of his six World Series appearances, four of which the Yankees won. And despite this kind of success and this kind of fame, Jerry Coleman said: To me, the height of my life, the best thing I ever knew, wasn't the Yankees, wasn't baseball, wasn't broadcasting. It was the United States Marine Corps.

So, to honor Jerry's legacy, beginning this year and in each year following, we're going to recognize those players and Marines who best exemplify his characteristics of honor, courage and commitment.

Now the second announcement. I have the coolest job in the world, I really do. One of the duties that I have is I get to name every Navy ship. And since the founding of our Navy,

since 1798, my predecessors have honored the spirit and the values of America by naming ships after people, after cities and after states. And I've had the honor and many opportunities to carry on this tradition, because one of my big priorities has been expanding the size of our fleet. Because when I took office in 2009, despite one of the great military buildups in our history, our fleet had declined almost 50 ships. In the five years before I became Secretary, we only put 27 ships under contract – not enough to keep our fleet from getting smaller and not enough to keep our shipyards in business. In my first five years, we put 70 ships under contract and we will get to 300 ships by the end of this decade.

The newest kind of ship that we have is called the littoral combat ship. It's innovative, it looks different. It's a modular design. It's flexible. They are fast. They have a shallow draft so they can go places that none of our other combatants can. And the cost keep coming down. These ships will serve our nation for decades, sailing the world from the waters of the Caribbean, the archipelagos of the Pacific, on patrol, standing the watch, providing presence. And so today I am very happy to name another ship. And I'm equally proud of the name that this ship will bear. Our Navy's newest littoral combat ship, LCS 23, will be the USS Cooperstown.

So to all of those who serve in the United States military, past, present and future, on behalf of a very grateful nation, thank you. And to the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, an institution that recognizes American heroes of all sorts, and on behalf of a grateful military, thank you. So from the Navy, Semper Fortis, Forever Courageous. From the Marine Corps, Semper Fidelis, Forever Faithful. Thank you.