

Secretary of the Navy Message to the Fleet
Marking the 100 Year Anniversary of the Completion of the Great White Fleet

One hundred years ago this coming Sunday, the Great White Fleet rounded Cape Henry, entered the Chesapeake Bay and completed its round the world voyage that began fourteen months before. This unprecedented initiative in diplomatic outreach and engagement formed the cornerstone of our Nation's and Navy's relationship with maritime allies for the next century.

From December 1907 until February 1909, the fleet's magnificent white battleships sailed the world, showing the American flag from Port of Spain to the Philippines. It was a global demonstration that America had become a world power with a first-class, blue water Navy and marked the dawn of a new era of security cooperation with key partners such as Australia. The fleet's historic accomplishment highlights the tremendous impact our Sailors and Marines can make every day, wherever they may be.

During this voyage, the fleet called at Suez, Egypt, on January 3 1909, and learned of a devastating earthquake and tidal wave that struck Messina, Italy, five days earlier. As Americans have always done, our Sailors and Marines rapidly responded with generosity and compassion. Racing to the island of Sicily, they delivered critical humanitarian assistance to victims. These actions nourished a lasting friendship between the people of Italy and those of the United States.

Over the past fourteen months, the men and women of the Department of the Navy have engaged with our international counterparts, neighbors, and friends to mark this centennial with Sailors and Marines at home and abroad. U.S. Navy ships visited ports in Mexico, the Republic of Georgia, Malta, France, Italy, Australia, Japan, and Egypt, continuing our historic tradition of international partnership and cooperation. We have also seen celebrations in the U.S. -- Norfolk, Seattle, Honolulu, and New York City -- that vividly remind us of the professionalism, sacrifice, and patriotism of our Naval forces and their families. Their commitment continues to be a source of great national pride.

When President Theodore Roosevelt traveled to Norfolk, Virginia, to greet the returning fleet, he told the Sailors and Marines, "other nations may do what you have done, but they'll have to follow you." For more than a hundred years, American Sailors have led the way for others to follow -- all of you who serve on, above, and under the sea. It is you Sailors and Marines, who engage with our allies and who come to the rescue of those in need from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of Aden, and serve as our nation's greatest ambassadors.

The naval heroes of our past look over our shoulders today as we stand the watch by the example they have set. I am confident that with your dedicated service, we can follow in the wake of the Great White Fleet to remain the world's preeminent maritime power for the next hundred years. Thank you for your service. May God bless you, your families, and our Nation.

The Honorable Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy.