

Secretary of the Navy Birthday Message to the Fleet, October 2008

On 13 October 1775, the continental congress voted on a resolution to commission a swift sailing vessel with a crew of 80 men and ten carriage guns to embark on a three-month cruise intercepting transports carrying munitions and supplies to British troops in America. The resolution also called for a second vessel to be outfitted for the same purpose. The resolution passed and the U.S. Navy was born.

Today, 233 years later, the original Navy fleet of two ships has evolved into the most powerful Navy in the world. The one constant across the years has been the Sailors who have made our Navy great. In my time as Secretary, I have come to appreciate more than ever what distinguishes our Navy from others around the world - the professionalism, training, and quality of our Sailors. The standard of excellence of our Sailors is truly what put our Navy head and shoulders above the rest.

The quality of our people was already a notable characteristic of the U.S. Navy 100 years ago when President Theodore Roosevelt sent sixteen battleships, with their hulls painted white, on a voyage around the world. The Great White Fleet, as it is known, traveled to six continents, making 20 port calls over a period of 14 months. The cruise was both an announcement that America was now a global naval power, and displayed an unprecedented initiative in diplomatic outreach and engagement.

Today we continue to build on the legacy of the Great White Fleet by working with partners to deter aggressors and prevent war, securing the worlds waterways for commerce, providing aid where needed to victims of natural disasters, and supporting wartime missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. As always, you are the key factor - the Sailors who operate our ships, submarines, and aircraft, who engage with other nations, and who come to the rescue of those in need from Haiti to Galveston to Beirut.

As we look to the future, the U.S. Navy remains an essential element of national power. Let us celebrate our many achievements and rededicate ourselves to the great and worthy cause of service in the United States Navy. On this 233rd birthday of the United States Navy, take pride in knowing that your service and sacrifice honors our great heritage and continues to provide the freedom and strength of our great nation.

Thank you for your service, and may God bless you, your families, and our nation.

The Honorable Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy