

Remarks by the Honorable Dr. Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
USS NORTH CAROLINA (SSN 777)  
Commissioning Ceremony  
Port of Wilmington  
Wilmington, North Carolina  
Saturday, May 3, 2008

Congressman McIntyre, thank you for that kind introduction, and thank you for your tireless efforts to ensure that this commissioning would take place in the great city of Wilmington.

Senator Dole, Admiral and Mrs. Bowman, Admiral Donald, distinguished platform guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor to be here today, surrounded by the men who will bring USS NORTH CAROLINA to life and place her into service to the Nation.

I am very pleased to see so many retired submariners here, and I would like to extend a special welcome to the significant number of World War II vets who stand proudly alongside today's generation of submarine Sailors.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the military veterans here today for coming to show your support for the Navy and North Carolina.

As the fourth ship to carry the name North Carolina, this boat will bear an illustrious name, and follow in North Carolina's long and honored tradition as the home of military heroes.

It is great to be here in the land of the long leaf pine, where, I was assured in the state's official toast, the sun doth shine.

Wilmington—as the home of the battleship NORTH CAROLINA, and with a long tradition as the supplier of naval stores to the world—is a worthy host on this historic occasion.

The people of Wilmington, by virtue of their enviable location on the seacoast, have a keen appreciation for the critical importance of maritime power.

Wilmington was a key seaport from colonial times through our Nation's most momentous events of the past two centuries.

On December 6, 1941, only a few feet from where I stand, the first of the

Wilmington Shipyard's 243 World War II Liberty Ships was launched.

Echoes of history also extend directly to this commissioning, for the boat we bring to life today is the sister in arms of the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA, the most decorated U.S. battleship of World War II.

With the commissioning of this boat—the 4<sup>th</sup> Virginia class submarine in the fleet—the U.S. Navy's ability to deter aggression and project power from the sea will continue to set the world standard.

On this day of celebration, it is worth taking a moment to put into perspective the significance of this event, and why the strength of America's submarine force is vital to our Nation's security.

We live in a dangerous world, and we have often, in our history, been surprised by events.

The attack on Pearl Harbor; the taking of American hostages in Tehran nearly 30 years ago; and the attacks of 9/11 are all events that shocked and surprised us.

They demonstrated the dangers of being caught unprepared, or being perceived as weak.

They also changed the way we looked at the world, and challenged us to re-think our assumptions.

George Washington, in his Farewell Address to the Nation in 1796, beseeched his countrymen to "Observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all."

As a peace-loving nation that has always endeavored to heed that advice, and extend the hand of goodwill to every nation that wishes us well in return, we are naturally tempted to become complacent, and assume that no nation will disturb our peace.

The desire to live in a world without war can have validity only if everyone else shares that desire—and believes that such a world is possible.

History argues otherwise.

We must remain vigilant, and be prepared to face the challenges that risk surprising us in the decades ahead.

Those challenges include a world in which 40 countries possess nearly 400 submarines.

In Asia and the Middle East, rising powers are especially focused on undersea warfare—all the while engaging in operations that create uncertainty about their future path.

With 70 percent of the world’s surface covered by water, 80 percent of the world’s population living near the sea, and 90 percent of international trade transported by sea, U.S. maritime power is undeniably key to preserving our own peace and prosperity—and preserving the world’s economic lifelines.

We would do well to recall the words of Theodore Roosevelt, who stated that, “A good Navy is not a provocation to war. It is the surest guaranty of peace.”

With USS NORTH CAROLINA, the Nation has made an investment in our safety, in our peace.

She now joins the world’s greatest Navy, and will be tasked with a wide range of missions—in support of battle groups, in reconnaissance and surveillance missions, in special operations, and as part of the submarine force that continues to deter aggression from every potential foe.

I note with dismay and astonishment that some have argued, that with the end of the Cold War, submarines are no longer vital to our national security.

This point of view reveals a serious lack of understanding of both the value of submarines in today’s global war on terror, and the value of submarines as a hedge against future threats.

The feats of the submarine community are performed in stealth, out of the headlines, far from the admiring eyes of a grateful Nation.

But those exploits are heroic nonetheless, and although we might not read about them until 50 years hence, they are no less deserving of our deepest respect and gratitude.

Even now, as we speak, in the depths of the oceans, our submariners are on missions that are critical to our Nation’s security.

They are performing superbly, and when the full story is finally told, your hearts will fill with the same pride that I feel when I learn of their many impressive achievements.

Our submarine force is the envy of the world.

When one has an opportunity to visit the submarine communities of other nations,

as I have, one quickly realizes that we enjoy not only a quantitative advantage, but a qualitative advantage as well.

This qualitative advantage is evident in the boat we are about to commission, with capabilities that will enable our Navy to prevail in war against any potential foe.

NORTH CAROLINA benefits not only from the capabilities that accrue from her design, but also from the quality of the workmanship of those who labored so hard on it and who have made this day possible.

In the proud tradition of the 50,000 patriots who built Liberty Ships here on this facility to help win World War II, this boat's builders—from welders to electricians to pipe-fitters—have produced a technological wonder that reflects one of America's key strengths as an industrial power.

The qualitative advantage this platform affords us—as with all of our platforms—is due not only to the genius of the scientists, engineers, and highly skilled technicians that design and build our submarines, but also to the quality of the Sailors who crew them.

Our submariners receive the most rigorous and the most demanding training in the world, insisting on a level of professionalism that is far above the norm.

To you, the officers and crew of USS NORTH CAROLINA, you now have an opportunity to make history.

I commend you for taking on the enormous responsibilities associated with submarine warfare.

Your willingness to apply the years of experience and training you have received, your dedication to duty, and your professionalism will continue to deter would-be aggressors and protect Americans from harm.

It is also important to recognize the role of this crew's support network, a network that includes the support of the families that stay at home, whose love and warm embrace, though distant in miles, will provide closely held warmth and inspiration across the miles.

The success this boat's entire team will build on the many achievements of previous USS NORTH CAROLINAS, of the submarine community that played the leading role in ending the Cold War, and of all those who today are fighting to protect our

freedoms.

Serve proudly in this magnificent vessel.

Remember what kind of nation you have the honor to defend.

Remember the words of Ronald Reagan, in his farewell address to the Nation:

“I’ve spoken of the shining city all my political life. In my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed.”

Let each of us do our part to make that vision of America’s destiny our own vision—and our calling.

Thank you, and may God bless the Sailors of USS NORTH CAROLINA, and may God continue to bless America.