

Remarks by
Dr. Donald C. Winter
Secretary of Navy
Naming of USS GERALD R. FORD (CVN 78)
Pentagon
Arlington, VA
Tuesday – January 16, 2007

Vice President Cheney, members of the Ford family, distinguished guests, welcome, and thank you for coming to participate in today's naming ceremony.

A U.S. Navy aircraft carrier is a symbol that is recognizable throughout the world. It represents American power. It is a reminder of America's global interests, and global reach. It is, in the eyes of freedom-loving people everywhere, a safeguard in a troubled and dangerous world. At moments of crisis, Americans from presidents to schoolteachers to cabdrivers anxiously await the latest news of an aircraft carrier's progress, knowing that wherever threats emerge, an American carrier will get the call.

Just last week was an example of the critical importance of aircraft carriers when our national security is on the line. President Bush, in an address to the nation, called attention to the fact that he has ordered the deployment of an additional carrier strike group to the Middle East.

We do not expect this to be the last time the commander-in-chief will be turning to Navy carriers to respond immediately to a crisis far from our shores. That is why the Navy is building a new class of aircraft carriers to replace USS ENTERPRISE and CVN-68 class carriers.

Known as the CVN 21 Program, this fleet of the most technologically advanced aircraft carriers in the world will be both the Navy's premier forward assets for crisis response and principal platforms in providing early, decisive striking power in a major combat operation. CVN 21 ships include significant warfighting capability improvements, including a 25 percent increase in sortie generation rate, a nearly three-fold increase in electrical generating capacity, an improved, fully integrated warfare system, and a host of new technologies in its system designs. CVN 21 is an investment in our future, and the Department of the Navy is urgently moving forward to turn our plans into reality.

With that in mind, today it is my great pleasure to announce that the Department of the Navy's newest aircraft carrier, CVN 78—the first in a new class of CVN 21 carriers—will be named . . . USS GERALD R. FORD.

President Ford, as many Americans have, over the years, come to more fully appreciate, was an historical figure, a great president, and a man of the highest character and integrity.

America has been blessed with leaders who were able to steer the American ship of state through dangerous waters during our Nation's most difficult crises. We think of Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, Franklin Roosevelt during World War II, and Ronald Reagan during the Cold War.

President Ford assumed the presidency during the greatest Constitutional crisis since the Civil War, at a time when the public's faith in government was shaken. But America was blessed once again with a leader for the times, a man with the integrity and character to heal the nation and restore trust in the presidency.

It is worth recalling an episode in President Ford's life that is illustrative of his character. When then-Congressman Ford was nominated to replace Spiro Agnew as vice president in 1973, his nomination required confirmation by both houses of Congress, as required by the 25th amendment to the Constitution. As part of the confirmation process, a background check on his fitness for office was initiated.

Given the circumstances of his nomination, the FBI took extra care to conduct an exhaustive investigation into his background and character, assigning 350 agents from 33 field offices to the case. The FBI sent 70 agents alone to Ford's hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan!

Soon afterwards, concerned friends, neighbors, and associates began to call the Ford congressional office in Washington, DC, informing him that they were being asked probing questions about his life—even his childhood—and asking how they should respond. To everyone who contacted his office, Ford had one stock reply: "Tell them the truth—give them everything."

It was a philosophy that served him well over a long lifetime of public service, and that would serve him well as president. His legacy includes service on the aircraft carrier USS MONTEREY as part of Admiral Halsey's 3rd fleet during World War II, an

experience that made a lasting impression on him of a carrier's capabilities.

His Naval service was followed by 25 years in Congress, the vice presidency, the presidency, and an active career in support of many worthy causes in the long twilight of his life.

President Ford's reputation has steadily grown over the past three decades, and the judgment of history now recognizes the rightness of his most difficult and controversial decisions. The Ford presidency will always be remembered for the pardon that was granted to Richard Nixon. The pardon was widely unpopular at the time, but it is now viewed as a critical step in moving our Nation forward.

In foreign policy, President Ford was heavily criticized at the time for signing the Helsinki Accords of 1975. And yet those agreements established the principle of individual rights, put a spotlight on the plight of Soviet refuseniks, and set the stage for the fall of the Soviet Union sixteen years later.

In both of these cases, President Ford did something that is all too rare in American politics—he put the national interest above his own political interest. He sacrificed his political career but he earned the delayed but enduring respect of a grateful Nation. Historians, journalists, and politicians of both parties have since come to acknowledge his many contributions and the significance of his role in healing the Nation.

Whether dealing with a dire financial crisis in New York City, the Vietnam War, or an economy ravaged by inflation and a world oil crisis, President Ford made tough decisions based on what he thought was the right thing to do. In doing so, he set a standard of character and decency that future generations will respect and admire, and a standard of leadership for the United States Navy to uphold.

Today, in naming CVN 78 after President Ford, we are bestowing an appropriate honor on a distinguished public servant who had a deep and personal connection with aircraft carriers throughout his life. He served aboard a carrier during war. As president, he commanded carriers in the fleet. During his tenure as president, he also commissioned USS NIMITZ, the first in its class of nuclear-powered carriers.

No one would have appreciated more the honor of having a carrier named after him than President Ford. May the future Sailors of USS GERALD R. FORD always

show themselves to be worthy of their ship's name, and may they always honor the legacy of a great man.

Thank you.