I want to thank Chris Lehman and Secretary Lehman for invitation to be here tonight, and for the dedicated service of your father, John F. Leman, Sr., who earned the Bronze Star as an LCS Skipper. Thank you to all of the members of this foundation for the work you do to preserve a critical chapter of American Naval history.

It’s an honor to be here with so many of my predecessors as Secretary of the Navy. Secretary Warner, thank you once again for your kind introduction at my confirmation hearing, and I want to thank all of the former Secretaries who offered me counsel both before I took the oath and during my time in office.

Before I begin I think it only appropriate to say a few words on the passing of President George H. W. Bush whose service to our nation was, to paraphrase his own words, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky. He served our nation as a Naval Aviator, Congressman, United Nations Ambassador, CIA Director, Vice President, and President, and he did so with honor and dedication.

He had a monumental impact on our country and his legacy will live on in the Sailors and Marines who serve aboard USS George H. W. Bush. President Bush was, at heart, a Navy man, whose dedicated service during World War II links him forever with Secretary Middendorf, and all of the brave LCS veterans we honor here tonight. We owe them all a debt that can never be fully repaid for the freedom and prosperity we continue to enjoy to this day.

It’s one thing to hear about the courage of Sailors charging straight into a hot zone. It’s quite another to actually walk the narrow deck of a Landing Craft Support ship. To see the heavy guns - and the light armor. To try and picture what it must have been like to stand firm against the rough seas and keep firing against the blazing guns of Iwo Jima or the diving menace of the kamikazes.

Thanks to this foundation, future generations will be able to take that walk, and run their hands along the cold steel rails of LCS-102. I’m sure it will give them a renewed perspective on the pacific war, and the price of freedom.

But beyond the lessons of warfare and sacrifice, I hope visitors to this ship will recognize something else as well. That as much as these ships contributed to the military victory over the Empire of Japan, the Landing Craft Support ships also saved countless American lives.

How many Marines made it up the beach the lethal guns above them were silenced by these ships? How many sailors survived because a kamikaze never hit their carrier deck? How many children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are alive today because another pacific war veteran made it home?
Like all veterans, the sailors of this remarkable fleet would just say they were doing their job. But history tells another story. And we must make sure that story continues to be told.

So I want to thank the foundation and all of the public servants and private citizens who brought this important museum into being. And most of all, I want to salute the veterans of the Landing Craft Support fleet. Thank you for your service. Bravo Zulu.