

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USS Jackson Christening
Saturday, 22 March 2014

It's great to be back with folks who don't have an accent.

I could not be more pleased or more honored to be here today to participate in one of the most important ceremonies we have in the Navy, christening a new ship for our fleet.

I know you understand that it is particularly special for me because of who and what this ship will honor, and because of its sponsor.

Another fellow Mississippian, William Faulkner, famously noted that here in the South the past is not dead, it's not even past. In that spirit, I'd like to note that this ceremony is occurring during a particularly significant week in the history of the Navy.

On March 25, 1898, then Assistant Navy Secretary Theodore Roosevelt proposed that the Navy investigate whether there was a military application for these new vehicles called flying machines, launching naval aviation.

On March 20, 1939, the Naval Research Lab recommended financing a research program on how power might be obtained from uranium, the first step in Navy's pioneering work on the use of nuclear power.

I've noted many times before that Navy has a long history of energy innovation. We shifted from wind to coal as a source of power for our ships in the middle of the 19th Century and from coal to oil at the dawn of the 20th. At the near edge of 21st Century, Navy is again a pioneer on power, afloat and ashore.

In keeping with our ceremony today, the most important anniversary may be that on March 27, 1794, 220 years ago, Congress authorized construction of the first six frigates for the United States Navy. President Washington and the first SecNav, Benjamin Stoddert, saw the wisdom of using the names of Navy ships to connect them to new nation and her people.

The first five names, recommended by Washington, reflected the republic and its fundamental elements: United States, Constitution, Constellation, Congress and President. Stoddert picked the sixth name himself, establishing a new naming convention. A Maryland merchant, he chose a geographic name from his own home: USS Chesapeake.

Today, in that same spirit and tradition, we christen the first Navy ship to bear the name Jackson. Named for President and General Andrew Jackson, it is the capitol of my home state of Mississippi and the home of our sponsor, Dr. Katherine Holmes Cochran, the daughter of Senator Thad Cochran, who for four decades in Congress has so ably served and represented with distinction and dedication the state of Mississippi and our people.

Senator Cochran has been a personal friend of mine and introduced me to the Senate when I was nominated as Secretary. But he has also been a great friend of our Navy. We would not have the fleet we have today, nor would we be building toward returning that fleet to 300 ships without his guidance, support and leadership.

I want to recognize another friend of whom it may equally be said that we wouldn't be here without him, Senator Jeff Sessions. Senator Sessions and I have worked side by side to help make possible not just this littoral combat ship, but the LCS program block buy of 20 ships that is essential to the capacity and capability of our fleet.

I am not of the same political party as Senator Cochran or Senator Sessions, but we have in common so much more that is more important. We are sons of the South who love our Navy and our nation.

But the spotlight in just a few minutes will be on a daughter of the South, Dr. Cochran, Kate. As a proud father of three daughters myself, I think I can appreciate how Senator Cochran feels right at this moment.

As sponsor of the USS Jackson, she is taking on a huge responsibility as well as an honor in a tradition dating back to our Navy's founding. Kate now becomes an honorary member of the Jackson's first crew, what the Navy calls "plankowners." And she will maintain a special relationship with this ship and her Sailors, a special relationship that will be shared by the city of Jackson and her people and by all the people of Mississippi.

That was the genius of Stoddert's choice of a geographic name, connecting the American people with their Navy and their fleet, even as those ships sailed far from home to advance American interests, assure our allies, deter or defeat our adversaries and secure free and open commerce over all the world's oceans.

When USS Jackson joins that fleet, it will represent not just America's interests, but also the story of Jackson and Mississippi and her people, around the globe. And they are so ably represented here today by Senator and Doctor Cochran.

But the story of Jackson, of Mississippi, indeed of America, could not have been written without the courageous contributions of so many of so-called ordinary people whose extraordinary efforts made and continue to make America the great nation it is and the great nation our Navy serves to defend.

I think it's altogether appropriate to remember just one of those other Mississippians, other Jacksonians, today. Lieutenant junior grade Randolph Mitchell Holder, a native Jacksonian, is not included in many history books, although he deserves to be.

Lt. Holder was part of Torpedo Squadron 6 that flew off the first Navy aircraft carrier that bore the name Enterprise and earned its place in history on June 4, 1942, in the pivotal battle of Midway, turning the tide in the Pacific in World War II. The Japanese Navy, seeking to deliver a crippling blow by sinking the U.S. carriers it had failed to find in Pearl Harbor just six months before, instead found itself crippled by American Naval aviators.

In a gallant attack, without benefit of fighter cover, Lt. Holder and the rest of Torpedo Squadron 6, attacked the Japanese. Because an effective attack required them to fly low, slow and directly into enemy fire, they knew there were likely sacrificing themselves and 10 of their 14 planes were destroyed. However, their attack forced the Japanese fleet to radically maneuver and divert and exhaust their own air cover, exposing them to their later decisive defeat. For his heroism, Lt. Holder was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross.

Today, the Pacific and the Indian oceans are again a focus in U.S. defense strategy and littoral combat ships like the USS Jackson, LCS 6, will play a critical role. She's fast, agile, modular, shallow draft, and will allow us to work in many different ways with our partners.

All told, we now have 24 ships of both LCS models either in the water, under construction or under a block buy. This is a completely new type of ship, a new concept. The weapons systems on JACKSON can be traded out to fit whatever mission it is given. Those same systems can be upgraded as technology changes without having to build a new ship or changing anything out but that particular weapon system.

One day soon the ship's crew will take her past the Battleship ALABAMA and Fort Morgan and head for the open sea. Jackson may be one of the LCS ships we will deploy to Singapore or forward base in the Arabian Gulf, helping us maintain our presence around the world, being in the right place, not just at the right time, but all the time.

The ship before you is a modern marvel, but so too is this incredible shipyard and its work force. Nearly 3000 American craftsmen have made this ship possible, both here in Mobile and all around the country making components of the ship and its systems.

With serial production underway both here in Mobile and at the yard in Wisconsin, our Littoral Combat Ships are launching on time, and their costs keep coming down. The way we are building these ships, with block-buys from each shipyard, makes

these ships a good deal for Mobile and Alabama and Mississippi, a good deal for Marinette and Wisconsin and Michigan, a good deal for the Navy, and a good deal for the American people.

That partnership between our uniformed men and women, our Navy civilians, industry, and the American people, is one of the great strengths of our system. In the past four years we have arrested the decline in the size the fleet. Since May 2009 we have put 60 ships under contract and are on pace to return the fleet to 300 ships before the end of the decade.

The men and women who build the LCS and JHSV here at Austal; and the shipyard workers at the other yards all over the country help to make the Fleet stronger, our economy more secure and our nation safer. To maintain our presence and our influence around the world, our platforms matter. Our platforms have always mattered.

I know you know there has been a lot of discussion about the LCS program. Frankly, there's been some confusion and some misinformation as well. Secretary Hagel this year asked Navy not to negotiate any contracts beyond 32 ships without a review of the program. That is not unusual. It's not anything beyond what Navy has done in the past.

We've set up a committee to review our small surface combatant requirements. Secretary Hagel said that review should include existing designs, including the current LCS; a modification of the LCS; or a brand new design. He also made it clear that our review should consider both how much each of those options would cost and how long it would take to deliver to the fleet. One final thing was made clear – we need small surface combatants and we must grow the fleet.

We've done similar reviews for every other new Navy ship, including the very successful BURKE class destroyers, which will soon be on their fourth generation, and our VIRGINIA class submarines, also soon to start its fourth flight. At appropriate milestones, we study what we've got, what we need and ways to make sure that are requirements are being met and new technologies and new requirements can be added.

And what we already know about these ships is the price of these ships is dramatically down to about \$350 million per hull, the weapons modules are on track, and the record of the ship we've already deployed is very positive.

These ships are going to be a critical part of the U.S. Navy for decades. In fact, the Sailors who will crew this ship at the end of her service haven't even been born yet. The JACKSON and other LCS's will be critical to our Navy as we sail deeper into the 21st Century.

Participating in missions all over the globe, working with our partners, and testing creative new operational concepts, these ships create exciting opportunities for the Navy and Marine Corps to help execute our defense strategy. They will serve our nation for years into the future, from the nearby waters of the Caribbean to the archipelagos of the Pacific, on patrol and providing presence.

American technology and innovation have always led the world, from those first six frigates, through the days of the Ironclads, to today's nuclear powered attack submarines and aircraft carriers, to innovative modular ships like JACKSON. They give us a combat advantage around the world.

Most important, however, the heart of our Navy and our top priority, the thing that gives us the edge no matter what the circumstances, continues to be the skilled, the dedicated, the always courageous United States Sailor.

You see some of these Sailors here with us today, along with the veterans of wars that we have fought before, but mostly you do not see them. We are America's Away Team and when our Navy and Marine Corps are doing their jobs they are usually a long way from home. It is very good that we take this opportunity when they are home, to remember them and to thank them. We thank them for their presence, we thank them for what they do, we thank them for the sacrifice that they and their families make, and we thank them for keeping us safe every single day and night.

Now it is time to christen this incredible new ship, so the crew can take it to sea and can defend our nation, just as their predecessors have for 238 years.

Semper Fortis. **ALWAYS** Courageous.