

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Commemoration of the War of 1812 and the Star Spangled Banner
Wednesday, 22 June 2011

I want to add my welcome and thanks for everyone being here tonight, I won't go through the list that Jose Fuentes just went through in such an eloquent manner. But thank you for your participation, thank you for being here, thank you to all the partners that we have in this grand celebration of the bicentennial of the War of 1812 - this kickoff of a three-year, intensive and extensive celebration.

I see a lot of very friendly faces in the audience that I know well, but I'm only going to mention one and that is my daughter, Elizabeth, who is here. Elizabeth is a rising senior at Harvard, majoring in history, so this is of special interest to her.

I also want to call out the color guard from tonight from the *USS CONSTITUTION*, Old Iron Sides. Built and launched in 1797, still on the active rolls of the United States Navy. And every one of the Sailors that you saw here tonight and every one of the Sailors that serve on the *CONSTITUTION* are active duty members of the United States Navy.

And I suspect most people in this audience have been to the *CONSTITUTION*. If you have not, I urge you to go. You are able to not only learn about history, but actually be in history in that ship. So Captain, I am trying to pump up your attendance figures.

The Captain and I are old friends now, particularly after Memorial Day when I dropped in on the *CONSTITUTION*. I've learned that as the Secretary of the Navy, it's hard to drop in on any naval ship. But he handled it with great, good grace and very professionally. So, thank you.

Today's date for this kickoff and this reception is not accidental. Jose talked about some of the other anniversaries, but today's date in 1807 was when the issue of British ships impressing American Sailors came to a head in the event called the Chesapeake Leopard Affair which almost inexorably from then until 1812 led to war. The difficulties that a very fledgling American Navy encountered at that time established a need for a strong naval force and began to build the fleet that we have today.

And as has been pointed out, the location for tonight could not have been better. In fact, I think, for the very first time we can answer the question at the beginning of *The Star Spangled Banner*, "Oh, say can you see?" Absolutely, just look right behind you.

This building, in November of 1998 saw the Star Spangled Banner returned, to great fanfare, back to public exhibition. The restoration and conservation project that saved a deteriorating flag for generations to come took two years and \$7 million.

This very flag, which has come to stand for democracy and freedom the world over, stood watch over Fort McHenry the night of September 13, 1812. Now the story is pretty well known, but I don't think you can repeat it too often. That night, and into the early hours of the next day, five British ships lobbed 190-pound shells into the fort and fired rockets with exploding warheads. Francis Scott Key, who was a lawyer sent to Baltimore to negotiate the release of an American hostage, was held on a British ship in the harbor throughout the fight. As dawn broke, Key stood on the deck seeing the American flag still waving above the battered fort and penned the words immortalized in our national anthem.

So beginning next year and continuing through 2015, the United States Navy, the United States Marine Corps, the United States Coast Guard, the United States Maritime Services, along with Operation Sail and a host of great partners will commemorate the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 and the inspiration for America's hymn. The theme of this celebration is to be, our flag was still there, as indeed it is today. And this second war of independence, fought 200 years ago, established U.S. sea power as a force in the world and our continuing presence in the great blue and beyond.

As has been mentioned before, it's going to begin in Mississippi's largest city, New Orleans. We haven't let the state of Louisiana in on that yet, but we're going to kick this off in April, next year in 2012, then the commemoration will travel up the Eastern Seaboard on to the Great Lakes region, to Canada and to fleet and Navy weeks all across this country through 2015.

Events in these major ports in the country are going to feature week-long festivities at every place with OpSail providing international tall sailing ships from up to 25 nations. We're going to provide a little more modern war ship and the Blue Angels at various places.

Much has changed in 200 years, it's almost a truism. Britain, once a staunch foe has become our strong friend. My first meeting with the first sea lord of Britain, he came in and said that his only regret meeting with the American Secretary of the Navy was every time he came in to one of our offices, there we inevitably pictures of British ships burning. Mostly they were from the War of 1812. I didn't apologize, but I did try to face him in a chair not looking directly at one of those paintings.

And where, as in those paintings, we once depended on wooden ships, we now sail ships of steel and aluminum and more exotic substances. The smoothbore cannon of 1812 that you can see on the *CONSTITUTION* today have become the modern naval guns, missiles and torpedoes that we use today. Wind power gave way to coal, coal gave way to oil, oil to nuclear power. And now our fleet is on the cusp of another change to biofuel and renewable energy.

Situational awareness in our Navy was once limited to the horizon, based mainly on the eyesight of keen lookouts from the ship top or like the lone American, Francis Scott Key, on that historic morning standing on the deck of a British warship. That's given way to instantaneous

communication around the world. To submarines sailing the depths, aircraft soaring the sky, missiles rocketing into outer space and to Sailors on the cyber sea.

In doing this commemoration, in commemorating the bicentennial of the War of 1812, we honor every Sailor and every Marine who has ever fought and served under the stars and stripes of this country.

I, like everyone here, watched, about six weeks ago, when the President of the United States announced that the world's most wanted terrorist had been brought to justice by the United States military. The military that carried that out, the people who participated in the raid, deservedly, absolutely deservedly, garnered a lot of attention, a lot of accolades.

One of the things I want to tell you though, is that every person who wears the uniform of this country, every single one, has equal skill, equal courage and equal patriotism and we ought to give the accolades to everyone willing to wear the uniform of this country. This commemoration is part of that. It's going to remind us that these Sailors and these Marines continue to live up to that great legacy bequeathed to them 200 years ago.

The mission of our fleet has expanded exponentially. It's gone from wooden ships fighting each other close range, to things like security assistance and disaster relief, humanitarian assistance from Haiti to Japan and development from Africa to the South Pacific.

So later on tonight at the reception, I hope you'll go back and visit the Star Spangled Banner. You'll enter a darkened hallway to the sound of artillery and rockets overhead. As you turn the corner, Old Glory strikes you at once, as a massive beauty even with its tattered edges, an emblem of great power and a fragile work of art.

As we commemorate her and as we commemorate the War of 1812, we ought to remember the delicate weaving of history that has brought America to this place of great influence and greater responsibility.

Thank you for being here.