

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Pearl Harbor 70th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony
Wednesday, December 7, 2011

Thank you, Admiral Pat Walsh, for that introduction and for your long and very distinguished service to America. And thank everyone here today in uniform and everyone who has worn the uniform of this country for your service.

The history of December 7th, 1941, is indelibly imprinted on the memory of every American who was alive that day. But it bears repeating on every anniversary so that every subsequent generation will know what happened here and will never forget.

Seventy years ago in this place and at this hour, a surprise attack began against the United States of America, and in less than two hours that attack claimed the lives of more than 2,400 Americans, nearly 90 percent of them Sailors and Marines. It also left 1,200 wounded; almost 1,200 deaths came from one ship – USS Arizona. Of the 90 ships at anchor that morning, 21 were sunk or damaged, including Arizona and all the other battleships in Pearl – California, Maryland, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia and Nevada. Nevada, which despite being damaged, managed to get under way but finally put herself aground rather than risk sinking and blocking the channel to the open ocean.

Three cruisers, four destroyers were also sunk or damaged and 188 planes destroyed and another 159 damaged, most before they could take off. It was, in President Franklin Roosevelt's searing and unforgettable declaration, "A day that will live in infamy," pushing us into a world war that would change both the world and warfare irrevocably, but for those whose final resting place is in the waters here, and all those who gave their lives that day 70 years ago in the service of their country and in the cause of freedom, they will never change. They remain in our minds and our hearts as they were that day – young and strong and courageous.

Although the attack surprised our forces, they immediately started fighting back. We know the stories: the steward aboard the USS Shaw, with no training, manning a gun and bringing down a Japanese aircraft; the machinist blinded by explosives but rescuing Sailors caught below decks of the Nevada; the Army Air Force Lieutenant, still in his pajamas, piloting an old P-36 and shooting down another Japanese plane.

And for their actions that day, 15 men – Bennion, Finn, Flaherty, Fuqua, Hill, Jones, Kidd, Pharris, Reeves, Ross, Scott, Tomich, Van Valkenburg, Ward and Young – were awarded the Medal of Honor – two-thirds of those, 10 of them, posthumously. Fifty-one Navy Crosses, 53 Silver Stars, four Navy and Marine Corps Medal, one Distinguished Flying Cross, Four Distinguished Service Crosses, one Distinguished Service Medal and three Bronze Stars were also awarded for that day. And we know that there were hundreds and hundreds more acts of courage that went unrecorded. As was said later of Iwo Jima, that day, uncommon courage was a common valor.

The architect of the attack, Admiral Yamamoto, has been depicted as lamenting, even as the Japanese planes returned to their carriers, that he feared, “all we have done is awakened a sleeping giant.” The quote cannot be proven historically true, but the sentiment certainly was.

The forces here on December 7th fought back, America fought back, and we built back as well. The attack failed to damage the shipyard facilities here, where American technological skill, economic might and just sheer determination played another key role in ultimate victory. Because of both that day and in the aftermath, the sacrifice and service of civilians were also critical.

Nearly 70 civilians died that day, and many more were wounded. A *New York Times* story, 1943, detailing the efforts to rebuild from the attack 70 years ago said: Nowhere in the world have Navy and civilian workers toiled together in such close coordination; their joint achievement has never been equaled. That joint achievement raised, repaired and returned to service all but three of the ships sunk here that day, and many saw significant service in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters.

And we all know that by a stroke of luck, the three Pacific-based American aircraft carriers were away from Pearl that day. Those three carriers helped turn the tide at Midway just six months later, with the Pearl shipyard playing a critical role. The Yorktown, damaged so heavily at Coral Sea that it was thought repairs would take months, was sailing toward Midway and the fight just after 72 hours of work at the Pearl shipyard. Both Pearl and Midway proved the impact of carriers, the preeminent warship in World War II and since.

The shock and the anger unleashed that morning here in Hawaii united our nation and steeled our will not just to respond but to overcome. As a former surface officer and as Secretary of the Navy, it's a profound privilege to offer the heartfelt thanks of a nation to these individuals here today who survived and then who thrived, leading the way for our nation to survive that day, and then to thrive in the seven decades since.

We rightly honor every one of our veterans, but there will always be a special place in our hearts for those who began the fight here at Pearl Harbor that led us to victory. You, the survivors, as well as those who were lost, earned with your blood, with your sacrifice a legacy you have passed on to those who have followed. Your efforts burnish the reputation of the Navy and Marine Corps as the most formidable expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known. Your legacy is leadership and heroism.

I hope and I believe that we serving today are living up to your example, working to assure that your legacy is sustained. Our responsibility is to learn from you, learn from your sacrifice, and be prepared to deter foes when we can and defeat them when we must. When I became Secretary our fleet was 43 ships fewer than it was on 9/11, and the smallest it had been since 1916. Today, just as you did after Pearl Harbor, we are working to rebuild the fleet. We're engaged in constructing more agile, more flexible ships and aircraft, and developing new ways to power those platforms.

We need look no further than the events leading to the attack here at Pearl Harbor to understand why the U.S. Navy is trying to diversify its fuel supply. Cut off by the United States from oil, the Empire of Japan felt compelled to seize oil-rich territories despite risking war with the United States. That effort that began here proved their strategy to be a catastrophic mistake. How nations get and use energy is and always has been a critical security and strategic issue, and this era is no exception.

One lesson of Pearl Harbor is also that America must look west and understand the importance of the Pacific to ours and the world's security. On his recent trip to this region, our President stated in no uncertain terms that as a Pacific nation, the United States will continue to play a large and long-term role in this region, including assuring unimpeded commerce and freedom of navigation. The U.S. Navy stands ready to uphold its long tradition to execute our unique ability to project power without impinging on anyone else's sovereignty, and to deter threats to peace by protecting the global commons.

December 7th, 1941's infamy has changed to a day that will live in remembrance. In remembering, we can see how far we've come. At the 10th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, our once implacable foe had become and remains our unshakable ally. At the 20th anniversary, we were fearful that a Cold War with the Soviet Union might turn hot as the Berlin Wall was built. By the 50th anniversary, we had won the Cold War. And although our presence in the Pacific never changed, our focus moved to the Middle East. On the 60th anniversary, the United States had just experienced the worst domestic attack since Pearl Harbor. Now 70 years later, we're beginning to close out a decade of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan and once again increase our attention to the Pacific.

The Navy, the Marine Corps will continue to build on the heroism and the commitment to freedom that was demonstrated so vibrantly, so vividly and so often here 70 years ago. To the survivors here today, and to those who are with us only in spirit and memory, thank you. Thank you for your legacy and thank you for the opportunity to honor your heroism. We must never forget, we must never fail – as you did not fail – to meet and defeat any challenge to America and what America stands for.

Thank you very much.