

Remarks by Thomas B. Modly  
Acting Secretary of the Navy  
USS John F. Kennedy Christening, Newport News, VA  
7 December 2019

Ambassador Kennedy, members of the Kennedy family, distinguished guests, members of the Newport News shipbuilding community, thank you for being here and for the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you on this cold morning.

Having the opportunity to represent the Department of the Navy and to participate in the christening of a ship like this, with its historical significance and linkage to the legacy of a great American president is something I will always treasure.

This ship represents what President John F. Kennedy meant to the United States of America, and to the world. Today, on the morning of December 7th, we are reminded of how just seventy-eight years ago, this bonded together and sent it's youth into service, to preserve this Republic and free the world from the tyrannical forces that had engulfed it.

We now call these young Americans "The Greatest Generation", but they never considered themselves that--and they certainly would never even considered giving themselves that name.

And this is precisely why the title "The Greatest Generation" suits them so perfectly. Their courage defined them, but their humility in victory is what elevated them for eternity --and it is what obliges us to honor them forever.

So on the anniversary of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, it is right that we christen, for the second time in our naval history, a ship named for someone who actually distinguished himself among this incredible generation of patriots.

As we all know, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was a Member of the United States House of Representatives, and the United States Senate, and he ultimately became a young, vibrant, and strategically-focused President and Commander in Chief. But before all that, and perhaps above all that, even to him, he was a naval

officer, just like so many others who answered the call, and served with valor, on the vast ocean battlefields of World War II.

As President, he lifted our ambitions towards the skies, and challenged our nation to be better—to be a more perfect Union, while at the same time remaining very aware of the existential dangers we faced from an aggressive adversary, who wanted to destroy us.

He taught us that deterrence will always cost less than war. That the purpose of our military, including this warship that bears his name, must be to ensure our nation's commitment to peace and prosperity for all nations of the world.

President Kennedy always loved the naval service, and all it represents – and I think he would have really loved this ship. But what we love about him is his legacy to our Navy and Marine Corps team today: bold vision, unrelenting courage, decisiveness under pressure---and tragically, the ultimate sacrifice, in the name of service to the nation. It is a sacrifice the Kennedy family has had to endure more times than any one family should.

Ambassador Kennedy, I believe the most fitting words any American can utter on this occasion when contemplating what the Kennedy family means to our enduring American legacy are those which President Lincoln wrote to Mrs. Lydia Bixby, who lost five of her sons in the Civil War.

“I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours, to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.”

Ambassador Kennedy, this ship, and the Sailors who will bring her to life, bearing your father's name--your family's name--will sail boldly into an unpredictable future with the very same spirit President Kennedy bequeathed to us all—A spirit that boldly affirms that it is only through strength and sacrifice that we can achieve an enduring peace.

Thank you for being here today to christen her as she begins her journey to the seas – the same seas where your father and two uncles served with honor, and where our Navy goes every day to keep us safe—and free. Go Navy. Go USS John F. Kennedy. And, of course, as always, Beat Army.