

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Remarks

At the

Keel Authentication Ceremony

Pascagoula, MS

Wednesday September 5, 2012

Good morning, Shipmates.

And I include all the shipbuilders in that as well...

Good morning Shipmates!

Since this is a Keel Authentication ceremony, I have to tell you a quick story. Just a couple of weeks ago, we went up to our Recruit Training Center in Cape May, New Jersey. I was the graduation speaker for a group of our brand new Coast Guardsmen. And evidently, early in her training, one of the new Seaman Apprentices was being quizzed on her nautical terminology.

The Company Commander asked, "What is a keel?"

She thought about it for about for a minute and said "well... 'keel' is to fall over and die."

Everyone thought that was pretty funny. But actually, that young Seaman Apprentice was exactly right. Because what she was thinking about started out as a nautical term: "keel over." And for any shipbuilder or sailor, what you *absolutely* do not want is your keel *over you*... That is a bad situation. We want to keep that keel underneath us. And the keel is why we are here today.

Thanks to all the dedicated shipbuilders and our Coast Guard team here at Pascagoula – it is truly and honor to be here with you today. It's been only a few days since Hurricane Isaac swept through this area and yet here you all are back to work, providing for the nation's safety and security.

Today we're celebrating the keel laying for our fourth National Security Cutter, the HAMILTON. HAMILTON is a revered name appearing throughout the whole of Coast Guard history – starting with our service's founder and the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton.

I'm sure most of you are aware this ceremony dates to the earliest days of shipbuilding. *This* was the day the shipyard actually laid down the last heavy, timber and completed the keel - the backbone of a ship's hull.

As I look around at this terrific facility, it's amazing to see how shipbuilding has changed. Instead of a keel constructed from solid timbers of slow growing oak, serving as the foundation for the wooden frames, sternpost, and stem which were to follow – great steel modules are assembled separately and then joined together to complete the hull. Construction on HAMILTON's modules began a year ago.

Today's keel laying may be more symbolic than the reality of those earlier days. But we still engrave the sponsor's initials on a special plate to authenticate the keel, because it is no less significant in the life of a ship. It is her birth – the first significant event in her life – soon to be followed by her christening, and, ultimately, her commissioning.

It is also an acknowledgment of our past. The traditions and customs and manners of our profession.

In our service we often talk of the “long blue line” of Coast Guardsmen. It describes those who served before us; their accomplishment, their commitment, and their sacrifice. It is more than simply looking back in our wake. It is looking at the course ahead and the obligation set before us. It is our legacy – and a reminder of the responsibility we bear to keep faith with those who came before.

But it applies not just to the men and women of our service. Our cutters have their own “long blue line.” From our very first Revenue Service cutters to our most recent National Security Cutter – and all of the cutters we've sailed in the 222 years in between.

And HAMILTON has her own special heritage. She will be the 6th in a great line of Cutters bearing the name of our Service's founding father. And each of them made their own contribution to that great line.

I am truly humbled to be here as this newest HAMILTON takes her place in that storied line. She will be the most capable and technologically advanced cutter in the history of our Service.

And I know Linda feels the same emotions I do as she accepts what we both believe is the sacred trust of serving as sponsor for this cutter. The first crew – as well as all the crews that follow - will become her family....

...just as all of the men and women of the Coast Guard are her family.

And she will love them and keep them as family – always.

A ship's sponsor is typically a woman whose spirit and presence is invested in the ship and guides it through its service life. She has been a tireless supporter and advocate for Coast Guard families. She will represent and carry the spirit of all Coast Guard families to HAMILTON. And that is why she was chosen as sponsor. I speak from long, grateful and personal experience when I tell you that this ship and the crews that sail in her will be in great hands.

And to all those who will breathe life into HAMILTON: We should all have a sense of this place and time in history as we bring this ship to the fleet.

Just image the feats she will accomplish! And you will have the pride of knowing you were here when it started – when *she* took *her* place in line.

I know that for all of you it's more than a job. Giving life to the cold steel that will carry our nation's sons and daughters through uncertain and stormy seas and back again is a great privilege and solemn responsibility. I know from talking with many of you that you feel it, too.

Her sister ships are already on patrol. Last year BERTHOLF interdicted contraband worth an estimated \$61 million. And she is now deployed to the Arctic as one of our only assets the with

critical command and control capabilities needed in that remote and challenging environment. I had the great privilege of visiting her with Secretary Napolitano near Dutch Harbor, Alaska, last month.

And our second NSC, WAESCHE, interdicted contraband worth an estimated \$24.8 million on her very first patrol.

To the shipbuilders and Coast Guard team who are overseeing the HAMILTON's construction:
Thank you.

I have great faith that you will build the Coast Guard and our nation a great cutter. A cutter that can cross the ever-changing oceans upon which we so much depend, complete her missions, and bring her crew safely home again. Build her strong knowing both the long, gallant line that precedes her and the beckoning track line which lies ahead.

May God bless this ship and all who will sail in her, and God bless the United States of America and the United States Coast Guard.

Thank you and Semper Paratus!