

9/24/94  
CHRISTENING CEREMONY FOR  
SSN COLUMBIA

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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**Remarks By  
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at the  
Christening Ceremony for the SSN Columbia**

Mrs. Clinton: Thank you very much. Thank you Secretary Dalton, Admiral Boorda and Congressman Reed and Congressman Gejdenson and Senator Dodd.

I was privileged already to have the chance to meet with Commander Govan and talk to him and the members of the crew and their wives and dependents. So it is a great pleasure for me to welcome the opportunity to serve as the sponsor of this submarine.

I must confess, however, that I am a bit nervous. I had the opportunity last spring when we were still playing baseball in our country to throw out the first ball at Wrigley Field, something that I had done as a child growing up, pitching in girls' softball teams. And my husband was kind enough to go out in the Rose Garden with me one afternoon and actually put up with my practicing. Throwing a ball, however, is something you can practice beforehand. I've had the opportunity to swing twice with a wooden bottle and I only hope that I will be as successful in actually christening this submarine as I was having the ball get to the person catching for me on Wrigley Field. Because I want this to be, not only the greatest christening for a submarine that deserves such a send-off, but a signal about how important this is to our country.

This day is historic because it represents the end of an era in shipbuilding. The Columbia is the last submarine that will be launched this way, of course it is the last Los Angeles class submarine that will be built here at Electric Boat. That is not all bad news for our country, because it is a sign of how far we have come together in making the world safer and more secure. It is also a testimony to the masterful work that has been done over the decades in this shipyard and which will continue to be done as we move forward with the next generation of submarines. The President remains committed to the construction of the third Seawolf because he believes it is vital to preserve our submarine industrial base.

The men and women who work in this shipyard are the best in

the world and they deserve the support of every citizen of the United States of America. Because yes, we live in a different time, but a time filled with challenges. We have new opportunities to help bring peace around the world but we also, in the post-Cold War era, have new enemies who can spring up unexpectedly anywhere in the globe. We have discovered, and need not worry over and over again, that our capacity to preserve peace and strengthen democracy will be challenged and tested and we must be ready to meet those challenges and tests. And that requires that we, as we downsize our defense, we recognize that we cannot and must not ever sacrifice our technological superiority over any who will sail the oceans in this world at anytime now or in the future.

Given these new realities that we see everyday flashing across our television screens, the launching of the Columbia takes on even greater significance. This submarine gives us the chance to make our presence known throughout the world because it builds on a very strong history of the six Columbias that have been previously issued by the Navy.

I did a little research about those who have come before. I found out that the first Columbia was a sailing frigate launched in 1836, becoming the first U.S. naval ship to sail around the world. The most recent Columbia, the sixth, was the famous light cruiser, the CL-56, that performed so heroically in the Pacific in World War II, even after being bombarded during a kamikaze attack near the Philippines in early 1945. So this Columbia, as we launch it, not only carries with it the spirit of three great cities, of Missouri and South Carolina and Illinois, but also the spirit of very noble and courageous ancestors.

But we also today celebrate not only the great naval tradition, but we take time to celebrate the thousands of skilled and dedicated men and women of Electric Boat who are building this boat and the new owners who will go to sea next year. We are celebrating a tradition and, more importantly, a set of values that prizes dedication, precision, and cooperation.

The President often speaks about the importance of keeping the American dream of opportunity alive for everyone who is willing to work hard and play by the rules. And he often says we need to do three things to accomplish that. First, we need to have an economy that works. Second, we must empower our people to succeed and win in that economy. And third, we have to come together as a nation, a community, and work together. All three of those goals are at work every day at Electric Boat. The work on display here is an example of the values the President is talking about. Because, when you think about it, building a great submarine like the Columbia requires the same values as building a great society, particularly a pluralistic, democratic society such as ours.

Secretary Dalton was a submariner, so he knows far more about submarines than I will ever know. I cannot explain, I wouldn't even be able to identify a turbine or a ballast tank. But I do know the extraordinary care, integrity, responsibility, and teamwork that must have been required for the building of this submarine. I know that many of the men and women of this shipyard come from families that have worked here for generations. You are here because you have proven yourselves. The welders who work in the hull use 750 different procedures to make joints as close to perfect as a joint can be.

I'm told that last time machinist Ed Waterman Jr. and his crew installed a 140 ton main propulsion package it was (Inaudible) power shaft to within .005 of an inch. And that kind of precision and excellence is repeated by the carpenters building the cradle and the launch blades, the pipe fitters, the ship fitters, the electricians, the electronic technicians, the recessors, the plumbers, (Inaudible) the sheet metal workers and the engineers. Everyone of you knows, your work cannot be sloppy, it cannot be rushed, it cannot be done in a vacuum. You have to get it right. As (Inaudible) said before about building submarines here at this ship yard, "We don't have any recalls." Because you know that at some point the work that you have done may make the difference between life or death, success in victory or defeat.

A few years from now this submarine will be submerged somewhere around the world 500 feet below the surface. Everything has to work. Every one of you who has helped to build this submarine has invested yourselves in making sure that it does. And you have given us important lessons. One is to set high standards, to take pride in one's work, to take the time and care to make sure the product you produce is nothing short of excellent. But secondly, it is not just those who are sailing on this submarine, not just the officers over you that deserve the glory. It is all of you who have planned and prepared for this day. That is why all Americans are grateful for your skills and your patience, your perseverance and your dedication to this vital national industry.

On behalf of the President and all of our citizens, I salute and thank you, those who work here, for contributing to the security of us all. And I also salute the crew for the courage and the fortitude it will take, that they have assumed such a challenging assignment. It is an historic day, an historic opportunity, and a real testimony to what hard work, team work and patriotism can do, and will continue to do, as we move America forward with greatness into the 21st century. Thank you all, everybody.

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