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Folder Title:
USS Truman [POTUS Remarks at Commissioning of the USS Harry S. Truman, July 25, 1998] [1]

Staff Office-Individual:
Speechwriting-Widmer, Edward

Original OA/ID Number:
2191

Row: 48  Section: 6  Shelf: 8  Position: 1  Stack: V
Ship statistics

Contract awarded: June 30, 1988
Start construction: April 25, 1989
Keel laid: Nov. 29, 1993
Christening: Sept. 7, 1996
Launch: Sept. 13, 1996
Crew move aboard: Jan. 12, 1998

Number of light fixtures: 30,000
Number of telephones: 2,000
Lifespan: 50 years
Number of catapults: 4
Number of aircraft: 80-plus
Power plant: 2 nuclear-reactors
Propellers: 4, bronze, 20 feet
Rudders: 2, each 29 feet by 22 feet
Anchors: 2, each weighing 30 tons
Anchor chains: 2, each 1,041 feet, 684 links, individual link weight 26 pounds

Tons of steel used: 60,000
Pounds of aluminum used: 1,000,000
Length of flight deck: 1,096 feet
Width of flight deck: 251 feet
Height, waterline to mast: 20 stories
Height of flight deck: 4.5 acres

Water displacement: 97,000 tons
Top speed: Exceeds 30 knots

More than 6,000 meals served daily
Commissioning: July 25, 1998
Homeport: Norfolk, Va.

Miles of cable and wiring: 900

The buck stops here
United States Ship
HARRY S. TRUMAN (CVN 75)

Service in the tradition of
Missouri’s greatest statesman
Commissioning
July 25, 1998
[Acknowledgments: Secretary Cohen; Secretary Dalton, Senator Robb; Mr. Berger; members of Congress; Admiral Johnson, Captain Otterbein; veterans; men and women of the Navy; fellow Americans]

[Before I say anything, I'd like to say that we are all thinking of Margaret Truman-Daniel on this special occasion. And I'd like to especially thank a man who will speak after me, and did so much to make this day happen, Representative Ike Skelton of Missouri]

Eighty-five years ago, in 1913, a young farmer in Missouri was experiencing a few business difficulties. But he was not one to give up easily. He wrote to his sweetheart and future wife, “my ship’s going to come in yet.”

Let the record show: Harry Truman was always a man of his word. Today, July 25, 1998, his ship has literally come in.

He would be the first to tell us, with Trumanesque bluntness, that he was not a Navy man ... This is a great day for all Americans ... for the U.S. Navy ... and for the hard-working men and women who built the USS Harry S. Truman. I am proud to be with you today.

At the end of the 20th century, we know something it took us a while to learn: Harry Truman represented the best in us ... and he gave us the best in him. He never failed to live up to the
words of his fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, which he kept on his desk in the Oval Office:

“Always do right! This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

A terrifying catalogue of crises faced America at the high noon of the American Century. Europe lay shattered ... a Cold War chilled foreign relations ... terrible new weapons made every false step a potential catastrophe ... and angry voices were often raised at home against fellow Americans.

Many wanted to turn away from the rest of the world, to relinquish the leadership we had fought so hard for. Harry Truman refused. With each crisis, he was decisive and determined, and he steered us back toward our proper destiny as a nation of leadership. He did more than lead the fight against what we feared ... he restored our faith in what we believed. His courage in the face of adversity renewed the promise of the American Century. He was, as Dean Acheson called him, “the captain with the mighty heart.”

Today, in the broad sunlight of this happy moment, let us remember one thing ... the future Harry Truman defined is the present we now enjoy. He was right about sending American aid overseas. He was right about pledging our partnership with international organizations like the UN, NATO, and the IMF. He was right about securing bipartisan cooperation on important foreign policy matters. And he was right about standing tough when others tried to intimidate us. These decisions were expensive. They were often unpopular. But they were right.
All of us face hard decisions in our lives. It is often tempting to choose the easiest option. But consider three decisions that came across the President's desk in a short burst, fifty years ago. 

First, in May 1948, President Truman was the first world leader to recognize the new state of Israel. Many of his top advisers said, “Go slow.” But Truman knew the suffering of the Jewish people over the centuries. He did not hesitate.

Then in June, when Stalin closed off western access to Berlin, he ordered that the city be supplied through a heroic airlift. It was my privilege to commemorate the Berlin Airlift when I visited Germany two months ago ... and I don’t think America ever soared much higher than over those eleven harrowing months.

But our military was not only fighting for liberty abroad. It was also a vital instrument of change here at home. Fifty years ago tomorrow, Harry Truman made a third decision, one of the best things any Commander-in-Chief has done before or since. Despite extraordinary political pressure against him ... despite his family’s Confederate tradition ... despite growing up in a segregated community ... President Truman ordered the armed forces to integrate when he signed Executive Order 9981.

With the stroke of a pen, he changed our history forever, encouraging Americans from every background to treat each other with the respect we all deserve. From that day onward, America’s men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom. An example of humanity ... and an example to humanity. When I look at the crew of this carrier ... from thousands of backgrounds ... wearing the same proud uniform ... I feel very grateful to be an American.
These had decisions were made by one man, alone in the White House. But they affected millions around the world. They testified that America would not stand idly while the world unraveled. They testified that our ideals were not just words scrawled on parchment, but living guideposts to a new and better way of growing together as fellow Americans. As Truman said in the first address by a President to the NAACP, "when I say all Americans, I mean all Americans."

Every day, our men and women in uniform sustain those decisions. You are ready to defend our friends and interests at a moment's notice. And your teamwork sends out a vital message of hope to other lands, where racial, ethnic and religious differences still simmer close to the surface. Each of you, in different ways, is doing the work of America – the work that Harry Truman did with those hard decisions alone in the White House. He would be very proud of you.

As we scan the new landscape of a new century, we see the results of Harry Truman's courage all around us. The Cold War is over. Europe is thriving. Berlin is united. Greece and Turkey are vital NATO allies, working with us to promote peace in the Balkans. South Korea has elected a champion of democracy, Kim Dae Jung, as its President. International organizations like NATO, the UN and the IMF are essential components of the architecture of peace. These welcome developments are not accidents of history. They stem from the vision of the leader we celebrate today. We must never lose sight of this vision. We must never relax our commitment to the architecture of peace.
America is today the unchallenged leader of the world because of a man who never expected to leave his small home town. We are confidently prepared for the 21st century because of a man who never lost the community spirit of the 19th century. The magnificent vessel whose commissioning we celebrate is a fitting tribute to a great captain – a captain who charted a wise course for us.

Those of you who have been to Independence, Missouri know that it is not exactly a center of naval operations. But Harry Truman had enormous respect for the United States military. Though we cannot deny he was an Army man, he was no stranger to the Navy. In 1944, as a Senator, he was the guest speaker at the christening of the great battleship, the USS Missouri – on whose decks Japan surrendered. He felt a lifelong affection for the “Mighty Mo,” despite the fact that his speech that day was cut short because the admirals ahead of him spoke for too long. He never forgot who they were. They didn’t call him “Give ‘em Hell Harry” for nothing.

If there is one lesson I have learned from our 33rd President, it is never to speak too long at a ceremony involving a lot of people on a hot day.

Harry Truman knew a President’s ability to persuade is greatly enhanced when he commands the world’s greatest military. That lesson is as true today as it was then. When the cause of peace demanded quick action in the Persian Gulf last winter, the Navy was there to put steel behind our diplomacy. When we wanted to restore hope in Haiti four years ago, the Navy was there to make it happen.
Today, my persuasiveness has been enhanced considerably. The carrier before you occupies four and a half acres and stands 20 stories tall. It will be a home to 6000 crew – roughly the population of Harry Truman's hometown. From the aviators in their ready rooms to the engineers in their spaces ... from the catapult officers who can catch four aircraft in one minute to the cooks who prepare 18,000 meals a day ... the men and women of the *Harry S. Truman* will do America proud.

This vessel is a monument to strength of character. The character of those who will serve aboard her. Of the men and women who built her so well in Newport News. Of the small-town American whose name she bears. The motto you have adopted says it all ... "The Buck Stops Here."

This carrier is expected to give fifty years of service. In 2048, I will be 97 years old. Strom Thurmond will be 147. The *Truman*'s commander in 2048 may not even be born yet. Our future President may not be born ... though he or she may be one of the small children here today. We can never completely control our destiny. But we can take steps to shape the future.

Over the next fifty years, we must continue to pose the questions that President Truman asked – and answered – every day of his long service to America. Is what we are doing good for the whole people? Will we protect the basic human rights enshrined in our Declaration? Will we bring hope to the oppressed and fear to the oppressors?
Looking at you ... looking at this vessel ... I already know the answer.

We will continue to do the right thing, even when it is not the easy thing. We will continue to evolve, because America has never been a nation to sit still for very long. But the best things we cherish will always stay the same. Home and family ... independence and togetherness ... the right to be free and the responsibility to work for freedom. The very sight of the USS Harry S. Truman will recall and recast these ideals and the steely will of a man who arrived when we needed him most. A man who felt no great ambition to be President, but who ably steered the Ship of State when he was called to the helm.

Some will look at this carrier and see only her specific dimensions. I see something even bigger – the living spirit of America, and the indomitable courage of one of the best men our young nation has yet produced.

Shortly after he became President, Harry Truman spoke at the commissioning of another aircraft carrier named for a great American, the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt. I think it is fitting to give him the final word: “These, then, are the two huge tasks before us: realizing for our own people the full life which our resources make possible; and helping to achieve for people everywhere an era of peace.” Let us continue in this spirit, remembering that no challenge is too great, and that democracy is never stronger than when it ties us together, not in fear of others, but with belief in ourselves.

Godspeed ... and give ‘em hell!
President William Jefferson Clinton
Remarks at Commissioning of U.S.S. Harry S. Truman
Norfolk, Virginia
July 25, 1998

[Acknowledgments: Margaret Truman-Daniel; Secretary Cohen; Secretary Dalton, Senator Robb; Rep. Ike Skelton; members of Congress; veterans groups; men and women of the Navy; fellow Americans]

Eighty-five years ago, in 1913, a young farmer in Missouri was experiencing a few business difficulties. But he was not one to give up easily. He wrote to his sweetheart and future wife, “my ship’s going to come in yet.”

Let the record show: Harry S. Truman was always a man of his word. Today, July 25, 1998, his ship has literally come in.

President Truman’s long career as a public servant began with a simple decision to join the military. And though he would be the first to tell you, with Trumanesque bluntness, that he was an Army man, he was no stranger to the Navy. In 1944, he was the guest speaker at the christening of the great battleship, the USS Missouri – on whose decks Japan surrendered. He felt a lifelong affection for the “Mighty Mo,” despite the fact that his speech that day was cut short because the admirals ahead of him on the program spoke for too long. [He never forgot who they were. They didn’t call him “Give ‘em Hell Harry” for nothing.]
If there is one lesson I have learned from our 33rd President, it is never to speak too long at a ceremony involving a lot of people on a hot day — especially when there are a lot of speakers following you.

This is a great day for all Americans... It is a great day for the U.S. Navy... And it’s a great day and for the hard-working men and women of Norfolk and Newport News. I am proud to be with you today, because I believe President Truman was one of the great presidents of this or any century. Many doubted his abilities, or said unkind things ... like “to err is Truman,” or “I’m just mild about Harry.”

But we know how wrong the critics were. A half-century later, we know that Harry Truman was profoundly right for this nation. He represented the best in us, and he always gave us the best in him. He never failed to live up to the words of his fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, which he kept on his desk in the Oval Office: “Always do right! This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.”

A terrifying [heavy/thick/overwhelming?] catalogue of crises faced America at the high noon of the American Century. Europe lay shattered ... a Cold War chilled foreign relations ... terrible new weapons made every false step a potential catastrophe ... and angry voices were often raised at home against fellow Americans. [attach to next graf]

Here and abroad, our bright future was clouded over with uncertainty. Many Americans wanted to turn away from the rest of the world, to relinquish the leadership we had fought so hard for.
[we didn’t fight for leadership, we fought for our interests and values and leadership is what it took to win. so maybe “to relinquish the leadership that helped freedom triumph over tyranny” and/or “that rescued freedom from tyranny...”

Harry Truman refused to surrender to these darker impulses. With each crisis, he was decisive and determined, and he steered us back toward our proper destiny as a nation of leadership. His courage in the face of adversity restored the promise of the American Century. He was, as Dean Acheson called him, “the captain with the mighty heart.”

[I would lose this graf and get right into hard choices, though I would save first line, which I’ve put in further down]Let us never forget that the future Harry Truman defined is the present we now enjoy. He was right about sending American aid overseas. He was right about pledging our partnership with international organizations like the UN, NATO, and the IMF. He was right about securing bipartisan cooperation on important foreign policy matters. And he was right about standing tough when others tried to intimidate us. Those decisions were expensive. They were often unpopular. But they were right.

All of us, every day, face hard decisions. But let us consider three decisions that came across the President’s desk in a short burst, fifty years ago. [Might also want to reference Greece-Turkey and Marshall Plan -- one of most farsighted instances of enlightened self-interest in history, extending a hand to, not turning backs on, defeated enemies] First, in May 1948, over immense opposition, President Truman was the first leader to recognize the infant state of Israel. Then in June, when Russians closed off western access to Berlin, he ordered that the city be supplied
through a heroic airlift against long odds. It was my privilege to commemorate the Berlin Airlift when I visited Germany two months ago ... and I don't think America has ever soared much higher than it did over those eleven harrowing months.

But our military was not only fighting for liberty abroad. It was also a vital instrument of change here at home. And fifty years ago tomorrow, Harry Truman made a third decision, one of the best things any Commander-in-Chief has done before or since. Despite extraordinary political pressure against him ... despite a family tradition of supporting the Confederacy ... despite growing up in a segregated community ... President Truman ordered the armed forces to integrate when he signed Executive Order 9981. With the stroke of a pen, he changed our history forever, encouraging Americans from every background to treat each other with the respect and dignity we all deserve. From that day onward, America's men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom. An example of humanity ... and an example to humanity.

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Every day, our men and women in uniform exemplify the wisdom and bravery behind those decisions. You are quick to defend our friends and interests at a moment's notice. And your
teamwork sends out a vital message of hope to other lands, where racial, ethnic and religious
differences still simmer close to the surface. Each of you, in different ways, is doing the work of
America — the work that he did with those hard decisions alone in the White House. I have no
doubt President Truman would be very proud of you. [breaks up flow and you come back to this
point]

As we scan the new landscape of a new century, we see the result of Harry Truman’s courage.
The future he defined is the promise we now enjoy. The Cold War is over. Europe is thriving.
Berlin is unified. Greece and Turkey are vital NATO allies, working with us to promote peace in
the Balkans. South Korea has elected a champion of democracy, Kim Dae Jung, as its President.
All the international organizations we belong to are essential components of the architecture of
peace. These welcome developments are not accidents of history. They stem from the vision of
the leader we celebrate today — from the tough decisions he made, sometimes unpopular,
sometimes expensive but always right.

To no small degree, America is today the unchallenged leader of the world because of a man
who never expected to leave his small home town. We are confidently prepared for the 21st-
century because of a man who never lost the community spirit of the 19th century. The
magnificent vessel whose commissioning we celebrate is a fitting tribute to a great captain — a
captain who charted a wise course for us. [cut for length]

Some might think it odd that America’s newest aircraft carrier is named after a politician who
hailed from the landlocked state of Missouri. His hometown, Independence, is not exactly one of
our more bustling ports. But Harry Truman embodied a truth at the heart of our national story: any American can become anything he or she wants to.

Few thought he was cut from Presidential timber when he began his improbable journey to the White House. He was the only President of this century who did not attend college—though he may have been the smartest. He wore thick glasses from childhood on—though few people had a clearer sight of their responsibilities. He was the shortest President of the century—though he may have cast the longest shadow.

President Truman's long career as a public servant began with a simple decision to join the military. And though he would be the first to tell you, with Trumanesque bluntness, that he was an Army man, he was no stranger to the Navy. In 1944, he was the guest speaker at the christening of the great battleship, the USS Missouri—on whose decks Japan surrendered. He felt a lifelong affection for the "Mighty Mo," despite the fact that his speech that day was cut short because the admiral ahead of him on the program spoke for too long—[He never forgot who they were. They didn't call him "Give 'em Hell Harry" for nothing].

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demanded quick action in the Persian Gulf last winter, the Navy was there to put steel behind our diplomacy. When we wanted to restore hope in Haiti four years ago, the Navy was there to make it happen. [any other things to flag – carriers to Taiwan Strait? Anything in Balkans?]

Today, the men and women of the *USS Harry S. Truman* have enhanced my persuasiveness considerably. The carrier before you will occupies four and a half acres and stands 20 stories tall. It will be a home to 6000 crew – roughly the population of Harry Truman’s hometown. From the aviators in their ready rooms to the engineers in their spaces … from the catapult officers who can catch four aircraft in one minute to the cooks who prepare 18,000 meals a day … the men and women of the *Harry S. Truman* will do America proud.

Everything about this vessel is a monument to strength of character. The character of the men and women who will serve aboard her. Of the men and women who built her so well. Of the American whose name she bears.

At the beginning of our national experiment, our founding fathers pledged to build a more perfect union. Harry Truman knew his work would never be finished, though he never gave up the struggle. Fifty year later, our work, too is unfinished. We must think, as he did, about the next chapter in America’s story. We must keep our nation focused on the problems that lie beyond our borders. Peace will not just happen – it will result from wise decisions we make today.
This carrier is expected to give fifty years of service. The *Truman*’s commander in 2048 may not even be born yet. Our future President may not be born ... though *she* may be one of the small children here today.

We cannot completely control our destiny. But we can take steps to shape the future. Over the next fifty years, we must continue to pose the questions that President Truman asked – and answered – every day of his long service to America. Is what we are doing good for the whole people? Will we protect the basic human rights enshrined in our Declaration? Will we advance our partnership with other peaceful nations? Will we bring hope to the oppressed and fear to the oppressors?

*Looking at you ... looking at this vessel ... I already know the answer.*

*We will continue to evolve, because America has never been a nation to sit still for very long.*

But the best things we cherish will always stay the same. Home and family ... independence and togetherness. The very sight of the *USS Harry S. Truman* will recall and recast these ideals and the steely will of a man who arrived when we needed him most. A man who felt no great ambition to be President, but who ably steered the Ship of State when called to the helm. Some will look at this ship and see only her specific dimensions. I see something bigger still – the living spirit of America, and the indomitable courage of one of the best men our young nation has yet produced. [could end here, picking up your last line.... up to you]
Shortly after he became President, Harry Truman spoke at the dedication of another aircraft carrier named after a great American, the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt. I think it is fitting to give him the final word: “These, then, are the two huge tasks before us: realizing for our own people the full life which our resources make possible; and helping to achieve for people everywhere an era of peace.” Let us continue in this spirit, remembering that no challenge is too great, and that democracy is never stronger than when it ties us together, not in fear of others, but with belief in ourselves.

Godspeed.
PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON
REMARKS AT COMMISSIONING OF U.S.S. HARRY S. TRUMAN
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA
JULY 25, 1998

[Acknowledgments: Margaret Truman-Daniel; Secretary Dalton, Rep. Ike Skelton]

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difficulties. But he was not one to give up easily. He wrote to his sweetheart, “my ship’s going
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the hard-working men and women of Newport News. I am proud to be with you today, because I
believe President Truman was one of the great presidents of this or any century. Many doubted
his abilities, or said unkind things ... like the popular phrase “to err is Truman,” or “I’m just mild
about Harry.”

But we know how wrong the critics were. A half-century later, we know that Harry Truman was
profoundly right for this nation. He represented the best in us, and he always gave us the best in
him.

[It was a wonderful thing to be American in the late 1940s and early 1950s. After war and
depression, the nation’s men and women happily turned their energies to starting new lives and
families. But the soft glow of nostalgia should not dim our awareness of hard reality. The years
of the Truman Presidency were some of the most challenging years our nation has ever
experienced. At the high noon of the American Century, we knew unprecedented power and
unprecedented danger. We survived and flourished because we had the right man at the helm.]

A daunting litany of crises faced America at the high noon of the American Century. Europe lay
shattered ... a Cold War chilled foreign relations ... terrible new weapons made every false step
a potential catastrophe ... and angry voices were often raised at home against fellow Americans.

At home and abroad, our bright future was clouded over with a deep insecurity about our ability
to get along as members of the same human family. Many Americans wanted to turn away from
the rest of the world, to relinquish the leadership we had fought so hard for.

Harry Truman refused to surrender to these darker impulses. With each crisis, he was decisive
and determined, and he steered us back toward our proper destiny as a nation of leadership. His
courage in the face of adversity restored the promise of the American Century. He was, as Dean
Acheson called him, “the Captain with a mighty heart.”
Let us never forget that the future Harry Truman defined is the present we now enjoy. He was right about sending American aid overseas, to Europe and the Mediterranean. He was right about pledging our partnership with international organizations like the UN, NATO, and the IMF. He was right about securing bipartisan cooperation on important foreign policy matters. And he was right about standing tough when others tried to intimidate us. Those decisions were expensive. They were often unpopular. But they were right.

As we scan the new landscape of a new century, we see the fruit of those hard decisions. The Cold War is over. Europe is thriving. Berlin is unified. Greece and Turkey are vital NATO allies, working with us to promote peace in the Balkans. South Korea has elected a champion of democracy, Kim Dae Jung, as its President. All the international organizations we belong to are essential components of the architecture of peace. These welcome developments are not accidents of history. They stem from the vision of the leader we celebrate today.

To no small degree, America is today the unchallenged leader of the world because of a man who never expected to leave his small home town. We are confidently prepared for the 21st century because of a man who never lost the self-reliance and community spirit of the 19th century. [Margaret Truman said, ...] The magnificent vessel whose commissioning we celebrate today is a fitting tribute to a great captain—a captain who charted a very wise course for us.

Some might think it odd that America’s newest aircraft carrier is named after a politician who hailed from the landlocked state of Missouri. Independence is not one of our more bustling ports. But Harry Truman embodied a truth at the heart of our national story: any American can become anything he or she wants to.

Few thought Harry Truman was cut from Presidential timber when he began his improbable journey to the White House. He was the only President of this century who did not attend college—though he may have been the smartest. He wore thick glasses from childhood on—though few people had a clearer sight of their responsibilities. He was one of the shorter Presidents of the century—though he may have cast the longest shadow.

If Truman was unlikely to become President, there was no doubting his commitment to America. I am a little reluctant to go into the details of his service before this audience. He was, after all ... an Army man. [his service changed him forever ... like so many of you, he grewHe joined the National Guard at age 21 ... he volunteered and recruited others to serve in Europe in World War One ... and he did heroic service as a Senator during World War Two ... protecting taxpayers from corruption and waste in the war effort.

But if he loved the Army, he was no stranger to the Navy. He first saw the ocean when his regiment was transported to France aboard a German liner renamed the George Washington. He spoke at the christening of the great U.S.S. Missouri—on whose decks Japan surrendered. He retained a lifelong affection for the “Mighty Mo,” despite the fact that his speech at the christening was cut short because some of the admirals ahead of him on the program spoke for too long. He never forgot who they were (people didn’t shout “Give ‘em hell, Harry!” for nothing).
If there is one lesson I have learned from this, it is never to speak too long at a ceremony involving a lot of people on a hot day.

And throughout his Presidency, he relied on the superb qualities of the Navy and the other service branches as he faced one confrontation after another. From the Mediterranean to Inchon, the Navy was critical to our foreign policy in those turbulent years. Harry Truman knew a President’s ability to persuade is greatly enhanced when he commands the world’s greatest force for freedom.

The ship you see before you is of course far more than a mere ship.

Most of all, this vessel is a monument to strength of character. The character of the men and women who will serve aboard her. The men and women who built her so well. And of course, of the great American whose name she bears.

All of us every day face hard decisions. I mentioned some of the ones he faced. But in a single year, 1948, he faced some of the hardest in our history. In May, over the strong opposition of some of his closest advisers, President Truman was the first leader to recognize the infant state of Israel. In June, when Russians closed off western access to Berlin, he ordered that the city be supplied through a heroic airlift against long odds. It was my privilege to commemorate the Berlin airlift when I visited Germany two months ago ... and I don’t think America has ever soared much higher than it did over those eleven harrowing months.

But our military was not only fighting for liberty abroad. It was also a vital instrument of change here at home. Fifty years ago tomorrow, Harry Truman did one of the best things any Commander-in-Chief has done before or since. Despite extraordinary political pressure against him ... despite a family tradition of supporting the Confederacy ... despite growing up in a segregated community ... President Truman ordered the armed forces to integrate when he signed Executive Order 9981. With the stroke of a pen, he changed our history forever, inspiring others by his courage ... and encouraging Americans from all backgrounds to treat each other with the respect we all deserve. From that day onward, America’s men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom. An example of humanity ... and an example to humanity.

Those decisions were made by one man, alone in the White House. But they had ramifications for millions around the world, far beyond that time and place. Every day, our men and women in uniform exemplify the wisdom and bravery behind those decisions. You are quick to defend our friends and interests at a moment’s notice. And your teamwork sends out a vital message of hope to other lands, where racial, ethnic and religious differences still simmer close to the surface. Each of you, in different ways, is doing the work of America – the work that began with those hard decisions alone in the White House. I have no doubt President Truman would be very proud of you.
At the beginning of our national experiment, our founding fathers pledged to build a more perfect union. Harry Truman knew his work would never be finished, though he never gave up the struggle. Fifty year later, our work, too is unfinished. We must think, as he did, about the next chapter in America’s story. This carrier is expected to give fifty years of service. What will our nation be like in the year 2048? The Truman’s commander may not even be born yet. Our future President may not be born … though she may be one of the small children here today.

We cannot completely control our destiny. But we can take steps to shape the future. We must continue to pose the questions that President Truman asked – and answered – every day of his long service to America. Is what we are doing fair? Is it good for the whole people? Will it make the world safer? Will it protect our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Will it bring honor to our parents and hope to our children?

Looking at you … looking at this vessel … I believe I already know the answer.

Things will continue to change in this country, because America has never been a nation to sit still for very long.

But some things will always stay the same. The very sight of the USS Harry S. Truman will testify to the steely will and towering influence of a man who arrived when we needed him most. A man who felt no great ambition to be President, but who ably steered the Ship of State when we needed him most.

changes in US navy in HST lifetime.

tennyson?

as we enjoy this great time, we should give thanks for someone who made it possible. Am century. through good times and bad, if we stay true to our best ideals, we’ll be OK. Some will look at this ship and see only the specifics. Granted, they are impressive. But I see in it something bigger still – the living spirit of America, and the indomitable courage of one of the best men our nation has yet produced.

lesson: world leadership requires cost and commitment.
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NORFOLK, VIRGINIA
JULY 25, 1998

[Acknowledgments: Margaret Truman-Daniel; Secretary Dalton, Rep. Ike Skelton]

Eighty-five years ago, in 1913, a young farmer in Missouri was experiencing a few business difficulties. But he was not one to give up easily. He optimistically wrote to his sweetheart, "my ship's going to come in yet."

Let the record show: Harry S. Truman was always a man of his word. Today, July 25, 1998, his ship has officially come in.

This is a great day for all Americans. It is a great day for the U.S. Navy. And it's a great day for the hard-working men and women of Newport News. I am proud to be with you today, because I believe President Truman was one of the great presidents of this or any century. Many doubted his abilities, or said unkind things ... like the popular phrase "to err is Truman," or "I'm just mild about Harry."

But we know how wrong the critics were. A half-century later, we know that Harry Truman was profoundly right for this nation. He represented the best in us, and he always gave us the best in him.

It was a wonderful thing to be American in the late 1940s and early 1950s. We had won an enormous victory, and men and women happily turned their energies to starting new lives and families. But the soft glow of nostalgia should not dim our awareness of hard reality. The years of the Truman Presidency were some of the most challenging years our nation has ever experienced. At the high noon of the American Century, we knew unprecedented power and unprecedented problems. We survived and we flourished because we had the right man at the helm.

The litany of crises Harry Truman steered us through staggers the imagination: the rebuilding of Europe, new independence movements around the world, economic instability, strikes, atomic weapons, the Cold War, McCarthyism, the Korean War. At home and abroad, our bright future was clouded over with a deep insecurity about our ability to get along as members of the same human family.

Harry Truman refused to surrender to the darker impulses. With crisis after crisis, he was decisive. His determination and courage in the face of adversity restored the promise of the American Century. He was, as Dean Acheson called him, "the Captain with a mighty heart."

No President has been correct about every decision, but Truman was a man of remarkable vision into future ... and let us never forget that the future he defined is the present we now enjoy. He
was right about sending American aid overseas, to Europe and the Mediterranean. He was right
about pledging our partnership with international organizations like the UN, NATO and the IMF.
He was right about securing bipartisan cooperation on important foreign policy matters. And he
was right about standing tough when others tried to intimidate us. Those decisions were
expensive. They were unpopular. But they were right.

To no small degree, America is today the leader of the world because of a man who never
expected to leave his small home town. We are confidently prepared for the 21st century because
of a man who never lost the self-reliance and community spirit of the 19th century. [Margaret
Truman said, ...] No matter how thorny things got, he rose to every challenge with boundless
courage and determination. He replaced an irreplaceable President, and when he retired, he left
our nation stronger, wiser and better than he found it. The magnificent vessel whose
commissioning we celebrate today is a fitting tribute to a great captain – a captain who charted a
very wise course for us.

Some might think it odd that America’s newest aircraft carrier is named after a politician who
hailed from the remote inland port of Independence, Missouri. But Harry Truman embodied a
truth at the heart of our national story: that anyone can become anything he or she wants to.
[Today our Navy is a composite of men and women from all different backgrounds and states.
The Nimitz class of warships is named after Admiral Chester Nimitz – a product of Nebraska.]

Few thought Harry Truman was cut from Presidential timber when he began his improbable
journey to the White House. He was the only President of this century who did not attend
college—though he may have been the smartest. He wore thick glasses from childhood on—
though few people had a clearer sight of their responsibilities. He was one of the shorter
Presidents of the century—though he may have cast the longest shadow.

If Truman was unlikely to become President, there is no doubting his patriotism or his
commitment to a strong America. I am a little reluctant to go into the details of his service
before this audience. He was, after all ... an Army man. He joined the National Guard at age 21
... he volunteered and recruited others to serve in Europe in World War One ... and he did
heroic service as a Senator during World War Two ... protecting taxpayers from corruption and
waste in the war effort.

But if he loved the Army, he was no stranger to the Navy. He first saw the ocean when his
regiment was transported to France aboard a German liner renamed the USS George
Washington. He spoke at the christening of the great U.S.S. Missouri – on whose decks Japan
surrendered. He retained a lifelong affection for the Mighty Mo, despite the fact that his speech
at the christening ceremony was cut short because some of the admirals ahead of him on the
program spoke for too long. He never forgot who they were. He was not called “Give ‘em Hell
Harry” for nothing.

If there is one lesson I have learned from the life of our 33rd President, it is never to speak too
long at a ceremony involving a lot of people on a hot day.

The ship you see before you is of course far more than a mere ship.
Most of all, this vessel is a monument to strength of character. The character of the men and women who serve and will serve aboard the Truman. The men and women who built her so well. And of course, of the man whose name she bears.

All of us every day face hard decisions. But in a single year, 1948, he faced some of the hardest in our history. In May, over the strong opposition of some of his closest advisers, President Truman was the first leader to recognize the infant state of Israel. In June, when Russians closed off western access to Berlin, he ordered that the city be supplied through a heroic airlift against long odds. It was my privilege to commemorate the Berlin Airlift when I visited Germany two months ago ... and I don't think America has ever soared much higher than it did over those eleven harrowing months.

But our military was not only fighting for liberty abroad. It was also a vital instrument of change here at home. Fifty years ago tomorrow, Harry Truman did one of the best things any Commander-in-Chief has done before or since. Despite extraordinary political pressure against him ... despite a family tradition of supporting the Confederacy ... despite growing up in a segregated community ... President Truman ordered the armed forces to integrate when he signed Executive Order 9981. With the stroke of a pen, he changed our history forever, inspiring others by his courage ... and encouraging Americans from all backgrounds to treat each other with the respect we all deserve. From that day onward, America’s men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom. An example of humanity ... and an example to humanity.

Those decisions were made by one man, alone in the White House. But they had ramifications for millions around the world, far beyond that time and place. Every day, our men and women in uniform display the wisdom and bravery behind those decisions. You are quick to defend our friends and interests at a moment’s notice. And your teamwork sends out a vital message of hope to other lands, where racial, ethnic and religious differences still simmer close to the surface. Each of you, in different ways, is doing the work of America – the work that began with those hard decisions alone in the White House. I have no doubt President Truman would be very proud of you.

At the beginning of our national experiment, our founding fathers pledged to build a more perfect union. Harry Truman knew his work would never be finished, though he never gave up the struggle. Fifty year later, our work, too is unfinished. We must think, as he did, about the next chapter in America’s story. This carrier is expected to give fifty years of service. What will our nation be like in the year 2048? The Truman’s commander may not even be born yet. Our future President may not be born ... though she may be one of the small children here today.

We cannot completely control our destiny. But we can take steps to shape the future. We must continue to pose the questions that President Truman asked – and answered – every day of his long service to America. Is what we are doing fair? Is it good for the whole people? Will it make the world safer? Will it protect our right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Will it bring honor to our parents and hope to our children? Will it bring hope to the oppressed and fear to the oppressors?
Looking at you ... looking at this vessel ... I believe the answer will be yes.

Things will continue to change in this country, because America has never been a nation to sit still for very long.

But some things will always stay the same. The very sight of the USS Harry S. Truman will testify to the steely will and towering influence of a man who arrived when we needed him most. A man who felt no great ambition to be President, but who ably and confidently steered the Ship of State when we needed him most.

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as we enjoy this great time, we should give thanks for someone who made it possible. Am century. through good times and bad, if we stay true to our best ideals, we'll be OK. Some will look at this ship and see only the specifics. Granted, they are impressive. But I see in it something bigger still – the living spirit of America, and the indomitable courage of one of the best men our nation has yet produced.
Eighty-five years ago, in 1913, a young farmer in Missouri was experiencing a few business difficulties. But he was not one to give up easily. He wrote to his sweetheart and future wife, “my ship’s going to come in yet.”

Let the record show: Harry S. Truman was always a man of his word. Today, July 25, 1998, his ship has officially come in.

This is a great day for all Americans. It is a great day for the U.S. Navy. And it’s a great day for the hard-working men and women of Norfolk and Newport News. I am proud to be with you today, because I believe President Truman was one of the great presidents of this or any century. Many doubted his abilities, or said unkind things ... like “to err is Truman,” or “I’m just mild about Harry.”

But we know how wrong the critics were. A half-century later, we know that Harry Truman was profoundly right for this nation. He represented the best in us, and he always gave us the best in him. He never failed to live up to the words of his fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, which he
kept on his desk in the Oval Office: "Always do right! This will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

A terrifying catalogue of crises faced America at the high noon of the American Century. Europe lay shattered ... a Cold War chilled foreign relations ... terrible new weapons made every false step a potential catastrophe ... and angry voices were often raised at home against fellow Americans.

Here and abroad, our bright future was clouded over with a deep insecurity about our ability to get along as members of the same human family. Many Americans wanted to turn away from the rest of the world, to relinquish the leadership we had fought so hard for.

Harry Truman refused to surrender to these darker impulses. With each crisis, he was decisive and determined, and he steered us back toward our proper destiny as a nation of leadership. His courage in the face of adversity restored the promise of the American Century. He was, as Dean Acheson called him, "the captain with the mighty heart."

Let us never forget that the future Harry Truman defined is the present we now enjoy. He was right about sending American aid overseas, to Europe and the Mediterranean. He was right about pledging our partnership with international organizations like the UN, NATO, and the IMF. He was right about securing bipartisan cooperation on important foreign policy matters. And he was right about standing tough when others tried to intimidate us. Those decisions were expensive. They were often unpopular. But they were right.
All of us, every day, face hard decisions. But let us consider three decisions that came across the President's desk in a single year, fifty years ago. First, in May 1948, over immense opposition, President Truman was the first leader to recognize the infant state of Israel. Then in June, when Russians closed off western access to Berlin, he ordered that the city be supplied through a heroic airlift against long odds. It was my privilege to commemorate the Berlin Airlift when I visited Germany two months ago ... and I don't think America has ever soared much higher than it did over those eleven harrowing months.

But our military was not only fighting for liberty abroad. It was also a vital instrument of change here at home. Fifty years ago tomorrow, Harry Truman made a third decision, one of the best things any Commander-in-Chief has done before or since. Despite extraordinary political pressure against him ... despite a family tradition of supporting the Confederacy ... despite growing up in a segregated community ... President Truman ordered the armed forces to integrate when he signed Executive Order 9981. With the stroke of a pen, he changed our history forever, inspiring others by his courage ... and encouraging Americans from all backgrounds to treat each other with the respect we all deserve. From that day onward, America's men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom. An example of humanity ... and an example to humanity.

Those decisions were made by one man, alone in the White House. But they had ramifications for millions around the world, far beyond that time and place. They testified that America would not stand idly by while the world unraveled. They testified that our ideals were not just words
scrawled on parchment, but living guideposts to a new and better way of growing together as fellow Americans. As he said in the first address by a President to the NAACP, “when I say all Americans, I mean all Americans.”

Every day, our men and women in uniform exemplify the wisdom and bravery behind those decisions. You are quick to defend our friends and interests at a moment’s notice. And your teamwork sends out a vital message of hope to other lands, where racial, ethnic and religious differences still simmer close to the surface. Each of you, in different ways, is doing the work of America – the work that he did with those hard decisions alone in the White House. I have no doubt President Truman would be very proud of you.

As we scan the new landscape of a new century, we see the result of Harry Truman’s courage. The Cold War is over. Europe is thriving. Berlin is unified. Greece and Turkey are vital NATO allies, working with us to promote peace in the Balkans. South Korea has elected a champion of democracy, Kim Dae Jung, as its President. All the international organizations we belong to are essential components of the architecture of peace. These welcome developments are not accidents of history. They stem from the vision of the leader we celebrate today.

To no small degree, America is today the unchallenged leader of the world because of a man who never expected to leave his small home town. We are confidently prepared for the 21st century because of a man who never lost the self-reliance and community spirit of the 19th century. The magnificent vessel whose commissioning we celebrate is a fitting tribute to a great captain – a captain who charted a wise course for us.
Some might think it odd that America’s newest aircraft carrier is named after a politician who hailed from the landlocked state of Missouri. His hometown, Independence, is not exactly one of our more bustling ports. But Harry Truman embodied a truth at the heart of our national story: any American can become anything he or she wants to.

Few thought he was cut from Presidential timber when he began his improbable journey to the White House. He was the only President of this century who did not attend college—though he may have been the smartest. He wore thick glasses from childhood on—though few people had a clearer sight of their responsibilities. He was the shortest President of the century—though he may have cast the longest shadow.

President Truman’s long career as a public servant began with a simple decision to join the military. And though he would be the first to tell you, with Trumanesque bluntness, that he was an Army man, he was no stranger to the Navy. In 1944, he was the guest speaker at the christening of the great battleship, the *USS Missouri*—on whose decks Japan surrendered. He retained a lifelong affection for the “Mighty Mo,” despite the fact that his speech that day was cut short because the admirals ahead of him on the program spoke for too long. [He never forgot who they were. They didn’t call him “Give ‘em Hell Harry” for nothing.]

If there is one lesson I have learned from our 33rd President, it is never to speak too long at a ceremony involving a lot of people on a hot day—especially when there are a lot of speakers following you.
Harry Truman knew a President's ability to persuade is greatly enhanced when he commands the world's greatest force for freedom. That lesson is as true today as it was then. When the cause of peace demanded quick action in the Persian Gulf last winter, the Navy was there to put steel behind our diplomacy. When we wanted to restore hope in Haiti four years ago, the Navy was there to make hope happen.

Today, the men and women of the USS Harry S. Truman have enhanced my persuasiveness considerably. The carrier before you will occupies four and a half acres and stands 20 stories tall. It will be a home to 6000 crew – roughly the population of Harry Truman's hometown. From the aviators in their ready rooms to the engineers in their spaces ... from the catapult officers who can catch four aircraft in one minute to the cooks who prepare 18,000 meals a day ... the men and women of the Harry S. Truman will do America proud.

Everything about this vessel is a monument to strength of character. The character of the men and women who will serve aboard her. Of the men and women who built her so well. And of course, of the great American whose name she bears.

At the beginning of our national experiment, our founding fathers pledged to build a more perfect union. Harry Truman knew his work would never be finished, though he never gave up the struggle. Fifty year later, our work, too is unfinished. We must think, as he did, about the next chapter in America's story. This carrier is expected to give fifty years of service. The
Truman's commander in 2048 may not even be born yet. Our future President may not be born
... though she may be one of the small children here today.

We cannot completely control our destiny. But we can take steps to shape the future. We must
continue to pose the questions that President Truman asked – and answered – every day of his
long service to America. Is what we are doing good for the whole people? Will it protect the
basic human rights enshrined in our Declaration? Will it bring hope to the oppressed and fear to
the oppressors?

Looking at you ... looking at this vessel ... I already know the answer.

We will continue to evolve, because America has never been a nation to sit still for very long.

But the best things we cherish will always stay the same. Home and family ... independence and
togetherness. The very sight of the USS Harry S. Truman will testify to these ideals and to the
steely will of a man who arrived when we needed him most. A man who felt no great ambition
to be President, but who ably steered the Ship of State when called to the helm. Some will look
at this ship and see only her specific dimensions. I see something bigger still – the living spirit
of America, and the indomitable courage of one of the best men our young nation has yet
produced.

Shortly after he became President, Harry Truman spoke at the dedication of another aircraft
carrier named after a great American, the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt. I think it is fitting to give
him the final word: “These, then, are the two huge tasks before us: realizing for our own people
the full life which our resources make possible; and helping to achieve for people everywhere an
era of peace.” Let us continue in this spirit, remembering that no challenge is too great, and that
democracy is never stronger than when it ties us together, not in fear of others, but with belief in
ourselves.

Godspeed.
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Today we know how wrong the critics were. Everything about Harry Truman was profoundly right. He was right for a tough job ... he was right for tough times ... and he was right about the daunting problems our nation faced at the high noon of the American Century.

The litany of international and domestic crises he led us through staggers the imagination. I don’t think any President has ever been correct about every decision, but Truman was a man of remarkable vision into the future ... and let us never forget that the future he defined is the present we now enjoy. He was right about sending American aid overseas, to Europe and the Mediterranean. He was right about pledging us to international organizations like the UN, NATO and the IMF. He was right about securing bipartisan cooperation about important foreign policy matters. And he was right about standing tough when others tried to intimidate us.

America is today the leader of the world because of a man who never expected to leave his small home town. We are confidently steering toward the 21st century because of a man who was always rooted in the self-reliance of the 19th century. No matter how difficult things got, he rose to every challenge with boundless courage and implacable determination. The challenges came fast and furious when he was at the helm. He replaced an irreplaceable President, and made the hardest decisions any Commander-in-Chief has had to make since Abraham Lincoln. He gave his country 7 years of strong leadership in one of the darkest periods of our history. And when he retired to spend his final years in Independence, he left our nation stronger, wiser and better. The magnificent vessel whose commissioning we celebrate today is a fitting tribute to a giant of our history.

I think it is appropriate that America’s newest aircraft carrier is named after a man who hailed from the great port of Independence, Missouri. For Harry Truman embodied a truth at the heart
of our national story: that anyone can become anything he or she wants to become. Today our Navy is a composite of men and women from all different backgrounds and states. The Nimitz class of warships is named after Admiral Chester Nimitz—a product of Nebraska.

Few thought Harry Truman was cut from Presidential timber when he began his improbable journey to the White House. He was the only President of this century who did not attend college—though he may have been the smartest. He wore thick glasses from childhood on—though few people had a clearer sight of their responsibilities. He was one of the shorter Presidents of the century—though he may have cast the longest shadow.

If Truman was unlikely to become President, there is no doubting his patriotism or his commitment to a strong America. I am a little reluctant to go into the details of his service before this audience. He was, after all … an Army man. He joined the National Guard at age 21 … he volunteered and recruited others to serve in Europe in World War One … and did heroic service as a Senator during World War Two … protecting the military from corrupt suppliers.

But if he loved the Army, he was no stranger to the Navy. He first saw the ocean when his regiment was transported to France aboard a German liner renamed the USS George Washington. He spoke at the christening of the great U.S.S. Missouri—on whose decks the Japanese surrendered. He retained a lifelong affection for the Mighty Mo, despite the fact that his speech at the christening ceremony was cut short because the admirals ahead of him on the program spoke for so long. And he never forgot who they were. If there is one lesson I have learned from the life of Harry Truman, it is to never speak too long at a ceremony involving a lot of people on a hot day.

I’d like to revisit the time fifty years ago.
All of us every day face hard decisions.
But in a single year, 1948, he faced of the hardest in our history. In May, over the strong opposition of some of his closest advisers, President Truman was the first leader to recognize the infant state of Israel. In June, when Russians closed off western access to Berlin, he ordered that the city be supplied through a heroic airlift against long odds. It was my privilege to commemorate the Berlin Airlift when I visited Germany two months ago … and I don’t think the American spirit has has ever soared much higher than it did in those eleven harrowing months.

But our military was not fighting for liberty abroad. It was also a vital instrument of change here at home. Fifty years ago tomorrow, Harry Truman did one of the best things any Commander-in-Chief has done before or since. Despite extraordinary pressure against him … despite a family tradition of supporting the Confederacy … despite growing up in a segregated community … President Truman ordered the armed forces to integrate when he signed Executive Order 9981. With the stroke of a pen, he changed our history forever, inspiring others by his courage … and inspiring Americans from all backgrounds to treat each other with the respect we all deserve. From that day onward, America’s men and women in uniform have truly been a force for freedom—an example of humanity … and an example to humanity.

Those decisions were made by one man, alone in the White House. But they had ramifications for millions around the world. And every day, our men and women in uniform are continuing to
display the wisdom and bravery behind those decisions. You are quick to defend our friends and our interests at a moment’s notice, as he did in Berlin. And your diversity and respect for each other sends out a vital message of hope to other lands, where racial, ethnic and religious differences still simmer close to the surface. Each of you, in different ways, is doing the work of America – the work that began with those hard decisions in the White House. I have no doubt President Truman would be very proud of you.

If in some sense, all of you are continuing for us he did for us fifty years ago, then we should also pause to think about the world we would like to see fifty years from today. In the year 2048, this vessel will still be in commission. Its commander may not even be born yet. Our President may not be born yet – though he or she may be one of the small children here today.

Things will continue to change in this country, because America has never been a nation to sit still for very long.

But some things will always stay the same. The very sight of the USS Harry S. Truman will testify to the steely will and towering influence of a man who arrived when we needed him most. A man who felt no great ambition to be President, but who ably and confidently steered the Ship of State when we needed him most.

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