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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 1: Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Political Ascension**

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**File No. 43**

**1915 May 14**

**New York City - Navy League**

May 14, 1915

[Navy League of U.S., NYC]

FDR Speech File

Franklin D. Roosevelt's  
Speech before the Navy League of the United States  
New York, N.Y., May 14, 1915

[ Excerpts ]

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Roosevelt, who spoke next, said that he could say with absolute sincerity that the Navy League was on the threshold of a usefulness greater than any it had ever been called upon to perform in its history.

"If we believe," said he, " in the system of American representative government we must hold our representatives in Congress responsible for their acts in Congress. If we believe that Congress should provide an adequate means of defense we should appeal to our Representative in Congress to give us that defense. We are confronted with the fact that the people do not realize what adequate national defense means. They must be educated to know what it does mean.

"As a boy I was taught that we won a glorious victory in the War of 1812 and that our cause was marred by no defeats. Yet I have since learned that the only reason we escaped with a whole skin was due to the grace of God and the genius of Napoleon Bonaparte. This is the third time in my memory when the people have taken a real interest in the Navy. The first time was when as a boy I saw the White Squadron in New York. The second was the Spanish War, and today.

"When we employ a lawyer we trust him to handle our case. When we employ a naval officer let us trust to his judgement. I have come in contact with many classes of people in my life, but I want to say that as a body of clean, right thinking, honorable men, I have never known a body to equal the officers of the United States Navy.

"We sometimes hear the expression that 'ship for ship and man for man' our navy is the equal of any in the world. Suppose Haiti had two efficiently manned and properly handled ships, as good as any ships in the world of their class. Then Haiti, too, could say and truthfully the same thing about ship for ship and man for man. Whether the United States Navy is efficient depends upon the navies of other countries. Let us take the opinions and the recommendations of the men who can tell us what national defense is. Let us stand by them, and put our trust in the experts who constitute our very first line of defense."

from The New York Times, May 15, 1915 (13:1)  
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