

September 26, 1941

[Liberty Fleet Day]

FDR Speech File

1382

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT

LIBERTY FLEET DAY

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

This is a memorable day in the history of American shipbuilding -- a memorable day in the emergency defense of the nation. Today, from dawn to dark, fourteen ships are being launched -- on the Atlantic, on the Pacific and on the Gulf and among them ~~was~~ ^{is} the first Liberty ship, the PATRICK HENRY.

~~This is just the beginning and while we~~ ^{are} ~~are~~
proud of what we are doing, this is certainly no time to be content. We must build more cargo ships and still more cargo ships -- and we must speed the program until we achieve a launching each day, then two ships a day, fulfilling the ^{building} program undertaken by the Maritime Commission.

Our shipbuilding program -- not only that of the Maritime Commission, but of the Navy -- is one of our answers to the aggressors who would strike at our liberty.

I am speaking today not only to the ship workers in the building yards on our Coasts, on our Great Lakes and on our Rivers -- not only to the thousands who are present at today's launchings -- but also to the men and women throughout the country who live far from salt water or shipbuilding.

I emphasize to all of you the simple, historic fact that throughout the period of our American life, going way back into Colonial days, commerce on the high seas and freedom of the seas has been a major ~~cause~~ ^{reason for} our prosperity and the building up of our country.

To give you one simple example: It is a matter of ~~fact~~ ^{history} that a large part of the capital which went into the building of railways ~~that~~ spread like a network ^{in the middle of the past century} into the new undeveloped areas across the Mississippi River, across the Plains and up into the Northwest, was money which had been made by American traders whose ships had sailed the seas to the Baltic, to the Mediterranean, to Africa and South America, and to Singapore and China itself.

Through all the years after the American Revolution your Government reiterated and maintained the right of American ships to voyage hither and yon without hindrance from those who sought to keep them off the seas or drive them off the seas. As a nation we have realized that our export trade and our import trade had a definite ~~by~~ ^{good} ~~possible~~ effect on the ~~well-being~~ of families, not only on our coasts but on the farms and in the cities a hundred or a thousand miles from salt water.

Since 1936, when the Congress enacted the present Merchant Marine Law, we have been rehabilitating a Merchant Marine which had fallen to a low level. Today we are continuing that program at accelerated speed.

~~Very soon an average of a ship a day will be put into commission. We are stepping this up in order to make it an average of two ships a day. These ships will come from two hundred and thirty four building ways in thirty-two yards -- the great majority of which were not in existence eighteen months ago.~~

The shipworkers of America are doing a great job. They have made a commendable record ~~up to date~~ for efficiency and speed. With every new ship, they are striking a telling blow at the menace to our nation and the liberty of the free peoples of the world. They struck fourteen such blows today. They have caught the true spirit with which all this nation must be imbued if Hitler ^{pernicious} and other aggressors of his ilk are to be crushed ^{us}.

We Americans as a whole cannot listen to those few Americans who preach the gospel of fear -- who say in effect that they are still in favor of freedom of the seas but who would have the United States tie up our vessels in our ports. *That attitude is neither truthful nor honest.*

We propose that these ships sail the seas as they are intended to. We propose, to the best of our ability, to protect them from torpedo, from shell or from bomb.

The PATRICK HENRY, as one of the Liberty ships launched today, renews that great patriot's stirring demand: "Give me liberty or give me death".

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There ~~must~~ be no death for America, for democracy,
for freedom! There must be liberty, world-wide and eternal.
That is our prayer -- our pledge to all mankind.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Original

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H. Foster
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SEPTEMBER 26, 1941

CAUTION: The following radio recording of an address of the President for Liberty Fleet Day is released to all newspapers appearing on the streets not earlier than 6:00 A.M., E.S.T., Saturday, September 27, 1941. The same limitation applies to its use by radio announcers and news commentators.

PLEASE SAFEGUARD AGAINST PREMATURE RELEASE.

STEPHEN EARLY
Secretary to the President

MY FELLOW AMERICANS:

This is a memorable day in the history of American shipbuilding — a memorable day in the emergency defense of the nation. Today, from dawn to dark, fourteen ships are being launched — on the Atlantic, on the Pacific and on the Gulf and among them is the first Liberty ship, the PATRICK Henry.

While we are proud of what we are doing, this is certainly no time to be content. We must build more cargo ships and still more cargo ships — and we must speed the program until we achieve a launching each day, then two ships a day, fulfilling the building program undertaken by the Maritime Commission.

Our shipbuilding program — not only that of the Maritime Commission, but of the Navy — is one of our answers to the aggressors who would strike at our liberty.

I am speaking today not only to the shipworkers in the building yards on our Coasts, on our Great Lakes and on our Rivers — not only to the thousands who are present at today's launchings — but also to the men and women throughout the country who live far from salt water or shipbuilding.

I emphasize to all of you the simple, historic fact that throughout the period of our American life, going way back into Colonial days, commerce on the high seas and freedom of the seas has been a major reason for our prosperity and the building up of our country.

To give you one simple example: It is a matter of history that a large part of the capital which in the middle of the past century went into the building of railways and spread like a network into the new undeveloped areas across the Mississippi River, across the Plains and up into the Northwest, was money which had been made by American traders whose ships had sailed the seas to the Baltic, to the Mediterranean, to Africa and South America, and to Singapore and China itself.

Through all the years after the American Revolution your Government reiterated and maintained the right of American ships to voyage hither and yon without hindrance from those who sought to keep them off the seas or drive them off the seas. As a nation we have realized that our export trade and our import trade had a definitely good effect on the life of families, not only on our Coasts but on the farms and in the cities a hundred or a thousand miles from salt water.

Since 1936, when the Congress enacted the present Merchant Marine Law, we have been rehabilitating a Merchant Marine which had fallen to a low level. Today we are continuing that program at accelerated speed.

The shipworkers of America are doing a great job. They have made a commendable record for efficiency and speed. With every new ship, they are striking a telling blow at the menace to our nation and the liberty of the free peoples of the world. They struck fourteen such blows today. They have caught the true spirit with which all this nation must be imbued if Hitler and other aggressors of his ilk are to be prevented from crushing us.

We Americans as a whole cannot listen to those few Americans who preach the gospel of fear -- who say in effect that they are still in favor of freedom of the seas but who would have the United States tie up our vessels in our ports. That attitude is neither truthful nor honest.

We propose that these ships sail the seas as they are intended to. We propose, to the best of our ability, to protect them from torpedo, from shell or from bomb.

The PATRICK HENRY, as one of the Liberty ships launched today reminds that great patriot's stirring demand:

"Give me liberty or give me death".

There shall be no death for America, for democracy, for freedom! There must be liberty, world-wide and eternal. That is our prayer -- our pledge to all mankind.

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UNITED STATES MARITIME COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

The President

September 18, 1941

Mr. William Hassett
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Hassett:

Here are some of the highlights regarding "LIBERTY FLEET DAY", September 27^r:

Fourteen ships will be launched from dawn to dusk--six on the Atlantic, seven on the Pacific and one on the Gulf.

Three of these are of the Liberty Fleet. The first to be launched will be the PATRICK HENRY at Baltimore. The other two are the JOHN C. FREMONT to be launched at Los Angeles and the STAR OF OREGON to be launched at Portland.

The other ships are cargo vessels excepting a tanker at Quincy and an army transport at Seattle.

Beginning at 7:00 A.M. in the morning, sectional celebrations will be held at each launching. Prominent women will sponsor the ships, for example, Mrs. Wallace will sponsor the PATRICK HENRY. At each of the launchings there will be speakers such as Senator Radcliffe, Admiral Land, (possibly Vice President Wallace) at the PATRICK HENRY; Governor Bacon and Congressman Thomas at Wilmington; Governor Sprague and others at Portland, Oregon; Governor Olson and Commissioner Macaulay at Los Angeles; Governor Johnson and Commissioner Woodward at Pascagoula, Mississippi.

The President's recorded speech will be the chief event at each of the launchings and will come first on the program. It will be transmitted by loud speakers throughout each yard and before the audiences and will be part of the sectional radio programs. We expect large audiences, for example, at the PATRICK HENRY launching accommodations are being made for 25,000 people. At each local celebration there will be bands, newsreels, airplanes, carrier pigeons and other features to make it an interesting program.

Mr. William Hassett - September 18, 1941 - 2.

While the sectional celebrations are going on throughout the day, there will be a build-up over the radio and through the newspapers for the evening program. One event will take place on the NBC Red Network between 7 and 7:30 when the "Defense for America" program will devote itself to shipbuilding covering Maritime and Navy.

Our main national program will go on in the evening when a summarizing narration, done in the "March of Time" manner, will be given and which will include talks by Admiral Land, Admiral Robinson and General Gregory.

Since we cannot put the President's speech on as a recording on this national hookup, the major portions of it will be read and included in Admiral Land's address.

In every way we are attempting to make this an important event and we are keeping in mind that it should not be confined to the seaboard areas alone but even more importantly, should reach the inland audiences among whom so much educational work is necessary on the subject of the merchant marine and the emergency program. So far as possible, we are primarily keeping the ship workers in mind and the inland mass public.

We hope from day to day to constantly better the program and you will be advised further as to developments.

Sincerely yours,

Mark O'Dea
Mark O'Dea
Director of Information

Draft - President Roosevelt's address for LIBERTY FLEET DAY.

UNITED STATES MARITIME COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

My fellow Americans:

This is a memorable day in the history of American shipbuilding — a memorable day in the emergency defense of the nation. Today, from dawn to dark, 14 ships are being launched — on the Atlantic, on the Pacific and on the Gulf and among them was the first Liberty ship, the PATRICK HENRY.

This is just the beginning and while we may be proud of what we are doing, this is certainly no time to be content. We must build more cargo ships and still more cargo ships — and we must speed the program until we achieve a launching each day, then two ships a day, fulfilling the program undertaken by the Maritime Commission.

Our shipbuilding program — not only that of the Maritime Commission, but of the Navy is one of our answers to the aggressors who would strike at our liberty.

(A)

Among the liberties which we are determined must be preserved is freedom of the seas. To that end our armed forces have been ordered to destroy or drive from the waters essential to our national defense all predatory raiders — all pirates of the seas. We do not propose that the 14 ships America is launching today shall have the sealanes of the world closed to them. We shall not permit the magnificent effort which is being made by the shipworkers of our nation as their part in the preservation of freedom to be nullified by failure to provide ample protection for these ships, as well as for the hundreds we must and will build in ever-increasing volume so long as this world emergency demands.

Many glorious early chapters were written into the history of the American Merchant Marine. Our famous Clipper ships made a vital contribution to the establishment of our country as one of the economic powers of the world. It is regrettable, but true that we failed to continue to build wisely on the maritime foundation which our forefathers laid for us.

Our lack of a well-defined and sound maritime policy for years caused deep concern among those who recognized that America was not maintaining a merchant marine adequate either as an auxiliary to our armed forces in event of war or emergency, or capable of safeguarding our rightful position in world commerce. Our first step to correct that undesirable and unnecessary situation was taken in 1936 when the Congress acceded to my request and enacted the present Merchant Marine Law. Under that legislation the Maritime Commission was established and a program of 500 merchant ships to be built in ten years to revitalize our merchant marine was adopted. Our nearly decadent shipbuilding industry was rehabilitated on a peacetime production basis.

Then the Nazi aggressors struck. Nation after nation crumpled. Democracies of the world turned to the United States as the one nation which could become their arsenal — their producer of planes, of guns, of tanks and of ships. But, without ships to transport them, the other essential materials would be of little avail.

As a result our shipbuilding program has been expanded so that we will build and put into service 1,200 merchant ships by the end of 1943 — virtually, two ships a day. These ships will come from 234 ways in 32 yards, the great majority of which were not in existence 16 months ago.

Thus adoption of a sound merchant marine policy and establishment of the Maritime Commission have been more than justified. The shipbuilding record we are writing today would not have been possible otherwise.

Not only has our nation become the shipbuilder which will make a decisive contribution to the ultimate and certain defeat of Hitlerism but it has become the shipbuilder, as well, that will reestablish and insure America's rightfully dominant place in world maritime affairs.

B { The shipworkers of America are doing a great job. They have made a commendable record up to this time for efficiency and speed. With every new ship they are striking a telling blow at the menace to our nation and the liberty of the free peoples of the world. They struck 14 such blows today. They have caught the true spirit with which all this nation must be imbued if Hitler and other aggressors of his ilk are to be crushed.

C These 14 ships are tangible results of what both management and labor are doing in the nation's shipyards, but the effort has just begun. To reestablish peace and security in the world the shipbuilders, and all of us, must continue unremittingly to make and break records of accomplishment. There can be no letup. The effort must continue to be truly all-out. Where one rivet is driven or one plate welded today, there must be two tomorrow and three the next day, with ever-increasing volume until victory is won.

The PATRICK HENRY, as one of the Liberty ships launched today renews that great patriot's stirring demand:

"Give me liberty or give me death."

P There must be no death for America, for democracy, for freedom! There must be liberty, world-wide and eternal. That is our prayer [redacted] -- our pledge to all mankind.