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COMMISSIONING U.S.S. VIGIL (YAGR-12)

U. S. Naval Base, Philadelphia, Pa.
5 March 1957

COMMISSIONING, U. S. S. VIGIL (YAGR-12)

Captain Abstetar, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Officers and Men of the VIGIL:

This afternoon we have assembled here to commission the United States Ship VIGIL. The procedure, or form, that we follow has become traditional. To start our ceremony we ask God's assistance and guidance in starting our ship on her career as a man-of-war in the United States Navy. This is most appropriate as this great country of ours was founded upon the principles of freedom of religion as well as freedom from political persecution and the other freedoms that Americans hold so dear.

After our Navy Chaplain had delivered the invocation, you have heard me read the orders from the Chief of Naval Operations to place the VIGIL in commission, and you witnessed the captain of the VIGIL, LCDR Abstetar, carry out those orders. Our band rendered our National Anthem as our national ensign and jack were raised for the first time in the VIGIL as a U. S. Navy ship. Then LCDR Abstetar read his orders which directed him to assume command of this ship and from now on although Abstetar is a lieutenant-commander he will be Captain Abstetar to the officers and men of the VIGIL. At times he will be familiarly spoken of as the "Old Man", but not within his hearing, of course.

After reading his orders and assuming command Captain Abstetar ordered the first watch set, which was done. For as long as the VIGIL remains in commission this watch will continue. Today and for the next few weeks until the VIGIL is ready to take her place as a radar picket in the seaward extension of the Continental Air Defense, this watch will be concerned solely with the internal running and security of the VIGIL. When this ship takes her place as a radar picket and commences the duty for which she has been converted, then her name will be most appropriate, for according to the dictionary VIGIL means "a watch kept by night or at other times; a course or period of watchful attention". And the U.S.S. VIGIL will be keeping watch over the seaward approaches of our country so that our citizens may feel more secure in our peaceful pursuits than we would otherwise were not the VIGIL and her sister pickets on station.

As all seafaring men know and understand, a ship is more than a hull filled with machinery, electronic gear, radar, guns, etc. A ship has a distinct personality. In these modern days a lot of our young men who only serve for a short time never feel this personality of their ship. I say to such members of the crew of the VIGIL, if there be such, do not take my word for it, but ask your Chief Petty Officers if I do not speak truthfully. In view of the type of duty the VIGIL will perform the best wish I can have for you is that your ship take on her personality from this hour on and that it be one of pride, of honor, of service and of a true shipmate feeling. And that all of her officers and crew know and enter into such a personality.

The personalities of ships vary as much as the personalities of humans. Some are taut ships, some happy, and more often than not a taut ship is also a happy ship, some are slack ships, and I am sorry to say some are unhappy ships. In the next few months you, the officers and men here today, will have given to the VIGIL her personality. I trust that you will do well by the VIGIL.

Each ship of our Navy has a purpose and a duty to perform. Every ship can not be a queen of the seas like the FORRESTAL and SARATOGA, nor even a fast cruiser or destroyer. But the important thing is that each ship, and by this naturally I mean her crew, must perform her assigned duty just as efficiently and thoroughly as the next, regardless of her size, speed, or appearance.

I would like to emphasize the word duty, performance of duty, devotion to duty. Too often today duty and all its connotations are laughed at, and even when a man does his duty to the best of his ability he depreciates his efforts. It was not always so. I would like to read to you an extract from a letter that General Robert E. Lee wrote to his son nearly a century ago. No matter what section of this great country of ours you may come from, I am sure that if you know your American history you will recall that there was never any question of Lee's devotion to duty and of his personal nobility of character. Here then is the extract: "In regard to duty, let me, in conclusion of this hasty letter, inform you that, nearly a hundred years ago, there was a day of remarkable gloom and darkness - still known as the 'dark day' - a day when the light of the sun was slowly extinguished as if by eclipse. The Legislature of Connecticut was in session, and as the members saw the unexpected and unaccountable darkness coming on, they shared in the general awe and terror. It was supposed by many that the last day -- the Day of Judgement-- had come. Someone in the consternation of the hour, moved an adjournment. Then there arose an old Puritan legislator, Davenport of Stamford, and said that, if the last day had come, he desired to be found at his place doing his duty, and, therefore, moved that candles be brought in, so that the House could proceed with its duty. There was a quietness in that man's mind, the quietness of heavenly wisdom and inflexible willingness to obey present duty. Duty, then, is the sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things, like the old Puritan. You cannot do more; you should never do less."

This ship, the U. S. S. VIGIL, has an important duty to perform. Her performance of duty may mean the difference between sufficient early warning for our Continental Air Defense to be alerted or not for the defense of our country and our homes. You and I both hope that your watch and vigil will be a peaceful one but the mere fact that this ship and others like it are on watch increases our chances for peace.

Without encroaching upon the Chaplain's prerogatives I can think of no more fitting way to end my few words to you than with the words of our Navy prayer which are especially applicable to an occasion such as the commissioning of a new ship in our Navy:

"O Eternal Lord God, who alone spreadest out the heavens and rulest the raging of the sea; vouchsafe to take into Thy almighty and most gracious protection our country's Navy and all who serve therein. Preserve them from the dangers of the sea and from the violence of the enemy; that they may be a safeguard unto the United States of America and a security for such as pass on the seas upon their lawful occasions; that the inhabitants of our land may in peace and quiet serve Thee our God to the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

I thank you.