

As delivered

Admiral Thomas H. Collins
USCGC MACKINAW Launch
Introductory Remarks
2 April 2005

Good morning! I'm very pleased to be here with you today for the christening and launch of our newest cutter to join the fleet, Coast Guard Cutter MACKINAW.

We are honored to have MACKINAW's sponsor, Mrs. Jean Hastert and her husband, Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable J. Dennis Hastert here with us today. Thank you both for being a part of this special event in Coast Guard history.

[Recognize other VIPs].

I also must take a moment to thank the men and women of Marinette Marine Corporation, for their dedication, patriotism, and craftsmanship that produced the beautiful ship out on the launchways. Their spirit of cooperation and teamwork, the willingness to find innovative solutions to challenges as they arose, and their dedication to yard process improvements are all evident in this magnificent cutter. You've done a terrific job and my hat's off to you.

With the new MACKINAW, we continue our long and proud history of sailing a major icebreaker on the Great Lakes. That history dates back to World War II. To keep essential war materials on the move during the harsh winter months, a major icebreaker was needed. So, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the order that put the original Coast Guard Cutter MACKINAW on the Great Lakes. It was commissioned on December 20, 1944, and has served our country faithfully on these waters for over 61 years.

Some might say, "It's about time" that a replacement is its way. I agree. And critical Coast Guard fleet modernization does not stop with MACKINAW. The United States Coast Guard, one of 41 major navies and coast guards of the world, has the 39th oldest fleet. And with our increased operational tempo since the terrorist attacks of September 11, we're working our vessels and aircraft even harder across all our missions.

Unfortunately, as we work our aging cutters and aircraft harder and longer, they show their age – loss of engine power in our helicopters, hull breaches on our cutters, and the wear-and-tear on our people as they toil to keep these assets up and running. The Administration and Congress saw the need – and the result is not only the MACKINAW replacement, but our Deepwater modernization program as well. It is the centerpiece for the Coast Guard’s transformation and plays an absolutely critical role in building a more ready and capable 21st-century Coast Guard, equal to the challenging tasks we face today and anticipate tomorrow.

The new MACKINAW is an excellent example of building a more ready and capable 21st-century Coast Guard. Marinette Marine has applied innovation, state-of-the-market technology, and automation to realize significant efficiencies and workload reductions in cutter operations, engineering, damage control, replenishment, and cutter support. The new MACKINAW provides a unique capability for the Ninth Coast Guard District, providing a heavy icebreaker, the most-capable buoy tender in the Coast Guard fleet, and a very capable command-and-control platform.

If the two MACKINAWs were tied up side by side, one of the first differences you’d notice is that the new MACKINAW has a buoy crane on her deck. In many ways, the new MACKINAW is an extension of our fleet of sixteen Juniper-Class buoy tenders, also built by Marinette Marine. Along with our Canadian partners and our five 140-foot icebreaking tugs, the Coast Guard's new Great Lakes fleet of HOLLYHOCK, ALDER, and the new MACKINAW presents a tremendous increase in operational capability for the region.

Icebreaking here on the Great Lakes remains critical to the region’s marine transportation system, and thus to the region’s economy and prosperity. On average, a billion dollars worth of cargo is transported on the Great Lakes during the ice season, supporting more than 100,000 steel workers, 8,600 iron ore miners, more than 2,000 Great Lakes sailors, and thousands of support jobs in related industries.

In every way – power, sea-keeping, maneuverability, ship control, station keeping, and habitability – the new MACKINAW will be the envy of the fleet for years to come.

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To Commander Don Triner and the crew of MACKINAW, I'm sure you can't wait to get MACKINAW in the water and underway. For most cutter launchings, I'd say something about avoiding obstacles when you're out sailing, but knowing the mentality of ice-breaking sailors, instead I hope your future holds lots of big ice to be broken into small ice ... Congratulations as the plank-owners of the newest cutter to join the Coast Guard fleet and I wish you fair winds.

Now it is my honor to introduce our keynote speaker. Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable J. Dennis Hastert, is a man who knows the value of public service: after 16 years of teaching high school, he served six years in the Illinois House of Representatives, then, 19 years ago, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he has served since. In 1999, his House colleagues elected him their Speaker, the third-highest elected official in the United States.

The Nation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Coast Guard have a visionary leader in Speaker Hastert. For example, he was one of the earliest supporters of arming our helicopters assigned to interdict illegal drugs. Those efforts have paid huge dividends -- this year we shattered our previous record for cocaine interdiction. Arming those helicopters has proven so successful, that we are expanding this capability to our homeland security missions. With Speaker Hastert's support, with the President's support, the Coast Guard has grown in force structure and in our overall capability to bring enhanced security and safety to the maritime regions of our Nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Honorable Dennis Hastert.