

Christening of the National Security Cutter HAMILTON

Remarks of the Commandant
Ingalls Shipbuilding, Pascagoula, Mississippi
October 26, 2013

One of my very first acts after I became Commandant three years ago was to preside at the christening of our third National Security Cutter, STRATTON, here in Pascagoula.

At that time, I never thought it would take as long as it has for me to christen another National Security Cutter. While it's taken three years, it's been well worth the wait.

Because, I must confide in you, there were some moments during this project when there were doubts we would see more than three National Security Cutters.

But I'm reassured here today – because immediately following HAMILTON, I can look across the yard and see that it won't be long until our fifth and sixth National Security Cutters, JAMES and MUNRO, follow.

In fact, I am proud to report that the Administration's budget now with the Congress has funding for a seventh National Security Cutter, and both the House and the Senate have indicated support and put in marks for long lead time materials for NSC #8.

This has been a tough fight in a down economy and a tight federal budget, but I'm reminded that one hundred and eighty years ago, our first Cutter HAMILTON, a 78-foot topsail schooner, had to tack back and forth to reach her destination when sailing to windward.

As a sailor I've learned when sailing against the wind and tide, getting to your desired destination takes a great amount of effort, and more time than you'd like.

But I count among our most satisfying accomplishments having the construction of eight NSC's now clearly in sight.

In great measure, the reason for our success is the quality of the work done by Ingalls Shipbuilding, as well as the demonstrated performance of the first three NSC's. Even as we speak, her sister ships are already on patrol.

BERTHOLF spent over 200 days away from home port last year. Just last month she completed a five-month patrol, where she traveled almost 30,000 nautical miles and seized over 2,300 kilograms of cocaine headed for our shores. She also successfully deployed an unmanned aerial vehicle to assist in two of those seizures.

And our second NSC, WAESCHE, is currently on a four-month patrol in the Pacific. She has seized over 5,000 pounds of illegal drugs so far.

And just a few months ago off the coast of California, STRATTON, working with a U.S. Navy frigate and other Coast Guard assets stopped and seized a smuggling vessel with over 1 million dollars worth of contraband aboard.

These cutters have provided a sovereign presence in U.S. waters and the vast Pacific and Arctic oceans.

As many of you know I have a deep and abiding passion for Coast Guard history, and I think, based on my study of the man, that Alexander Hamilton would be greatly pleased. In fact, what we are seeing accomplished is very similar to his vision as articulated in Federalist Paper Number 12 in 1787 – that “[a] few armed vessels, judiciously stationed at the entrances of our ports, might at small expense be made useful sentinels of the laws”.

While he was talking literally about the usefulness of several small ships to protect the safety, security and stewardship of the young nation, he was also setting a precedent that we have followed for 223 years of our history, and still follow today.

These National Security Cutters would look mammoth to Hamilton. His understanding and vision for ships of the Revenue Cutter Service was in a different age. Our first 10 cutters averaged less than 60 feet in length. But we all know that in contrast to most Navy ships today, our cutters are still quite modest.

However, like the Coast Guard as a Service, these National Security Cutters fight above their weight and provide great utility for the Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, and the country. And they will continue to do so in the decades before us.

What Secretary Hamilton would recognize is that phrase “useful sentinels of the law” He would be pleased and proud, and would give high marks for wisdom, workmanship and stewardship of the taxpayer’s money on this project. I look forward anxiously to seeing HAMILTON join her sister ships out in the service of our country.

I’d be remiss if I didn’t point out that regardless of the quality of these ships, much of their success is due to the professionalism, character and spirit of our crews.

I am delighted that the first Commanding Officer of the HAMILTON is CAPT Doug Fears, whom I’ve known for years. His qualities as a Cutterman, a leader, and an officer would have made Hamilton proud. I am also proud of these qualities, as well as his qualities as a husband and a father.

Alexander Hamilton was a leader of troops on the battlefield, and he knew and understood the sacrifices that people have made, are making, and will make on behalf of their country. He understood that what inspired him and his fellow patriots then, as they fought for a new nation based on freedom and liberty, would also inspire future generations keeping those same ideals alive.

He said *“There is a certain enthusiasm in liberty, that makes human nature rise above itself in acts of bravery and heroism”* That enthusiasm still drives Coast Guardsmen today.

As a Coast Guardsman nearing the end of my career, I look forward to living vicariously through HAMILTON, her crew, and her future exploits. The next waypoint for HAMILTON will be her commissioning, probably in late 2014.

I may be retired by that point, and if so, I look forward to attending that event as the guest of the ship's Sponsor – Mrs. Papp! And you could not ask for a more caring, loving, devoted, and compassionate ship's sponsor.

I say that with no bias whatsoever....

I know Linda feels the same emotions I do as she accepts what we both believe is the sacred trust of serving as sponsor for this cutter. The first crew – as well as all the crews that follow – will become her family, just as all of the men and women of the Coast Guard are her family. She is as passionate about the Coast Guard family as she is for her natural family. Our two matrons Jillian and Caitlin are a testament to Linda's love and commitment.

A ship's sponsor is typically a woman whose spirit and presence is invested in the ship and guides it through its service life. Linda has been a tireless supporter and advocate for Coast Guard families. She will represent and carry the spirit of all Coast Guard families to HAMILTON.

I speak from long, grateful and personal experience when I tell you that this ship and the crews that sail in her will be in great hands.

And to the crew of HAMILTON, the shipbuilders, and all those here today who will breathe life into this great cutter that bears the name of our Service's founding father: We should all have a sense of this place and time in history as we bring this ship to the fleet. You will have the pride of knowing you were here when it started – when this new cutter HAMILTON took her place in that proud line of cutters to bear this most special of names.

I know that for all of you it's more than a job. Giving life to the cold steel that will carry our nation's sons and daughters through uncertain and stormy seas, and back again, is a great privilege – and a solemn responsibility.

I have great faith that you will give the Coast Guard and our nation a great cutter. A cutter that can cross the ever-changing oceans upon which we depend for our nation's prosperity and security, complete her missions, and bring her crew safely home again. Build her strong, knowing both the long, gallant line that precedes her and the beckoning track line which lies ahead.

As a ship captain, I understand that today is but a waypoint on that track line, albeit an important, historic waypoint. I know much hard work remains as HAMILTON is prepared to join the fleet next year.

But I know you are up to the challenge because we are Coast Guardsmen – this is our chosen profession, this is our way, this is what we do.

May God bless this ship and all who will sail in her, and God bless the United States of America and the United States Coast Guard.

Stand a taut watch. Semper Paratus.