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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
REUNION OF THE CREW
OF THE USS MONTEREY

L'ENFANT PLAZA HOTEL

7:44 P.M. EDT

Thank you very much, Charlie and Roger Mehle. I can't express adequately my appreciation for the opportunity to see so many of my old shipmates.

It was a very warm and a very dear part of a significant part of my life. Let me just say, I was the assistant navigator under Pappy Atwood (Laughter), and it is fortunate that the ship relied on Pappy Atwood's sightings rather than mine, and I hope that my decisions as President are more accurate than my sightings as assistant navigator. (Laughter)

It used to be a wonderful experience to go out on the bridge in the morning or in the evening and Pappy Atwood was -- well, all of you who know him -- he was truly an expert, and there would always be some variation. Inevitably, he was right and I was wrong. (Laughter)

But I thank you very much, Charlie. As I look at the ship here and, Allie, it brings back many great memories to me, and I am sure to all of you.

The first assignment I had was the gunnery group down on the fantail. (Laughter) That shows how trustworthy I was, see. (Laughter) They put me as far back as anybody could go. (Laughter)

Well, I gradually worked my way up. Captain Hunt, who was a great skipper, and Captain Ingersoll, who is in the finest traditions of the United States Navy, saw to it that I got up on the bridge. (Laughter) I didn't contribute very much, but I enjoyed the great inspiration of both Captain Hunt and Captain Ingersoll.

Fritz Deppe and I had a little stateroom. You would hardly call it one of any fancy accommodations, would you, Fritz? (Laughter) I have forgotten who had the upper and who had the lower bunk. (Laughter)

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You know, those MDs are always smarter than us politicians. But I can remember many wonderful experiences. We used to play basketball. We would lower the elevator on the other side, on the port side, and we would play basketball.

That was a hard thing to convince Captain Hunt and Captain Ingersoll of, that it was going to not interfere with operational activities. (Laughter)

But they were very kind and understanding, and here is a picture, and we had some wonderful times.

I remember very distinctly June 17, 1943, when we commissioned the ship in Philadelphia. I recall with great memories the shakedown crews down to Trinidad. (Laughter) That was an exciting place. (Laughter)

I recall vividly the trip through the Panama Canal, and I will not tell the whole story on that. (Laughter) The ship got through all right, but I wasn't sure I was going to get through all right. (Laughter)

Then I recall that wonderful trip from San Diego to Pearl Harbor. We loaded the ship with a lot of submariners who had never been to sea. (Laughter) We loaded it up with a lot of aircraft. We had hot bunks. Do any of you remember that? (Laughter)

When we got to Pearl Harbor, the ship needed a real scrubdown. (Laughter) Then I recall our first operation off Mackin Island. We were all scared to death.

Then I recall us going with the BUNKER HILL down to Kavieng and Rabaul on Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and a few days after New Year's Day -- that was thought then as one of the most daring operations at the time as far as the Navy was concerned. We lost some very fine people, but we survived.

Then we gradually worked our way up the Carolines and the Marianas, et cetera. We had some wonderful times in Majuro. (Laughter) At Ulithi, that was a delightful place. I was single at the time. (Laughter) But if any of your wives think that your husbands went astray, (Laughter) there wasn't any room or there wasn't any company. (Laughter) So, I will verify everything they ever said to you. (Laughter)

Then, of course, we had the wonderful experience of the Battle of the Philippines, where we were headed back to Pearl Harbor, I think, and we got orders to turn around and we participated in that very important battle as far as the Pacific was concerned.

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Then, of course, the climax was the typhoon on December 18 and 19 of 1944. I can recall most intimately the coolness, the courage of the skipper. I happened to be on the bridge as the officer of the deck during general quarters, and we were in general quarters a long time. (Laughter)

The word came from the Admiral, "Abandon the ship, if you so order." I am not sure that is the way it went. (Laughter), but one out of the four boilers was in operation, the fire pumps were manned, the hangar deck fire was extinguished, and the MONTEREY, after about seven hours, dead in the water with one or two cruisers and three or four destroyers, got underway.

But that was the spirit, that was the attitude of the MONTEREY. All of you, as well as myself, are proud of the people, the skippers and the ship, and we should be thankful that we had the opportunity of fighting for a great country and a great cause.

I should say one thing. I have just talked about the ship's company. (Laughter) Of course, I do want to congratulate all the members of our Group 30 and our Group 28. They were an integral part and a vital portion of the effort and the success of the MONTEREY.

I have some wonderful memories of the pilots, whether they were SBD, F-2s or 4s or 6s, or TBMs or TBFs, they were great people and the crews that maintained them, that brought them in, that launched them. There were as much a part of the MONTEREY as the ship itself.

So, Roger, on behalf of those of us who had the privilege of serving you and the air groups, I thank you for the great job that all of you did.

Thank you.

END (AT 7:56 P.M. EDT)