HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA -

WHAT A GREAT DAY - AND WHAT A GREAT LADY YOU ARE.
YOU KNOW - WE SHARE A LOT OF EXPERIENCES -

I'VE BEEN ON ACTIVE DUTY JUST A COUPLE OF YEARS LONGER
THAN ME. YOU, I GUESS WE SORT OF GREW UP TOGETHER.

IN FACT, I FIRST SAW YOU IN YOUR INFANCY; I SAT RIGHT OVER
THERE, SOMEWHAT IN AWE, AS THE MAN WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MY
JOINING YOU IN OUR NAVY RETIRED. WHAT AN IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY-
YOU ALL GUSSIED UP IN YOUR FINERY. LATER, WHEN YOU WERE JUST A
FEW YEARS OLDER I CRUISED WITH YOU TO THE MED AND THEN TO THE
TONKIN GULF OFF VIETNAM. THERE WAS PLENTY OF EXCITEMENT THERE,
I'LL TELL YOU. WASN'T IT GREAT - SEEING THOSE POW'S FLYING
OUT. LOT'S OF TEARS OF JOY WERE SHED THERE.

YOU KNOW YOUNG LADY - WE'VE SEEN A LOT TOGETHER HAVEN'T WE.
SOME GOOD - SOME NOT.

WE'VE HEARD THOSE NOW HISTORICAL WORDS, "ONE SMALL STEP FOR
MAN, ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND" AS NEIL ARMSTRONG STEPPED ONTO
THE MOON.

WE WERE STUNNED WHEN ROBERT KENNEDY AND MARTIN LUTHER KING
FELL TO THE GUNMAN'S BULLET. LATER, WE WONDERED WHEN AND HOW
IT WILL ALL END WHEN ANWAR SADAT AND INDIRA GHANDI WERE STRUCK
DOWN.

WE'VE SEEN FIVE PRESIDENTS - JOHNSON, NIXON, FORD, CARTER
AND NOW PRESIDENT REAGAN; ALL OF WHOM HAVE COUNTED ON
YOU AND WILL COUNT ON YOU TO CONTINUE TOING YOUR

...
Our hearts sank when the hostages were taken in Iran, but swelled with pride in our countrymen when they came home with dignity.

We saw a dark period in our history when our countrymen began revolting against the "establishment". They defamed our flag, burned their draft cards and professed to have all the answers. But common sense and responsible men prevailed and we're back now to where pride, professionalism and patriotism mean something.

We saw Vietnam end, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan go, Yom Kippur and Grenada. We witnessed the Camp David accords and Beirut and terrorism.

Famous people paraded through history, Joe Namath, Henry Kissinger, Burt Reynolds, Lady Di, Michael Jackson, Farrah Fawcett, Arnold Palmer and the Bear, Mary Lou Retton and Margaret Thatcher and so many others.

We've watched proudly as our navy and country began recognizing and judging men and women for what they can do, what they can contribute rather than basing that judgement on their race, color or creed.

We've shared tears, as we've remembered those who once walked your decks but will not pass this way again —
Chris Mason
Jim Hall
Steve Musselman
Jim Sullivan
Mike DeBartolomeo
Larry Golden
and more.....

We saw Watergate shake the foundations of our country - but as always we saw our country overcome adversity, regain her strength and resume her position of world leadership.

We've marveled at medical advances, heart transplants and now even artificial hearts. Wonder if we’ll ever see a cure for the common cold.

You've seen, dear lady, 15 Commanding Officers - two of whom have joined us this morning to celebrate your 20th birthday.

RADM Heyworth
CAPT Meyer

They are joined by Admiral Page Smith, Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet when you came on the line.

And with them are so many special guests - Plankowners we call them. They're the folks who breathed life into you, warmed your cold deck plates and infused you with a personality all your own. They gave your life meaning and helped you tell your own story.

Yes, young lady - we’ve seen a lot. And through it all, you really haven't aged a bit. You've still got it all.
Kings and Queens, Heads of State, Princes and Princessest have toured your decks. Thousands of others from all countries and walks of life have too. And they all exclaim and marvel over your beauty, grace and power.

I expect you still swell with pride when you recall that exciting day 20 years ago. What a thrill it must have been as your first crew sprang to their station, setting the first watch to the strands of Anchors Aweigh. That was a proud day for them too — and what must have been the thoughts of your first Captain.

No doubt he'd tell us that he had the very best crew that could ever be assembled —

Well, I'm not in the habit of disputing my seniors — But I'd sure offer my opinion that the men who man you today are every bit as good —

They're proud men — men who work hard — who have never let either one of us down. They're eager, full of enthusiasm and spirit. They know that war is an ugly thing but not the ugliest of things. Far worse is the man who holds nothing sacred, nothing so dear that he would fight and sacrifice for them. For he is a pitiful soul who is made and kept free by the men who continue to breathe life into you.

Proud and patriotic blood courses through their veins, they remind me of the men Theodore Roosevelt must have been thinking of when he wrote —

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points how strong man stumbled, or where the door of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in
THE ARENA, WHOSE FACE IS MARKED BY DUST AND SWEAT AND BLOOD; WHO STRIVES VALIANTLY; WHO ERRS AND COMES SHORT AGAIN AND AGAIN; WHO KNOWS THE GREAT ENTHUSIASMS, THE GREAT DEVOTIONS; WHO SPENDS HIMSELF IN A WORTHY CAUSE; WHO, AT THE BEST, KNOWS IN THE END THE TRIUMPH OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT, AND WHO, AT THE WORST, IF HE FAILS, AT LEAST HE FAILS WHILE DARING GREATLY, SO THAT HIS PLACE SHALL NEVER BE WITH THOSE TIMID SOULS WHO KNOW NEITHER VICTORY OR DEFEAT." THEODORE ROOSEVELT

And I'm so proud of every one of them.

Well, AMERICA, you have told your story all right and the years ahead will record that you continued to do so because of the very unique men who make you what you are.

Happy Birthday, Dear Lady - and many more happy returns of the day - and God - Bless AMERICA!!!!!

Will you please stand and join me in singing American

Beautiful