



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Veterans Day Sunset Ceremony
Battleship Missouri Memorial
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
11 November 2013
As Prepared For Delivery**

Thanks, Mike, for that introduction, and to the Battleship Missouri Association for hosting this important event.

Let me begin by acknowledging the aftermath of the super typhoon in the Philippines. Our thoughts and prayers are with our brothers and sisters in the Philippines and their families and friends here in Hawaii. The U.S. and U.S. Pacific Command stand ready to help.

Vice Admiral Kihune, you don't know this, sir, but you inspired me to stay Navy. To this Japanese-American officer, you were a great role model and someone I wanted to be like. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Tsukiyama and Sgt. Arakawa, thank you for your service to our nation and for your meaningful remarks this great day.

... Fellow Flag and General officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and fellow veterans, good afternoon.

It's a true privilege and honor for me to be here today. As a Sailor, as an American, and as a fellow veteran, I can think of no place I would rather be today than with each of you. There is no more appropriate place to celebrate Veterans Day than here at Pearl Harbor, onboard the mighty Battleship Missouri.

Our battles, our victories, indeed our very way of life, are owed not to great moments or important dates. They are owed to the actions and sacrifices of individual men and women who were willing to step into the breach for their country and for the cause of freedom.

America is the country she is because of her heroes past and present.

America is the country she is because of young men and women who are willing to forego wearing a business suit, forego strolling down 'Easy Street,' forego living the good life, to wear instead the cloth of the nation, to travel instead along an uncertain road fraught with peril, to live instead a life on the ragged edge of danger. To live lives that matter on a fundamental level.

As I crossed the Ford Island Bridge on my way here, I looked upon the Arizona Memorial, where over one thousand Sailors and Marines stand an eternal watch. I thought about the historic events of December 7th, almost 72 years ago, when we were surprised by an attack that thrust our reluctant nation into war.

Thucydides wrote that "The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them -- glory and danger alike -- and yet, notwithstanding, go out to meet it."

In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, in the face of certain danger and an uncertain outcome, men and women, all across America, stepped forward to march into harm's way and into history.

My father, and four of his brothers, also answered our nation's clarion call, as they volunteered to fight for their country during World War II. In fact, my dad was stationed right here in Pearl Harbor in December 1941 on board the USS Lexington when she sailed west just two days before the attack.

Now, I'm not a preacher-man, but there's a passage in the Good Book which defines for me the spirit that lives in each and every citizen who has ever chosen to wear the cloth of our nation.

One day God was searching for the right man -- a man with the right stuff, if you will. A man to embark on a dangerous mission and go into a dangerous land.

"Whom shall I send? Who shall go for us?"

And the prophet responded "Here am I, Lord -- send me."

Here am I -- send me. Powerful words. When our nation was attacked over 70 years ago, and again just a dozen years ago, Lady Liberty cried out in her pain and anguish "Whom shall I send? Who shall go for me?"

And everywhere, Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians called out,

“HERE AM I, AMERICA -- SEND ME.”

From the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond, from internment camps and the concrete canyons of Wall Street, America’s sons and daughters answered that clarion call. They continue to answer that call today, serving with great flair and greater distinction.

As the Arizona Memorial represents the start of World War II, this battleship represents the end. As I stand here on Admiral “Bull” Halsey’s Flagship, in command of Admiral Chester Nimitz’s Fleet, speaking on the same deck where General Douglas MacArthur joined them in the ceremony that concluded World War II, I am humbled and also reminiscent of the motto of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association:

“Remember Pearl Harbor ... Keep America alert ... Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”

Sage advice from those who could speak first hand of the events of December 7th and the need for America to never be caught flat-footed again.

Today, America is again a nation at war, and as we continue to fight in places like Afghanistan and conduct counter-terror operations throughout the Middle East and Africa, our men and women repeatedly go into harm’s way.

The world is a dangerous place and it demands that we be ready 24-7, to meet any danger that threatens American citizens and our national interests. George Washington once said “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.” I believe that. This is why the Pacific Fleet today remains vigilant, ready to fight tonight. This is why as your Pacific Fleet commander, I am committed to deepening the maritime piece of our defense relationships with our allies and security partners as America rebalances to the Pacific.

And I’m also committed to being prepared, to never be strategically surprised. This is, for me, the fundamental lesson of Pearl Harbor.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we honor all veterans who have fought our nation’s wars, this ceremony pays special tribute to the Nisei veterans of World War II, some of whom are in attendance today.

I truly stand on the shoulders of giants.

We have heard from the great speakers before me, of the grit, determination and unrelenting courage of those who fought with the 100th and the 442nd in Europe, the members of the Military Intelligence Service -- the MIS -- who served on assignments to individual units throughout the Pacific, and of the 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion. Of course we cannot forget the courage of the 300 Nisei women who joined the Women's Army Corps, or WACs, to also serve in World War II.

Our nation has not always dealt immigrants and minorities a fair shake, even those who were American citizens.

In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, many American's of Japanese ancestry were uprooted from their homes, their businesses sold at a loss or simply taken, mistrusted by fellow citizens and their government, their draft cards were labeled 4-C, they were rejected for service by the Navy and Marine Corps.

But, instead of bitterness and hatred, these patriots chose to make theirs a legacy of service, honor and courage.

“HERE AM I, AMERICA -- SEND ME.”

In July 1946, President Harry S. Truman stood on the White House lawn to award the 442nd Regimental Combat Team its seventh Presidential Unit Citation and he said: “You fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice ... and you have won.”

President Truman ultimately ordered the end to racial segregation in the military in 1948.

Despite injustice, these Japanese-Americans stood together for a truly American ideal. The many cultures resident in the immigrant experience share a common underpinning of honor, pride and perseverance that has added immeasurably to our strength as a nation. This is a powerful message and it speaks to us all, no matter our gender, religion or ethnicity.

And this is a powerful message that speaks to our adversaries as well: we are in fact stronger, together.

While my father was from Tennessee and wore the Navy uniform in World War II, my mother had a very different story. She's Nihonjin. From Kobe, Japan. She lost her home, her school, many of her friends in air raids during the same war that her future husband was fighting. It was from her that I learned the concept of *giri* – duty – which is an important part of my heritage and of who I am.

As a young boy, growing up in the American South, I was inspired by the story of the 442nd, the “Go For Broke” team. Your trials and tribulations, your victories and your success, made me proud. You were, and you are, an inspiration to so many.

I stand on the shoulders of giants and I thank you for your service to our country.

While we can surely be grateful for where we all are along the American journey, we must also accept our responsibility to maintain the course that you worked so hard to chart for us.

Today, our *giri* – our duty, our obligation – is to remember the legacy of our veterans. Be they the Founding Fathers who revolted against the oppression of the Crown, the Nisei and other veterans who fought in World War II, those who fought in the Korean War, Vietnam War, Cold War, the wounded warriors who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, and those who gave the last full measure.

And we must remember and honor our young men and women from all branches of service who stand the watch today – on , above or below the seas – and throughout the world.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I've talked too long. I'm reminded of the baseball story where the home team is getting pounded. The manager walks out of the dugout directly to the mound, where he takes the ball from the pitcher.

The pitcher protests, “Coach, I'm not tired.” The manager – with a practiced eye – says “Yeah, I know, but the outfielders sure are.”

So, for all you outfielders out there, let me close by emphasizing that my tribute today simply would not be complete if I didn't recognize the families of our veterans who have also given so much to our nation. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, wives, husbands, and loved ones – theirs is never an easy burden. So today, we thank them for their support as well.

May God bless you and each and every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen – past and present – who answered our nation’s call to duty. May God bless the beautiful state of Hawaii and may God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.