



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
42nd Annual Sailor of the Year Luncheon
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
28 March 2014
As prepared for delivery**

Thank you Fleet Ramirez for that introduction, and for all of your hard work and dedication to our Sailors. Ladies and gentlemen, friends and families, welcome to the 42nd Annual Commander of the Pacific Fleet, Sailor of the Year luncheon.

Before I get started, I would like to thank the Honolulu Navy League, especially President Carl Devoe and Executive Director Bob McDermott, for all you do to support our Sailors and our families. And of course, thank you for this remarkable event.

I'm glad to see much of the Pacific Fleet leadership team here, including Fleet Ramirez and Command Master Chief Carroll. Our Master Chiefs, and the entire Hawaii Chief's Mess, have done a magnificent job of making this a memorable week of celebration...so I ask all Chief Petty Officers to stand and be formally recognized. Thank you.

Now to the main event ... the true stars of this luncheon, the Pacific Fleet Sailor of the Year finalists. Can you feel the excitement in the air? As soon as I finish this speech, we get to find out who our Sailor of the Year winners will be.

For our finalists, I probably can't speak fast enough.

I also know that the NCAA tournament games are all starting right now. So for those of you sneaking a peak at your cell phones while I'm talking, remember, if you're clapping and cheering and I didn't say anything funny...we're all going to know what you're doing ... did I mention I was from Tennessee? So I would at least ask you to cheer for the Volunteers...

Today, we are here to cheer on another group of volunteers-- the United States Navy Sailor. Only 25 percent of our Nation's 17 to 24 year old's are physically, scholastically and legally eligible to serve in our armed forces. Out of 315 million Americans, only one percent actually volunteer to serve. So each of you serving in uniform today are already the very best our nation has to offer.

But out of the one-hundred thousand or so Pacific Fleet Sailors, the ten finalists standing on the stage with me have risen to the top...and I am truly thankful to have them on our team.

The poet Robert Frost wrote that he took the road less traveled ...and for him it made all the difference...and for so many of our Sailors, the same can be said: they chose the path less traveled.

They didn't just graduate high school and enter the civilian workforce, hiring out to punch a clock on the factory line...they didn't choose a predictable forty hour work week...and they didn't choose to stay close to home, amidst familiar settings, close to friends and family. Instead they chose the road less traveled, they chose to join the United States Navy...and for our Nation, that has made all the difference.

You see, I know that the United States of America is the country she is because of young men and women like each of our Sailors here today...who are willing to don the Cloth of the Nation...to travel along an uncertain road fraught with peril...to live a life in harm's way...to live a life of sacrifice and service for the greater cause...to serve our Nation in the United States Navy. And I know that's the story behind our ten finalists.

And while they each walked a different road, they all faced challenges, and they've proven themselves well-equipped to meet those challenges. President Ronald Reagan once said, "When life gets tough and the crisis is undeniably at hand...we will find nothing inside ourselves that we have not already put there."

Think about that.

You may have read in the news this week that Petty Officer 2nd Class Mark Mayo lost his life Monday when he jumped between a gunman and a fellow Sailor on aboard USS MAHAN in Norfolk. His selfless act was nothing short of heroic and our condolences go out to his family and loved ones.

Petty Officer Mayo symbolizes the courage, commitment and character that is inside each and every one of our Sailors, including our finalists. Values like these aren't just transplanted into the fabric of our being the moment they're needed... they cannot be crammed into our brains during an all-nighter...and they won't be e-mailed into the hard drives of our spirit or our soul and then installed as needed. These things are instilled in us over a life-long process that begins in our homes, continues through boot camp, and matures through our interactions and experiences in the Fleet.

Growing up, all of us learned these things by those who influence us, by our parents, grandparents, teachers, and any number of mentors who helped us along the way as we became the person we are now. My father, a Chief Petty Officer, instilled a sense of duty to country that I have to this day.

For our finalists...right now, as I look out at the audience, at all those who support you, I recognize the spouses... the children... the parents...and the shipmates ...just a few of the many people supporting and influencing you every day. The fact is that none of us could do what we do in the Navy without the support of our loved ones. So I also want to thank those family members and shipmates in the audience with you today.

Earlier this week, I had an opportunity to look through each of our finalists' nomination packages... I'll tell you folks...I am eminently impressed by each one of them. They come from all across America, representing the diversity of our great nation. They represent our Navy's Core Values of Honor, Courage and Commitment. They have deployed around the world, they have represented our nation as ambassadors to foreign lands.

They are leaders, they are volunteers, inside and outside of the Navy, they've all sought to improve themselves through higher education, and they're role models for all of us.

They do not accept second-best at anything they put their minds to. They're winners, always have been, always will be. They exemplify the highest standards of service to our nation, at home and abroad, at sea and ashore, in combat and in peace.

Here in a few minutes, as soon as I finish up and sit down, we'll all learn who the Pacific Fleet Sailors of the Year will be, one for sea, one for shore. The competition was keen, and I for one am glad I didn't have to make the decision. That's why I thanked those Master Chiefs earlier. But no matter who wins, I want each of you to know that you really are winners, no one can dispute that.

And I want to leave you with a challenge. Remember all those who helped develop you into the outstanding Sailor, citizen, and patriot that you are today, and make sure you're developing those who you are able to influence.

Pay it forward; help them to succeed as they walk the path they have chosen for themselves.

Before this luncheon, Fleet Ramirez asked me to close with something inspirational and memorable...so here it goes. For the inspirational part, I want to leave you with the quote... "Destiny isn't the path chosen for us, but the path we chose for ourselves."

Each of these finalists has followed the path of their own choosing since they volunteered to serve our Nation as Sailors in the United States Navy...no one chose it for them, they have chosen their own destiny and are walking down the pathway necessary to achieve it.

Now here's the memorable part. That's a direct quote from the animated movie...MegaMind.

So if you remember nothing else from my remarks, remember an old four-star Admiral from Tennessee quoted a big-headed blue alien from a cartoon.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've talked too long. So before we get to the announcement you're all waiting for, let me leave you with this final thought.

In my office, I have a bronze statue of the Lone Sailor. As I look at that statue...from the perspective of a Sailor... I know that Sailor is anything but alone. He ... or she...is part of a team, with shipmates standing behind him...with shipmates standing beside him...

And always...always... our Sailors have the support of the very Nation that sends them into harm's way. No Sailor stands the watch alone. Never forget that.

Today, our United States Navy is second to none... we have the most advanced warships, submarines and aircraft in the world...but the best equipment means very little if you don't have the hard-working, highly trained and dedicated Sailors who bring those platforms to life. Our nation's brave sons and daughters...who have chosen the road less traveled...who bravely run toward...not away... from the sound of the guns, are what makes our Nation great, and I'm proud of each and every one of you.

Thank you for all you do on a daily basis to make sure that the Pacific Fleet is always ready to fight tonight.

Now, let's find out who is this years' Pacific Fleet Sailor of the Year! Thank you.