



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Submarine Force Anniversary Ball
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
12 April 2014
As prepared for delivery**

Thank you, Phil for that great introduction.

Phil and I just returned from Australia, where they were holding an international conference discussing Australia's future submarine. That was an interesting experience. Hanging out with the top submariner in the Pacific, they treated Phil like a rock star. They hardly seemed to notice me.

He's got some serious street cred with our allies, partners and friends in this part of the world.

And why shouldn't he? He's commanded at all levels here in the Pacific, from submarine to force, including as CO of USS La Jolla, Submarine Squadron 15 in Guam, Submarine Group 7 in Yokosuka, and now, as Commander, Submarine Force Pacific Fleet here in Hawaii.

Phil, thanks for your leadership, well done shipmate.

So Happy 114th Birthday Submarine Force!

You know, this is my first submarine ball as a flag officer. I thought we aviators knew how to have a party. Tonight I'm mightily impressed!

Must be because the oxygen's a little thicker here on the surface.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, veterans, especially the veteran submariners out there, welcome to tonight's festivities. It's my pleasure and honor to be here for this celebration and to have this opportunity to speak to you.

I'd like to thank all those who had a part in making tonight such a special event, especially those on the Submarine Officer's Ball Committee. Thank you. You've done a superb job and we intend to thank you by having a tremendous time tonight.

And from what I hear, a lot of 'em already are.

Now I'm sure -- given the choice -- instead of hearing a short speech from an old P-3 aviator like myself, most of you'd rather hear no speech at all. I'm also aware that the only thing separating you from the dinner and the dancing is, well, me. So I'm going to get on with it...so that you can get on with it.

Our United States Navy's Submarine Force has a tremendous legacy, since your humble beginnings in 1900 to now. You've got a lot to be proud of.

When our nation was strategically surprised here at Pearl Harbor, on December 7th, 1941, our Pacific Fleet was dealt quite a blow. In those dark times, when our nation was under the real threat from a powerful and aggressive enemy, we relied upon our submarine force to take the fight to them, to cut off their supply routes, to keep their warships and their carrier fleet at bay, and to give us time to rebuild our fleet and take the offensive.

As a result, in World War II, more than half of all enemy ships sunk at sea were last seen through a periscope.

Now how's that for a legacy? And Admiral Joe Vasey, who I have the privilege of sharing a table with tonight, was there. He e was part of all that great and glorious history that makes you who you are and makes our nation who we are. Thank you, Admiral.

Then there was the Cold War, and a new generation of submarine warriors whose incredible tale has yet to be told fully, because in many cases, it's too sensitive to be told at all.

That reminds me, I read a book once -- we aviators do that from time to time, all that time in the air with nothing to do -- and this one book in particular was supposed to describe this time in history. I'm sure some of you have read "Blind Man's Bluff." And I'll leave it at that.

Anyway, there's no doubt your shipmates of the Cold War era protected our nation's interests globally. They gained the necessary knowledge and understanding of the Soviets, held them continuously at risk, and allowed us to ultimately prevail. Our submarine veterans of the Cold War led America's effort to win that war. How's that for legacy?

And now there is the current generation of submariners: all of you here wearing the cloth of our nation tonight and all of your brothers -- and now your sisters, too -- who are deployed far from home tonight, underway on nuclear power, who keep our nation safe and defend our very way of life.

There are warriors in this room who have served in operations Desert Storm, Allied Force, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. And I've personally seen what the Silent Service can do first hand.

When I was Commander of U.S. Sixth Fleet, we found ourselves contending with the quickly evolving events of a violent Arab Spring. We were as surprised as much of the rest of the world was with what happened in Libya. And when the decision was made to stand up Operation Odyssey Dawn, our Submarine Force answered that clarion call without hesitation. The world watched in awe as more than a hundred Tomahawk missiles, from submarines USS Florida, Providence and Scranton, rose from hidden positions beneath the waves, and delivered the opening shots of that operation. I don't know if any of you were there. If you were, my hat's off to you.

And today, our Submarine Force leads our nation's efforts as we rebalance to the Indo-Asia-Pacific, where our Navy plans to have 60 percent of the fleet by 2020. The Submarine Force has already done it!

Today, nearly a third of the submarine force is deployed around the world at any given time...that's certainly the way of it here in the Pacific. Tonight we have five Pearl Harbor-based boats underway, carrying out our nation's business.

And I know three of those boats are well represented here tonight How about CHARLOTTE, GREENVILLE and CITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI? Ladies, I know you're out there!

Our submarines are a strategic asset to our nation, and an asymmetric threat to our would-be adversaries. It's a great comfort for our leaders to know that they are underway protecting our six. And we've got other Pacific-based fast attack boats deployed from their homeports tonight, and boomers on patrol out there as well, acting as part of our nation's nuclear deterrent.

I see every day proof that this newest generation of submarine warriors is continuing the proud legacy of your forefathers, and I'm proud of all that you do.

You know, I've often wondered what kind of person it takes who would selflessly volunteer to serve our nation as a submariner. I tried it for one week and that was enough for me...well, that and my grades back at the Academy. Because it's not an easy life. It's not for the faint of heart. It's a demanding profession that requires rigorous academic and technical training. Then there's an element of risk every time you dive beneath the waves and descend into darkness, to sojourn the perilous ocean depths. Then there's the mission, where you're on the pointy end of the spear, alone and unafraid as you work to ensure our continued dominance of the undersea domain.

Each of you possesses -- in abundance -- an interest in adventure ... along with profound patriotism, unrelenting courage, and supreme confidence.

Those of you who volunteered to serve in our Submarine Force have chosen a career of first-order importance to our nation. You have chosen to sacrifice much, to ensure that our country remains safe and protected, and that's the most noble choice of all.

Now, I'm not a preacher-man. We've got one of them coming up here on stage to give the benediction here in just a few minutes. But I've heard a thing or two about the Good Book. There's a passage in Isaiah which defines, for me, those brave, selfless individuals who volunteer to go under the sea in submarines.

You see, in Isaiah, 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.

And the Lord said: "Whom shall I send? And who shall go for us?"
And it was Isaiah who responded: "Here I am, Lord, send me."

Here I am. Send me.

For 114 years, whenever our nation was threatened, Lady Liberty would call out to her sons, and now daughters, asking them to embark on dangerous missions, to descend beneath the waves to protect her. And she has always heard the resounding reply, from all across our great country:

“HERE I AM, AMERICA. SEND ME!”

Ladies and gentlemen, America is the country she is because of her heroes past and present -- heroes like each and every one of you who wears the dolphins and calls yourself "submariner.”

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, and 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.

America is truly blessed beyond riches because of volunteers like you.

And of course we know that you do not sortie alone on this journey.

Ladies and gentlemen, my tribute tonight would simply not be complete without recognizing the families who also give so much to our nation. Theirs is not a light or easy burden to bear. For they also risk much -- and sacrifice much -- as they let you, their loved ones, step briskly across the gang plank, descend the ladder well, seal the hatch and sail away. They who wait for you, without a word spoken, until you return from sea again.

To all those family members here tonight, I thank you for enabling your Submariners to do their job and do it so well. Theirs is important work, for our Nation, for all of us.

Well folks, I realize I've talked too long. I'm reminded of the man who shot and killed a long winded speaker. He went to the sheriff's office and said, "Sheriff, I've just shot a keynote speaker." The sheriff turned to the man and said, "Son, you're in the wrong place. You pick up your reward money at the courthouse."

For those of you thinking about collecting some reward money, let me close with this thought: our United States Navy's Submarine Force is second to none. That's not wishful thinking or a wild boast. That's an indisputable fact. The strength of our Submarine Force, of our Navy, of our United States Armed Forces writ large, are drawn from our nation's brave sons and daughters who chose the warrior way -- warriors like Admiral Vasey, warriors like Rear Admiral Phil Sawyer, warriors like each of you here tonight. Our nation draws its strength from those who served before them and will draw its strength from those who will serve after them, an unbroken chain, linking Americans generation to generation.

I truly thank you for all you do on a daily basis to help ensure our military and our nation remain ready to fight tonight.

May God bless our men and women who serve on the forward edge of the battle area – the FEBA of freedom – at sea, under the sea, in the air, in Afghanistan and the far reaches of the Pacific.

And may God bless this land of liberty we call America.

Thank you.