



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Armed Services YMCA of Honolulu's 2nd
Annual "Celebrating the Military Family"
Breakfast
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Harry B. Harris, Jr.
06 June 2014
As prepared for delivery**

Thank you, General Bramlett, for that kind introduction.

And I thank all of you who worked so hard to make this event such a special and meaningful occasion. Those of us in the armed services are lucky to have such a strong relationship with the YMCA.

Let's give it up for CWO3 Michael Smith and Ciana Pelekai for singing the National Anthem and Hawaii Pono'i. You know, Ciana sang at my change of command last October and her dad works with me up at the Pacific Fleet Headquarters, so it's always a special treat to listen to her sing.

General Bramlett, Admiral Fargo, General Stackpole, General Remington, Admiral Thomas, General Robling, Admiral Williams, YMCA Board members, including, Board Chair Sarah Fargo, Gillian Carlisle, Vivien Stackpole, Cathe Robling, Gary Thomas, thank you for all you do.

My wife Bruni is a board member, too, and she would have been here but she had a season-ending surfing injury Wednesday. They call it "Hang 10" for a reason; "Hang 5" just won't do.

CEO of the Armed Services YMCA Mike Landers, Executive Director Stan Lum, fellow flag and general officers, distinguished guests, and especially those families here today, who so proudly represent the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard and our National Guard -- a special welcome to each of you.

And for you children out there, now that school's out, I know you thought you were going to get to sleep in today. Sorry that didn't work out.

I thank each of you for being here bright and early this morning.

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Not only is this the 70th anniversary of D-Day, it's also the 72nd anniversary of Midway. So this is truly a great day indeed.

A moment ago when the Chaps was praying about "giddy-up and wrap up," I peeked and sure enough, he was looking right at me. So I got the message.

It's an honor to have this opportunity to thank all those involved in the Armed Services YMCA, an organization that strives to make military life a little easier for those who serve our great nation. Yours is meaningful work, and I appreciate all that you do.

And it's an honor for me to acknowledge those brave men and women who volunteer to serve and protect our great nation. Thank you, as well. Those who serve today are among the nearly 25 million living Americans who have served, or are currently serving, in the nation's armed services. Since General George Washington commanded the Continental Army, 40 million Americans have served the colors. And a million have given their lives in defense of our nation.

There can be little doubt that America's fighting men and women have sacrificed much to ensure that our great nation stays free, and we owe a debt of gratitude to all those who served, to all those who were injured and to all those who paid the ultimate price, the last full measure, and to all those who have been blessed enough to return from the battlefield unscathed.

On the night of September 11, 2001, when President George W. Bush addressed the nation, he said, "America was targeted for attack because we are the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world, and no one will keep that light from shining."

And today, members of our armed services are deployed around the world -- at sea, in the air and on land -- where they protect our national interests abroad and where they ensure that that beacon of light continues to shine, even to the farthest reaches of the globe.

And I've seen first-hand how today's military men and women serve our nation. This generation of warriors not only has the strength and physical courage to defeat the enemies of our nation anywhere in the world, they have the integrity and moral courage to succeed in difficult jobs, in dangerous places.

The poet Robert Frost wrote that he took the road less traveled, and for him it made all the difference. For so many of those who joined our armed services, the same can be said: They chose the path less traveled.

They didn't graduate high school or college and enter the civilian workforce, taking coveted jobs in industry, manufacturing, IT or in the financial sector. They didn't choose a predictable 40-hour work week, and they didn't choose to stay close to home, amidst familiar settings, close to their friends or family. Instead they chose the road less traveled, they chose to join our armed forces...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 those representing their services here today, who have willingly donned the cloth of the nation, who have willingly traveled 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.

And of course my tribute today would simply not be complete if I didn't recognize the families of those who serve our military families. They also sacrifice so much for our nation. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands, daughters and sons, close friends and loved ones.

When our service members deploy abroad, they leave behind their families, their friends, who in their absence soldier on -- life as normal, only you and I know it's not normal anymore.

Across the many distant miles that separate them, over the weeks and months that divide them, those who are deployed abroad are always in our thoughts, and our prayers. Those who stay behind carry the concern -- and the worry -- and the fear for their trooper's safety in harm's way.

For our military families, theirs has never been an easy burden.

So as we thank those who serve, let's also remember our heroes on the home front. Our nation's military forces simply could not carry out our duties without the critical support our families and loved ones provide every day.

To those families representing your respective services here today, I salute you.

Our collective recognition of the military service rendered by men and women who chose the road less traveled and their tremendous families who support them along every step of that journey, is very appropriate and I want to thank the Armed Services YMCA of Honolulu for your year-round support, and this recognition ceremony. I think that your efforts define what Hawaii is, the Aloha State, where aloha means affection, peace, compassion and mercy, where aloha means love.

And it's been a long and enduring relationship. The Armed Services YMCA of Honolulu has been serving our Hawaii military members for almost a hundred years, since 1917.

Ladies and gentlemen, I realize I've been up here for a while. I had an opportunity to speak at an event several days ago and when it was over I asked my wife Bruni how I did.

She quickly replied. "You did great! Except you missed several good opportunities to sit down."

Well, I got the hint and I don't want to miss an opportunity to sit down, but I do want to close with something inspirational and memorable.

For the inspirational part, I want to leave you with the quote, "Destiny isn't the path chosen for us, but the path we choose for ourselves."

Think about that. "Destiny isn't the path chosen for us, but the path we choose for ourselves."

That's the inspirational part; here's the memorable part.

That's a direct quote from MegaMind in the animated movie "MegaMind."

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

That was for you kids out there, old and young alike.

But each of our service members has followed the path of their own choosing since they volunteered to put on the uniform and serve our nation. No one chose it for them. They have chosen their own destiny and are walking down their own path, the one less traveled.

Ladies and gentlemen, our nation continues to draw strength from those who have served in the past and those who are serving today. And our nation will continue to draw strength from those who will serve tomorrow and in the coming decades, an unbroken chain linking Americans generation to generation.

Our strength as a nation also comes from loyal citizens like each of you in the audience today -- Americans who are aware of the challenges, aware of the opportunities, and aware of the dangers we face. Those of us who serve are grateful for patriots like you, who support us, who support our military families when we are deployed abroad, who help make us what we are today, the world's strongest force for stability and peace on the face of the Earth. And I'm grateful for your contribution.

May God bless you and every one of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, National Guardsmen and our Reservists... past and present... who answered our nation's call to duty.

May God bless our beautiful state of Hawaii ... and may God bless the United States of America, land of the free, and home of the brave.

Thank you.