



Commander U.S. Pacific Fleet
Change of Command Speech Transcript
Admiral Patrick M. Walsh
9/25/2009

Governor Lingle, Admiral Keating, Admiral Greenert, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, shipmates.

Good morning and Aloha...

It is a high honor to assume the responsibilities of command of the Pacific Fleet today...and to share this moment with so many family (and extended family from Texas), friends (from Hawaii and the mainland), and colleagues (from around the world).

Your friendship, constant and continued support, and presence here today remind us that whenever and wherever that we are with you...we are home.

I am grateful to be in the presence of so many leaders (both on the dais and in the audience) who have earned the respect and won the admiration of generations of Sailors over the course of their respective careers. Moreover, I am especially thankful to our Chief of Naval Operations for this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Today we celebrate the combined teamwork of ADM Willard and his wife Donna who have given so much of themselves to the Pacific Fleet community. Together they fostered relationships in Hawaii and in the region, took care of Pacific Fleet sailors, families and Navy civilians.

Andy and I are very fortunate to follow this team, and I am lucky to follow a person whose lifetime commitment to the Navy and operational leadership in the Pacific is legend. Bob has led 'from the front' with exceptional skill. Collectively, the men and women of the fleet are grateful for his leadership, his commitment to service, and the personal example that he has set for all to follow.

When we have a change of command, it is customary practice to announce the change of commanders to the fleet with a short, succinct, two-sentence message. The first sentence identifies who has replaced whom. The second sentence simply states, "All policies, directives, and instructions remain in effect." The intent of the message is to provide continuity in direction to the operational forces and to allow one commander to follow another sequentially, without concern for the loss of order, discipline, or focus in the command mission.

Within the hour, I will release that message...but not because of an administrative habit or custom. I will announce that his policies, his guidance, and his instructions will remain in effect. The reason why they remain in effect is an essential part of today's story as well as tomorrow's operations in the Pacific Fleet.

The list of ADM Willard's accomplishments in his citation and award are as varied as they are lengthy.

Here is what it means: if you look behind the eloquent words in the citation, you will see that Bob Willard is a man of strategic vision who has a passion for the operational art of warfare. He knew



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the direction the fleet needed to go and positioned this headquarters so that we could anticipate and respond to the requirements of a very complex, challenging, and changing security

environment. He invested himself and took the fleet to a new level of performance. He engaged and played at many levels to ensure that our fleet could respond to the full spectrum of military operations from warfighting to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Thanks to Bob Willard, his life work and personal sacrifice, our fleet is stronger, more adaptive, and responsive, so that our Sailors can play an impactful role for a nation, and in a world, that needs them more than ever. Our former CNO, Vern Clark, was fond of telling his Sailors, "Go write some history"...well, Bob did it. Thank you, shipmate, for your service, your friendship, your counsel; I am proud to join your team. I speak for all present that we are truly in your debt.

I stand before you today a blessed, humble, and fortunate man. I am proud to introduce Andy to you. She will light up a room with her warmth and laughter. She taught me that while states have interests...people have friends. I am lucky to have her with me today, blessed to have her as a soul mate and best friend. We married 21 years ago, have two children, Jennifer and Matthew, whom I adore, and a family (extended family) who supports us as we join the wonderful Hawaiian ohana and associated team. This fleet, our organization, and its storied performance and historic accomplishment are the pride of the Navy. I have much to learn from you and am very proud to join the team.

We share a mission at an extraordinary moment in history – when the movement of information, the shipment of energy, goods, and commodities, combined with the ability to communicate beyond national borders and the opportunities for travel...have resulted in linkages and connections that make us increasingly reliant on partners in the international community (and dependent on the sea for many elements of our daily lives).

In the Asian-Pacific region, we are witnessing a period of increased demand for resources, increased competition, and a period when the demand for access and freedom of movement that we typically view through the lens of the national interest...is equally important to the interests of the international community as well. In other words...now, more than ever before, the consequences of activities that impede those vital connections no longer affect simply one nation, but rather the vital interests of the global community.

At a time when the stability and security of the global commons has so much at stake for the community of nations, I think it is helpful to remind ourselves of the power of the past to inspire and instruct.

Our way of life rests on one idea...an idea that was, in its day, revolutionary in the history of the world. The notion that people could govern themselves and provide liberty for all races was without parallel, and mockingly referred to as the "great experiment." Those who shaped the foundation of our country did so in a time of great personal danger to themselves, when every thing they had and every idea they stood for was at risk. Their dreams of freedom endured, I think, because in their darkest hour, the founding fathers reached for timeless and principled words rather than adopt the language of vengeance...and those who wore the cloth of the nation –



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a uniform – rallied behind those principles -- that call to action, and were willing to respond with a tenacious commitment and the moral courage to serve the young republic.

Ideas of freedom, liberty, and the right to live ones own life without threat, fear, or retaliation, was born in war and survived through the ages because of the inherent humanity embedded in them. We define who we are as a people by the value we place on human life, the honor, esteem, liberties, and rights of its individual citizens, as well as the integral, reciprocal responsibilities for individual service that a democracy must have in return -- which has been essential to our form of government and to the formation of our armed forces.

These are more than lofty ideas that we admire, but principles that we put into action. These principles are the source of our strength.

You will see these principles in play in how we respond when our nation calls.

You will see these principles in play through the commitments that we make and the risks that we bear on behalf of our friends and allies...that is why standing alliances, mutual defense pacts, and other national level commitments are so important to us.

You will see these principles in play in the way we conduct operations on the high seas...that is why access to the global commons and freedom of navigation in international waters is so important ...because it is a principle that applies to everyone.

You will see these ideas embedded in our forces (officers and enlisted)(active and reserve)(military and civilian)(servicemember and their families)...that is why the pledge that we make to the health, welfare, and professional development of those who serve (and their families) is a covenant we require ourselves to honor because we see it as a sacred trust. When we see Sailors in action, they demonstrate not only the commitment of our country, but reveal the soul of the nation.

In this historic setting, you will find powerful images of our Navy; in our audience, you will find an impressive armada of international friends...and not far from where we stand...you will find silent, but equally powerful and humbling reminders of honor, courage, and sacrifice while under fire. The crisp array of flags and uniforms present today are symbols in this historic setting that remind us of what we treasure; we treasure those who serve and those who stand with us.

We share more than borders, boundaries, or treaties with our international friends who join us in the fleet today; we share the challenges and the opportunities of the sea. Together, we come from the traditions of the navy; it is a culture uniquely shared by mariners of the open ocean. Ultimately, on the appointed day and hour, we cast off all physical and symbolic lines that tie us to solid ground, get underway, and with a sense of independence, set sail beyond the sight and comforts of our respective societies and into an uncertain world.

Samuel Eliot Morrison once wrote that going to sea forced mariners to make decisions about people in their charge and resources in their trust at early stages in their career.

To succeed in this sometimes stark and harsh environment, naval leaders had to learn, early in their professional lives, to draw upon the capabilities, talents, insights, experiences, and the



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creative energy of all those with them because oftentimes the success of the mission and the very survival of the crew depended on it. To succeed, leaders had to create a resilient, sustainable, team from a very diverse group of talent and experience. The strength of the team has given the long blue line the ability to persist forward, against difficult challenges and overwhelming odds.

Today, I am fortunate to follow in command of a great leader whose initiatives, goals, efforts, and passion helped to create one team. I look forward to working for you on that team. Thank you for your work, your commitment to our critically important mission, and the service that all of you provide to the family of nations.

God Bless our team, our Navy, and the United States of America.