



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet  
U.S. Seventh Fleet Change of Command Speech  
Yokosuka, Japan  
Admiral Patrick M. Walsh  
September 10, 2010**

Thank you very much for the kind introduction.

Distinguished guests, fellow Flag and General officers, family and friends, on behalf of our CNO, good evening, Aloha, and kon-ban-wa. It is truly wonderful to be in Yokosuka, and aboard this great ship, once again.

I am especially grateful for the opportunity to recognize the important work done by the men and women of the Seventh Fleet, to express the gratitude of our Navy for their service and sacrifice, and to honor the departing and arriving commanders and their families with this formal ceremony.

The United States Navy values our close friendship and partnership with the JMSDF, and the key role that we play together at sea. We see a direct connection and draw a direct correlation, between the security of the high seas and the stability and prosperity of nations. In the Asia Pacific community, we share this 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 opportunities for travel... have resulted in linkages and connections that make us increasingly reliant on partners in the community of nations... and dependent on the sea, for many elements of our daily lives.

As Sailors, we have the honor, good fortune, and responsibility to represent our nations, where the very nature of the operating environment as well as the vastness of it, requires a collective approach for the shared benefits and shared responsibilities for the sea. The U.S. Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force have a very special relationship and understand that we must work together to ensure the integrity of the sea lanes.

As I speak to you today, 60 ships, over 200 aircraft, and more than 40,000 Sailors and Marines are operating under the command of the U.S. SEVENTH Fleet, forward-deployed here in Yokosuka. The SEVENTH FLEET area of operations spans 48 million square miles – the world’s five largest armed forces reside within its purview – one-third of the world’s commerce passes through its waters. Half of its forces are underway on any given day, facing the challenges necessary to ensure security in the global commons. Those chosen to command the SEVENTH Fleet are, without exception, the very best our Navy has to offer.

We are here today to recognize, Vice Admiral John Bird, and his outstanding leadership of the U.S. SEVENTH Fleet during the past two years. John applied his deep-rooted sense of responsibility and substantial intellectual prowess to ensuring the effectiveness of our naval forces in the region. Today, our Navy-to-Navy relationship is more relevant and important than ever before - it is a bond characterized by maturity, respect, and cooperation.

During the past two years, our countries benefitted from John’s steadfast leadership. His determination was the driving factor in the establishment of the first ever U.S. Navy/JMSDF combined watch floor, resulting in unprecedented levels of interoperability between U.S. and Japanese naval forces and dramatically improving bilateral operations as demonstrated during last year’s ANNUALEX.

As a combined component commander Vice Admiral Bird was responsible for the combined naval forces defense of the Republic of Korea. Under his leadership, coalition forces conducted ballistic missile defense operations, deterring aggression on the Korean Peninsula. His vision and determination have been instrumental in reaffirming U.S. commitment during a time of great crisis.

Continuing to foster these relationships throughout the region, Vice Admiral Bird expertly led SEVENTH Fleet and coalition forces with the Australian and Indian navies during exercises TALISMAN SABER and MALABAR; and he oversaw international fleet reviews in Indonesia and China.

Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is one of our Navy's core responsibilities; it is especially important in the Asia-Pacific region, where the littorals are home to the preponderance of the world's population but have frequent natural disasters...on average at least one every 60 days. Vice Admiral Bird took on this responsibility whole-heartedly, directing humanitarian assistance operations in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

He spearheaded a wide-ranging Theater Security Cooperation Plan by engaging senior foreign military officers and diplomats, promoting trust and confidence in bilateral relations and fostering increased multilateral relationships. His efforts made possible the USS GEORGE WASHINGTON visit to Manila – the first aircraft carrier to visit the Philippines in more than ten years.

I must also point out that John managed all of this while training for, and completing, the Tokyo Marathon this past February.

This is a very important role for any one commander – the responsibilities are unique -- the mission extraordinary -- and the stakes are very high. VADM Bird has tackled these responsibilities and, in only two short years, truly succeeded. Thank you John, for your commitment and your tenacious drive; your many achievements have enhanced regional peace and stability.

There are not many career paths in the world that offer such an exceptional view into the human spirit. All around us is a team, which, in the course of its daily mission, works to represent the commitment of our country and, through this work, reveals the soul of our nation. I am especially grateful to be here today, to recognize the honor, commitment, and courage of this team and to express my personal gratitude for the leadership, dedication, and professional approach taken by John and Noni Bird.

Those of us who wear the uniform know that the most important part of our lives, the most important source of strength and support, is our family - so we understand and appreciate the personal sacrifices that your family has made.

A few minutes ago, I recognized Noni and formally presented to her the Department of the Navy Superior Public Service Award for her dedicated efforts, service, and support. Noni, with selflessness and grace, you supported our team, you were with John all over the Pacific, and you enriched so many lives throughout. On behalf of the Pacific Fleet, please accept my heartfelt thanks for all you have done - we are grateful for your support.

John and Noni- we bid you Fair Winds and Following Seas as you take on your next assignment in the Pentagon. I have every faith that you will continue your many successes...we will miss you.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Vice Admiral Scott and Mindy Van Buskirk, who come to you from Hawaii. For the past year, Scott has been serving as my Deputy Commander and Chief of Staff at the Pacific Fleet headquarters.

A submariner by trade, Scott has seen service in nearly every duty station available in the U.S. Navy. I am confident that he is the person best suited for this challenging assignment. Today you will notice his trademark, large and unyielding smile – a characteristic that many in the audience will grow accustomed to seeing. His optimism and his visionary leadership, are precisely what we seek in the SEVENTH Fleet commander.

Scott and Mindy, I have every confidence in your leadership and know that you will serve the Pacific Fleet, the U.S. Navy, and our friends and allies in the Asia-Pacific region well. I am grateful for the chance to continue serving with you.

I would like to express my gratitude to our regional partners, joint services, and all those who stand with us as friends of the U.S. Navy for being here today. I would like to especially thank the government and people of Japan, the citizens of Yokosuka, and the Japan Self Defense

Forces, for your hospitality and unwavering support. It is an honor and a pleasure for our Navy to live and operate here, with you.

Finally, I want to extend my thanks to the men and women of the United States SEVENTH FLEET who have dedicated their lives to the defense of our nation and to the cause of freedom; your Navy and your nation are eternally grateful.

Thank you.