



**Remarks for Admiral Patrick M. Walsh
Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Commander, Naval Region Hawaii Change of Command
18 November 2011
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii**

Thank you, Mike, for the kind introduction and for your terrific support of Pacific Fleet Sailors and families.

Governor Abercrombie, Mayors Carlisle and Carvalho, Consuls General, fellow Flag and General officers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen...

...aloha, good morning and a warm welcome to all of you, especially those who have traveled to Oahu for today's ceremony.

Andy Kaye and I are grateful for the opportunity to help celebrate today's change of command, a significant milestone in the lives of Dixon and Kiki Smith, and Frank and Carol Ponds. The presence of so many special guests, distinguished leaders, and members of the Hawaii community reflects the remarkable partnership between our Navy and the Hawaii community – a partnership bolstered on Dixon and Kiki's watch during their remarkable three years in Hawaii.

We are so grateful for the support of the Hawaii community, and for our Sailors and their family to truly be a part of the Ohana. For all of us, it is a great privilege to serve our nation, and especially to do so in the Aloha State.

Today's ceremony is also an opportunity to thank the many men and women who comprise the Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific team... and to pause and recognize the leadership and teamwork so vital to their success. The official transfer of authority and accountability we will witness today reminds us of the privilege and attendant responsibilities to serve our nation as Sailors.

We serve during an extraordinary moment in history - when our national leadership points the way to a Pacific Century, recognizing the importance of our nation's role in the Asia-Pacific region. For many decades, the U.S. Navy has worked with allies and partners to enhance the maritime security which underpins economic growth and prosperity...and we will continue our commitment to regional stability.

Hawaii will continue to play a vital role for our Navy, our national defense, and regional security... Hawaii's strategic location and world-class facilities such as the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Pacific Missile Range Facility, and the Naval Station Pearl Harbor are vital to the readiness of our fleet, our Sailors, and their families.

We have been fortunate to have Dixon Smith at the helm of both Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific for over three years – his energetic leadership so vividly raised the bar of excellence. Vice Admiral Vitale described for you some of Dixon's achievements in Navy Region Hawaii...I would like to focus on his accomplishments leading Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, comprised of Destroyer Squadron 31 and eleven Pearl Harbor-based cruisers, destroyers, and frigates.

As Dixon assumed command in 2008, the Pacific Fleet was developing a new organization and concept of operations for the Hawaii-based surface combatants...Dixon's vision and drive made it succeed. Under the MIDPAC Surface Combatant initiative, all eleven ships and Destroyer Squadron 31 were placed under his command, with a focus on operating with Forward Deployed Naval Forces in the western Pacific. The initiative increased deployed ship presence and made us prepared and more responsive to regional contingencies. Today, the concept is a reality and a part of the fabric of our routine fleet operations.

In the past three years, MIDPAC ships have deployed around the world – providing ballistic missile defense in the Arabian Gulf, performing counter-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean, working with numerous allied and partner navies in Southeast Asia, providing surveillance of Economic Exclusion Zones for Pacific Island nations, and, closer to home, playing a key role in the premier multi-national naval exercise Rim of the Pacific.

In every task, the ships of MIDPAC and the DESRON 31 staff have performed superbly, representing our nation and our Navy both at sea and ashore.

On Dixon's watch, MIDPAC introduced innovative ways to integrate surface, submarine, and aviation training. The Hawaii Integrated Training Syndicate created collaboration among communities, and has become a model copied in other homeports. It also supports another innovation: the Koa Kai series of at-sea exercises. The sixth exercise of the series concluded yesterday, bringing greater complexity and, for the first time, the participation of a ship from Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Behind all this operational success is the dogged determination of Dixon Smith to ensure his Surface Group squadron and ships had the highest levels of combat readiness. The day-to-day details of manning, training, equipping, and maintaining ships is complex and requires constant vigilance – Dixon's leadership and partnerships with Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Afloat Training Group Middle Pacific, and the many organizations that support fleet readiness ensured that deploying MIDPAC ships left home ready to sail in harm's way.

In short, MIDPAC enables our Navy's forward presence to build on and strengthen our partnerships and alliances where sea lanes, resources, and vital U.S. interests intersect...Admiral Smith's leadership, guidance, and strong emphasis on operational readiness truly made a difference.

Thank you Dixon, for your commitment and your tenacity; your many achievements have enhanced the security of our nation and the Asia-Pacific region.

Those of us who serve in uniform owe much of our achievement to the love and support of family. Kiki Smith has been a source of strength for Dixon and the greater military family community in Hawaii. Perhaps only Kiki matches the energy and drive of Dixon – I understand that she can be found before dawn swimming laps or working out at Bloch Arena – usually with Dixon not too far behind. Kiki's support for Navy families has reached far and wide -- the

Ombudsman Assembly, Military and Family Support Center, Surface Navy Ohana spouse group, and spouse leadership training programs – have all benefitted from her commitment. She has been Dixon’s close partner in building bonds with the Hawaii community – and has represented us all so well. Kiki, you have been a true champion for Sailors and Navy families, and we are grateful for your service. Thank you!

DIXON AND Kiki, on behalf of the Pacific Fleet, please accept Andy Kaye’s and my heartfelt thanks to both of you. Best wishes to you at Navy Region SOUTHWEST – I’m confident you will continue to provide the same level of excellence in support to the fleet and Navy families there.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Rear Admiral Ponds and his wife Carol – Andy and I are so pleased to welcome you to the Pacific Fleet ohana. Admiral Ponds has an accomplished record of leadership and broad operational expertise – he brings special insight from his last assignment in the Pentagon developing our Navy’s strategic plans and policies. It is clear that he is exactly the right officer for the challenges ahead.

Frank, as you take the helm...I have the utmost confidence that you and your talented team will continue to provide first-rate support to Pacific Fleet Sailors and their families.

To the men and women of Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, thank you for dedicating your lives to the defense of our nation and to the cause of freedom...and thank you to the Navy families whose sacrifice few others can understand or appreciate. And to our friends from the community and region here today, thank you for your support and your partnership.

God Bless America and the United States Navy.

(pause)

Dixon, please join me at the podium.