Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Admiral Scott H. Swift
75th Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea Commemoration
aboard HMAS Choules in the Coral Sea
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As prepared for delivery

As we look out on the Coral Sea today, there is nothing over the horizon for hundreds of miles to suggest that one of the most consequential battles of World War II waged there 75 years ago. Though the smoke has long since cleared and the guns are silent, the Battle of the Coral Sea brought our nations and our navies together in ways that are still as relevant and resounding today as then.

It was in these waters that U.S. and Australian forces joined to thwart the invasion of Port Moresby, and in doing so, gave the Allied Fleet its first victory against an undefeated and undaunted adversary.

Leading up to that fight, Pacific Fleet's commander, Admiral Nimitz, resolved to risk everything he had in the hopes of striking a debilitating blow against the opposing Japanese Imperial Navy Fleet. He knew full well he might not have enough forces to halt the offensive but that half steps would only add risk to what he saw as a commitment he had to take regardless of likely outcomes. As a result, he sent his entire carrier fleet – USS Yorktown, USS Lexington and escorts. This commitment meant there were no U.S. naval forces between Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. While he knew success swung on the size of the fight in the combined Allied Fleet, not the size of the fleet in the fight, he had high confidence in the Sailors that manned that Fleet.

That confidence in his Sailors' initiative, strength, and willingness to confront the enemy at sea regardless of the odds 75 years ago was validated in these seas that we sail now. They were determined to fight, even if it meant forfeiture of their lives, their hopes, their dreams, and their futures. There just was no alternative. Japanese naval expansion in the Pacific could not continue unchecked, especially as it threatened to overtake Australia.

In part because aircraft carriers were the main fighting force, the battle ushered in a new era of naval warfare, fought between opposing fleets that did not sail within sight of each other. Fighting over the horizon still came at great cost to both sides – hundreds of Australians, Americans and Japanese lost, or nearly lost, their lives. This context is not lost on me as I stand here on behalf of Admiral Harry Harris, U.S. Pacific Command commander. When the order came down to abandon Lexington, his father, Machinist Mate Second Class Harry Harris, was one of the Sailors who fought his way through fire and flooding to abandon Lexington for the Coral Sea, swimming through turbulent and rough waters, eventually to be rescued by another ship of the fleet.

His will to fight that day, and the commitment by all of Nimitz's forces to defend America's allies, remains part of Pacific Fleet's DNA today. It is a heritage passed on by those who went before in these waters, and those who fought throughout the Pacific in places like Midway, Guadalcanal, Leyte, and Okinawa. It is a history of strength, resolve and iron-clad alliances.

It’s also not lost on me today that our former adversary is part of this commemoration as one of our closest allies. Our friendship with Japan is one of the most compelling examples that Pacific nations can learn from the devastating consequences of war, set past differences aside and together embrace the pursuit of the regional tide of prosperity that swept across the Pacific following the end of the war. For more than seventy years, that tide was driven by the ebb and flow of security, guided and sustained by the international rules-based system that our nations continue to embrace, advocate and uphold as the model for all to follow.

That is why we are standing on these decks today, among friends, commemorating Sailors who risked everything they had, to show their immutable spirit and resolve in the face of unprecedented challenges. To acknowledge that the blessing of the prosperity we enjoy today is the direct result of their belief in each other, their belief in the nations they represented and their faith that their commitment to the future of their loved ones would be sustained by those lucky enough to follow in their footsteps.

Let us endeavor here, on this glorious morning, in these hallowed seas, to renew our commitment to prove their faith in us was well placed.

May God bless those that have gone before, and those that serve their memory faithfully, with selfless service to a greater good. Thank you.