



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet**

**Admiral Scott H. Swift**

*76th Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Commemoration*

*Pearl Harbor, Hawaii*

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*As delivered*

Good morning Admiral Harris, Governor Ige, thank you for joining us here this morning. I could not have asked for a more beautiful morning. And for those of us that have spoken on December 7th and sat here on the dais, invariably someone will approach us and say “you know it’s unfortunate that you don’t have the nicest view looking out across the harbor.” But I would argue otherwise, standing here looking across this front row of Pearl Harbor survivors. It’s great to see so many old friends back here today.

So it’s truly an honor to join you in the remembrance of those heroes, these heroes that were unexpectedly thrust into the crucible of war here more than seven decades ago, heroes whose honor, courage, and commitment amidst adversity continue to inspire generations of American service members and citizens today.

This morning, as we have for the last seventy-six years, we gather here to pay our respect to America’s World War II generation, the Greatest Generation, and in particular our veterans and civilians that responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor, grateful for their courage, service, and sacrifice. We also honor fallen shipmates and all others who fell that day, as we mourn the loss of so many of our nation’s best and brightest.

Within the chaos that morning there was no shortage of bravery, as Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen overcame shock, uncertainty and fear in the heat of battle, to find something greater within themselves: a grim determination to survive and an unwavering resolve to fight.

Unsurprisingly, in my experience is that none of these heroes considers themselves as such; they all say they were just doing their job. I guess that is true if just doing your job entails 15 Medal of Honors, 51 Navy Crosses being awarded, many posthumously, all of which highlights the valor displayed that morning 76 years ago today.

Make no mistake, though all awoke that morning as ordinary Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen, Marines, and Coastguardsmen, by the time the guns fell silent, they were heroes all.

Among those we honor today are the Captain and crew of the USS Ward, just discovered the other day, whose vigilance and decisive action at the very cusp of the transition between peacetime and world war demonstrated a readiness, determination and tenacity that informs our fleet today.

I'd like to pause here a moment to reflect on history and cultural heritage, and why each is important to what we do and who we are as a Fleet today. History is what happens on a day to day basis, those events that are recorded for prosperity – posterity – which we in turn use to inform future decisions.

Our cultural heritage, on the other hand, is the effect of the span of history on us as a group, embodied largely in how we respond to the events of the day. This brings me back to the USS Ward, the ship that fired America's first salvo in World War II.

Ward was a World War I era destroyer that had been decommissioned for nearly 20 years, and brought back into service in January of 1941. The United States had been at peace for longer than Ward had been out of service, though the winds of war had already begun blowing just over the horizon by December. The crew was made up primarily of enlisted Reservists from the Midwest who previously honed their seamanship skills on the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River.

Both ship and crew had been activated as part of America's leadership's effort to prepare for potential hostilities, but peacetime training can never be as trying as operating in war. Ward's performance that morning is exceptional, the details of which I'll leave to Mr. Twomey to regale you with the details of that engagement, though I'll take a moment here to highlight how her story still speaks volumes to our fleet today.

One might almost have excused Ward's team from any reluctance they might have had to mount an armed attack during peace, without contacting higher headquarters, with incomplete information. What I find compelling about Ward's story is that the crew overcame the culture of a peacetime fleet posture so quickly and effectively. They were able to do so because they had the clear understanding of their commander's intent, of their assigned duties, and of the risks of inaction.

Ward's experience reminds us today that the transition from operating as a peacetime navy to conducting war time missions can happen in an instant, and we as a Fleet need to be prepared to act. Her example, and the example of all the Pearl Harbor survivors, underscores the value of equipping and empowering our Sailors and Civilian Sailors with proper training, sufficient resources, and most of all, clear commander's intent to act decisively when conditions require - their – and to ensure that they are ready to fight at a moment's notice.

As leaders, we owe it to our Sailors to remember that readiness can't be measured in how we as a Navy perform in peacetime; rather, it must be evaluated within the context of how well we can fight and win when our mettle is tested in combat, as it was 75 years ago this morning here in Pearl Harbor.

That said, while preparing ourselves for the demands of the potential adversary, whatever they may place on us, we still must balance the maintenance, manning, training requirements of a peacetime fleet. That is no simple task, but I can tell you, that Pacific Fleet Sailors, that its the American citizens' view that they have entrusted us with that responsibility.

America's experience at Pearl Harbor reminds us we cannot be trapped by our most recent historical events. That the heroes with us today allowed Pearl Harbor – ensured Pearl Harbor – would not be the end of the story. If that had occurred, it would have been a gloomy day indeed, but that sweeping defeat here that morning 76 years ago was short-lived. Instead of retreating from the fight, America's Pacific Fleet dug in its heels. Along the way they forged a cultural heritage of resilience that Sailors continue to draw upon today. Indeed, America's Sailors, Civilian Sailors, and members of all military branches made sure that the adversary intended as the first and last battle of a short war was only the opening act.

Within days, Pacific Fleet submarines launched on offensive patrols, taking the fight to the enemy. Likewise, Fleet crypto analysts in the basement at Station HYPO refused to give up, despite earlier setbacks that failed to foresee the attack. Instead, they redoubled their efforts to break the Imperial Navy's code to anticipate the adversary's next move. All along the waterfront, dive and salvage crews, shipyard workers, and ship's company labored around the clock to save lives and resurrect the vessels that they could. Across the island and across our nation, Americans were rising to the challenge.

Within six months, the critical victories of the Battle of Coral Sea and Midway, the Pacific Fleet Sailors and civilian Sailors had delivered a blow to the adversary that shifted the momentum of the war, thanks in no small part to Station HYPO's dogged tenacity. By the end of the war, Pacific Fleet submarines had conducted 488 war patrols and were responsible for more than half of all enemy shipping sunk. And remarkably, shipyard and salvage professionals were able to return 17 ships that were either damaged or sunk at Pearl Harbor back to service, many of which fought valiantly throughout the remainder of the war.

On behalf of a grateful Pacific nation, and a proud Pacific Fleet, I would like to thank our Pearl Harbor and World War II veterans who yet carry the burden and bear the scars of those fateful days. We honor you today for the proud cultural heritage of victory and toughness that you have bestowed on each of us that now wear the uniform in your honor. We remain forever in your debt.

During this time of reflection, I am also grateful to observe the strong bonds that have formed between former bitter adversaries. I cannot help but note that, just as the crew of the USS Ward was not caught unprepared by peace time mentality, likewise the Pacific Fleet was not trapped by fear and uncertainty following the attack that morning, and at the war's end, American and Japanese leadership did not remain bound by former war time hostilities, but instead chose to forge a new future of reconciliation that has benefitted both of our nations and indeed the entire Indo-Asia-Pacific region in incalculable ways.

December 7th holds a number of hard lessons that no Sailor of any nation should have to relearn. Though the wounds dealt here more than seven decades ago are fading, we will never forget the valor, heroism, and leadership displayed by all of those who gave their lives here seventy-six years ago. Thank you very much.