

Admiral Thomas Fargo
U.S. Pacific Fleet
Monday, April 23, 2001

Questions and Answers

Q: Admiral Fargo, (inaudible) Commander Waddle, he does retire with full benefits and an honorable discharge and the fine was suspended. There are some who say this was a slap on the hand.

A: I think first off, you have to look at our traditions in our service. Commander Waddle has been stripped of his command and his career effectively terminated. For a naval officer who's served 20 years to his country, I would tell you that this is absolutely devastating. He has paid dearly.

As I expressed earlier, our profound regrets to the Japanese families. I've lived in Japan. I understand what they're going through. But no process, none whatsoever, will fully compensate for loss of life.

Q: In the Manual for Court Martial, all that's necessary to charge for negligent homicide is that someone died as a result of (inaudible) negligent behavior, not exhibiting a degree of care and safety that an otherwise careful person would have exercised, and no intent is necessary. Why does this case not live up to charging under negligent homicide?

A: I charged Commander Waddle with two very serious counts of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. It was my judgment that further charges were not necessary and that we could achieve proper accountability without them.

Q: Before the Court of Inquiry announced their findings the Secretary of the Navy made some remarks to the press that a court martial would lower morale and praised Commander Waddle very much. Were you aware of those comments, and did they have any effect on your decision?

A: I saw those comments, but I would tell you as the convening authority and the second echelon commander, I had full authority to dispose of this case and they didn't affect my judgment whatsoever.

Q: Admiral, how would you describe this chapter since 9 February for the Navy and for the submarine and for yourself?

A: I think it's been very painful, without a doubt. It always is when there's a loss of life.

I would tell you that you have before you what I consider to be a very tough report. It's a report that is very thorough and examines all aspects of this in great detail.

But I also believe very strongly that it's this kind of critical look, this kind of assessment of our performance that will make our institution stronger.

Q: Would your decision in this case have been any different if the victims had been American citizens as opposed to Japanese (inaudible), and also if you can (inaudible).

A: I don't think my decisions would be any different whether these were American citizens or Japanese citizens or military personnel. My judgments are based on the report of the Court of Inquiry, Admiral Nathman, and the other flag officers that assisted him in this investigation, and my experience as a naval officer.

Q: Do you (inaudible)

A: If the families would like me to come out, I would certainly be happy to do that.

I think I would tell them that from the very outset we tried to provide a full accounting for this accident. That's why we did the Court of Inquiry and that's why we made it open to the public.

We have found the cause of this collision, of this accident. The Admiral's Mast that I held has found Commander Waddle both responsible and accountable for that, and certainly we have meted out punishment in this case.

Once again, I think that the Japanese people, what they're really looking for here is accountability and that's precisely what we have attempted to provide.

Q: You mentioned that it was a 20-year career, but from what I understand he hasn't quite reached that 20-year benchmark. Did you consider forcing the resignation before that benchmark was reached as punishment? Can you comment on that at all?

A: You have to understand how our resignation processes work. I don't have authority to terminate a career. A retirement is submitted and then approved by the authority of the

Secretary of the Navy.

Q: Admiral, some critics have charged that the Court of Inquiry sort of swept under the rug the issue of the Distinguished Visitors Program by not calling any of the 16 civilians and by not looking more in depth at the whole program and how it entered the (inaudible)

A: I think that we've looked very thoroughly into the Distinguished Visitors Program. I'm well aware that the civilians were not called to the Court.

I would tell you, I went back and read all of the statements of the civilians that were given to the National Transportation and Safety Board as part of my deliberations to make sure I read them and understood them, and I came to the same conclusion as the Court, that there was nothing there that added to the body of facts with respect to this collision.

Q: ...you say there are -- I'm taking about in regard to the (inaudible). You had a press conference at the Pearl Harbor Base. And you say that there is no (inaudible) between the (inaudible). Do you have still the same conclusion? And also, do you feel any responsibility for this issue?

A: Right after this incident, of course, that first Saturday I came out and spoke to all of you, and of course a week later when I convened the Court of Inquiry I had another press conference.

The report is very clear that the civilians on board did not cause, were not directly the cause of this collision.

We've had a Distinguished Visitors Program, we've been embarking civilians in the Navy for 50 years now. I think it's important to our nation.

We can do this safely and will do it safely. It would be a mistake to build a wall between American citizens, the mothers and fathers of our sailors, and its Navy.

Thank you all very much.

Let me just conclude by saying that ultimately this was an accident. A tragedy in which mistakes were made, for which our people have been held accountable. We've taken action to make sure that we can go to sea safely and that we can manage these programs properly.

Once again, my profound regret to the Japanese families. As I said, we have expressed our apologies throughout with a very honest attempt to provide a full and open accounting. But I do recognize that there is no process that will compensate for the loss of life.

Thank you all very much.

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