



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Pearl Harbor Survivors Association 2010 Reunion Dinner
Honolulu, Hawaii
Admiral Patrick M. Walsh
Tuesday, 7 Dec 2010**

Governor Lingle, Mayor Carlisle, Admiral Harvey and other distinguished guests, Pearl Harbor survivors and family and friends ... Good evening and Aloha. I am most grateful to the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association for the opportunity to spend this evening with you and to stand in the presence of veterans who gave so much of themselves, so that we could have lives of promise, potential and opportunity.

Today on the 69th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day, we flew the flag at half-mast – we paused, we reflected, we recognized, and we memorialized the men and women who served in World War II, who survived the attack at Pearl Harbor, and especially, those who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. Their storied acts of courage and heroism endowed special meaning to all who serve and support the Armed Forces.

My remarks begin with you: our survivors, our veterans, our friends and our extended family...because the days pass too quickly, our opportunities with each other too fleeting, our reunions too limited, to miss out on a chance to express our personal gratitude to each other....for each other. Tonight is importantfor many reasons that connect and cut across several generations. We are part of a great circle of community, history, and tradition, where one generation cares for and nurtures the next.

Those we honor today did that over the course of their lives for us; it is our charge to carry their example forward to those in our trust.

Gatherings like this morning's ceremony and this evening's banquet are especially significant, because they provide an opportunity to come together and collectively express our gratitude to each other, for each other.

It is important to remember ... what those who served experienced, in the hours that followed tragedy. It is important to know the humanity of their stories because it is their biography that inspires us, and gives us the strength, commitment, character and resilience for the challenges ahead. They were grief-stricken, emotionally tattered and physically drawn. For each ship, each crew, and each family, it was a time of shock, then guilt, then anger. It was a period of sad reflection and respect followed by acceptance and hope.

It was a moment in time that tested our nation – and served as a clarion call for citizens to serve the country. It was a moment in time that tested our Navy. Yet those here found a way – to see clearly through the grief that overwhelmed them and discern the path to take... to move with resolve and dispatch ... for recovery ... and then victory.

An extraordinary level of personal strength, will and determination was necessary to respond to the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the aftermath, recovery efforts proved the strength of those in uniform and the people of Hawaii.

Complex salvage operations to recover sunken and damaged ships required dangerous work. Doctors, nurses and corpsmen cared for the many wounded.

Through innovation and fierce determination, the Pearl Harbor shipyard repaired the fleet, and many damaged ships could sail once again. Just six months later, those efforts led to victory at the Battle of Midway, and turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. Today, our naval history and heritage command cites a letter written by a Sailor in 1943 who said, “Wherever we go, we are part of America, a part of history.” His words are just as true and enduring today because of the extraordinary acts that took place on this island ... by people whose actions proved that they were stronger and more resilient than they ever realized or imagined.

The story of Pearl Harbor became the story of the fleet...and the story of the fleet became the story of the nation. The strength of our ideals and all that we hold dear, the willingness of so many Americans to defend life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness served to guide us from tragedy to triumph.

The men and women whom we honor today started their life’s journey from diverse parts of America. These were people of principle who answered the call of a wounded nation, to lead a life of consequence, to take action, to be ready, and to take risks for a cause larger than themselves.... They left the safety of their local neighborhoods, the security of protected surroundings, joined our team, and performed a mission in a time and place where uncommon valor was common virtue.

These principles of service are part of the makeup of who we are and what we do—and are part of the fabric of our culture. It is here that our history can inform and instruct. In the post World War I era, the nation sat passively isolated and alone while totalitarian regimes invaded, ransacked, and conquered countries

across Europe and across Asia. America had suffered significant losses in World War I and in the economic depression that followed; for many reasons, the country resisted involvement or entrapment in potentially another foreign war...segments of the population simply took an isolationist view. In the summer of 1941, Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes, held a different view and appealed to the American people directly, to make them aware of the far greater cost that American isolation meant to our fellow man with this impassioned plea aimed at the very fabric of our society and soul of our citizens.

“What constitutes an American?” He asked, “Not color nor race nor religion. Not the pedigree of his family nor the place of his birth. Not the coincidence of his citizenship. Not his social status nor his bank account. Not his trade or his profession. An American is one who loves justice and believes in the dignity of man. An American is one who will fight for his freedom and that of his neighbor. An American is one who will sacrifice property, ease and security in order that he and his children may retain the rights of free men. We know that freedom, like peace, is indivisible. We cannot retain our liberty if three-fourths of the world is enslaved.

Brutality, injustice, and slavery, if practiced as dictators would have them, in the long run would destroy us as surely as a fire raging in the nearby neighbor’s house would burn ours if we didn’t help to put out his. We must do everything to restore freedom to people. [Otherwise, our lives are at risk.]”

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. Earlier today I saw spouses and caretakers, sons and daughters, grandchildren, and

perhaps some great-grandchildren and nephews and nieces who have traveled from afar to experience a reunion that may never be repeated, but will always live on in our individual and collective memories. Their presence is a moving tribute to the service and sacrifices of a loved one who gave much so we could have more. You, the family, deserve credit for giving us the stories of the “greatest generation,” for encouraging your survivor to share their memories, to teach future generations about the meaning of loss, selflessness, perseverance, ingenuity, valor, duty, faith, love and honor.

We recently received a letter from the family of a former Utah Sailor who requested the interment of their loved one’s remains in USS Utah:

“I recall my father saying not a day passed that he didn’t think of December 7, 1941. Dad never spoke much about that tragic December morning when Japanese air squadrons commenced the bombing on Oahu until he started attending the USS Utah Association meetings. Talking with his shipmates, and sharing in their memories about the attack on Ford Island, brought back many memories of his own. I think it also helped Dad open up about what was no doubt the most unforgettable day in his life.

Imagine for a moment, looking out a porthole and seeing an airplane heading directly for your ship. Dad’s first thought was, why are they flying on Sunday morning, then suddenly seeing the plane pull up and noticing the “meatballs” (Japanese insignia) as a torpedo was dropping into the water. “We are under attack,” he shouted as he ran through the galley alerting the crewmembers.

Dad never understood why he survived and others did not. His last wish was to be buried at Pearl Harbor on the USS Utah. He wanted to be reunited with those that weren't as lucky.

The USS Utah is often referred to as the forgotten ship. In honoring Dad's last wish, my sister and I hope his interment on the Utah will help keep alive the memory of the ship and all of the sailors who went down with her."

This correspondence is one of several hundred the Navy has received over the years from survivors or their families communicating a similar last wish of a Survivor to return to the hallowed waters of Pearl Harbor as their final homeport. I understand the draw, the call to come home. This morning as I accompanied Survivors to the Arizona Memorial for a Floral Tribute, I was struck by the serenity, the peacefulness and calm of the setting that puts our minds at ease and affords families and loved ones the opportunity for quiet reflection.

But it is the Shrine Room and the Wall that steal our gaze. As with each visit, my eyes are drawn to the names etched in marble – the 1,177 names of those who died in the attack along with the names of several dozen surviving crewmembers interred in the ship over the years, name after name creates one succeeding image after another -- images in my mind of faces of the crew, of their pride, dedication and sacrifice ...some blessed with a full life, most of them blessed by giving their life for their country.

The story of Pearl Harbor has been told by thousands of men and women who witnessed the unforgettable destruction of their youth, their innocence, their friends

and comrades and their home in this tropical paradise. Those who have known war, up close, do not forget it. And for those who experienced the attack, December 7 is all the more seared in their memory, because war was far from their minds on that quiet Sunday morning.

It is natural for those who experience the same life-changing catastrophe to seek fellowship by sharing memories and stories of that event, but that desire to speak and remember is not always immediate nor does it come easily. After World War II veterans focused on the immediate task of coming home and building productive lives, filled with renewed vigor for the freedoms they had fought for. Many did not talk of the horrors they witnessed or of the friends they lost. But the passing of time and youth compels memories to surface and for survivors to seek others who shared the same experience.

From the first reunion dinner attended by your 11 founding members in Gardena, California in 1954, the annual gatherings have helped give voice to hidden history, to connect survivors with shipmates and friends, to open windows on a loved one's service and sacrifice, and to remind America of the need to never forget Pearl Harbor.

The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association has played an important role in telling the story of who we are and what we do. You have facilitated year-round effort by survivors to educate and provide an enduring gift of history to our youth. Many of you have been active at schools, museums, community events, and special gatherings such as air shows and veterans' parades. Wherever you go, Americans

applaud your service and sacrifice and recognize you for who you are and what you represent. You help us help each other.

Within each survivor are images and memories of youthful laughter, exuberance, and innocence shared with fallen comrades before that fateful day. Those of us touched by your stories will always carry within us images of heroes physically bent by the passage of time, but eternally standing tall - for the principles you defended and for the honor of warriors our nation lost.

Future generations will long cherish the heroism and valor of those at Pearl Harbor. We will never forget their loss, their sacrifice and their service ...and the world will never forget how many are free because of it.

God bless you, our country, and all those who stand with us.