**244TH NAVY BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

Welcome to the 244th Birthday of the Navy and Marine Corps. Tonight we celebrate the honor, courage, and commitment for which we stand, and we celebrate our history and heritage. We also need to pause and reflect on how blessed we are to have the opportunity to serve this great nation.

Thank you Captain Kaiser and Commander Langham for the honor of speaking to you tonight. Thank you Captain Debra Yniguez for joining us tonight, and to all the family members here celebrating with us. Your support is very important and cannot be overstated.

A special welcome to the School of Leadership and Education professors. I would like to take a moment to recognize SOLES and the University of San Diego for their support of the NROTC program. SOLES leadership supports this unit above and beyond all its expectations. The care and support they provide the students is a direct correlation to the unit’s success. As the head of Navy Recruiting, I cannot thank you enough for that!

You have more than 230 Midshipmen attached to this unit and more commissions out of this unit than any other. As I look to the future of Navy and Marine Corps leadership, I couldn’t be more proud of you or more hopeful for the future of the Navy/Marine Corps team.

As the Commander of Navy Recruiting Command, I am perhaps more aware than most of the stringent standards required to be an officer in the military. I am asked to select more people in a tougher economy, and yet the quality of our applicants cannot suffer. I look around the room tonight, and I’m impressed with the quality of our future.

You have the largest contingency of Marines at more than 100. OORAH! This unit currently commissions 10 percent of ALL USMC officers from NROTC! As a proud grandson of a Marine, who served with Chesty Puller and Freddy Moosbrugger, survived the attack on Pearl Harbor in the MARDET of USS Arizona, and fought the Japanese in the Pacific, I wish all of you a Happy Navy and Marine Corps Birthday!

As NROTC midshipmen, you are elite. This highly competitive process and demands this program places on you prepare you for leadership and management positions in an increasingly technical Navy and Marine Corps. I am depending on you. The Nation is depending on you.

(Grandfather at VMI)

On October 13, 1775, at 1022 in the morning, Congress signed our Navy into being. Shortly thereafter, the first liberty incident was reported, truly establishing the Navy, and subsequently berthing the Marine Corps!

244 years… just about two and a half centuries of Maritime Dominance. Today’s great power competition is one built on the speed of technology. Our adversaries, although not our equals, are working hard to challenge us at sea. There are historical examples of nations who build navies that challenge other nations for maritime supremacy. You can look to the past, Spain, England, and now us. We have adversaries like Russia and China who are rapidly building their Navies in an effort to challenge us, and they are doing it through technology. However, our military remains one step ahead. We have a Military that is going to be rooted in the latest technologies: hypersonic missiles, directed energy, lasers, and 5th generation fighters to name a few.

Our strength is our Sailors and Marines, the ones you will lead very soon.

This new technological fighting force will require highly qualified Sailors and Marines who can operate these ships, airplanes, and weapons systems.

The mission of today’s military is as relevant as it has ever been. The reason we can operate so effectively today, is because of the quality of men and women who are accepting the challenge military service offers.

The theme for this year’s birthday celebration is, “No Higher Honor.” It draws upon the extraordinary service and sacrifice of the Sailors who fought the greatest sea battle in history, Leyte Gulf, and in particular the heroism of the crews of USS Samuel B Roberts and USS Johnston.

That pivotal battle was fought to retake the Philippines, a major objective to achieving victory in the Pacific during WW2. In order to allow American forces to land on the islands, LCDR Robert W. Copeland, Commander of the USS Samuel B Roberts, along with a small group of accompanying destroyers, known collectively as Taffy 3, bravely charged into a line of Japanese battleships blockading the islands.

The fighting was ruthless and our American destroyers were decimated in the action.

In addition to the heroism of the crew of Samuel B. Roberts, Commander Ernest Evans, who commanded USS Johnston, told his crew at commissioning, “This is going to be a fighting ship. I intend to go in harm’s way, and anyone who doesn’t want to go along had better get off right now.” When the Japanese were closing in on Taffy 3, Commander Evans stayed true to his word and led Taffy 3’s charge into the fight.

Commander Evans went down with his ship, but succeeded in meeting his and LCDR Copeland’s objective. Taffy 3 had successfully turned back the Japanese, allowing us to establish a beach head and ultimately retake the Philippines in support of our push to mainland Japan.

LCDR Copeland would later recount the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the incredible valor of his crew in the face of such overwhelming odds, stating that there was “No Higher Honor” than to have the privilege to command such a crew. The cost of the battle was high. 1,117 ships’ crew and 43 aviators were killed, and other 913 wounded. Although the Battle off Leyte Gulf is now rightly regarded as the most gallant in U.S. Navy history, our US victory came at a staggering price.

It is difficult to know how Commanders Copeland and Evans felt that day back in 1944, as they and their crews prepared to sacrifice themselves to accomplish the mission. It is not difficult to know what it means to feel the overwhelming inspiration that comes from leading brave and committed Sailors and Marines.

The fight in the Pacific during WWII is one of the most well-known examples of the strength of the Navy and Marine Corps team. This team worked together to relentlessly push back the Japanese empire through the Pacific Theater. In a region full of island nations and countries with long coastlines, it required both the Navy and Marine Corps acting in unison to be successful. Together we liberated countries from Japanese invasion and restored freedom of navigation in the vital Asia-Pacific region.

That dynamic WWII Navy-Marine Corps partnership remains today. With the help of the Marine Corps, the Navy continues to maintain a vigilant posture throughout the world, ready to respond to any crisis at a moment’s notice.

While the future remains uncertain, I am confident that our Navy and Marine Corps team will always look to the example of those who have gone before us, and strive to uphold their legacy.

It is Taffy 3’s legacy that we carry on today in attributes like character, toughness, and resiliency. Attributes that will be required to compete, deter and win the Great Power Competition.

Right now we have Active Duty Marines and Navy here who have served in the Battle of Fallujah, Kandahar Valley in Afghanistan, and many other modern day battles. Between students and staff, the experience in this room starts with Desert Storm and includes almost every operation to date. “No Higher Honor” than to continue to do what those before us have done, fight and win.

(Ed Kaiser in command of PC and saved SEALS story.)

The Navy and Marine Corps is 244 years old this year, yet its true age is frozen in time by the sailors and Marines who serve. We never seem to grow old thanks to the next generation who boldly hold service above self as a noble calling, who raise their right hand to support and defend the constitution of the United States.

Happy Birthday Navy and Marine Corps! There truly is “No higher honor” than serving you.