

As delivered

**Admiral Thomas H. Collins
Coast Guard Foundation Dinner
New York, NY
18 October 2003**

What a terrific evening this has been!

[Recognize VIPs]

It has been a real delight to be here with you this evening. Over the past 10 days, I've been to Sweden, Norway, Gettysburg, and now here in New York. They were all wonderful trips, but it's good to be back here among Coast Guard family and friends. Many, many thanks to the Coast Guard Foundation for hosting this celebration of Coast Guard men and women and many thanks to all of you attending and showing this wonderful outpouring of support for the Coast Guard.

Since the last time I had the honor of speaking to you, lots has been happening in the Coast Guard:

We deployed Coast Guard forces to execute Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom as America's superb military and our coalition partners liberated Iraq from a tyrant.

Closer to home, as we confronted the tremendous new demands of Homeland Security and the Global War on Terrorism, the Coast Guard supported Operation Liberty Shield to defend America's ports, coasts, and infrastructure.

While supporting these Operations at home and abroad, we successfully met the unrelenting demands for search and rescue, marine safety, environmental protection, drug interdiction, domestic and polar icebreaking, fisheries enforcement, aids to navigation, and migrant interdiction.

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We initiated the two largest procurements in Coast Guard history: the Integrated Deepwater System and Rescue 21.

We stood up an Assistant Commandant for Intelligence.

We led the international effort to adopt a new maritime security code and began implementing major new federal maritime legislation, the Maritime Transportation Security Act, all in record time.

And on March 1, 2003, as part of the largest government reorganization in over 50 years, we moved smoothly from the Department of Transportation to the new Department of Homeland Security, joining 21 other agencies in the new Department.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002, which established DHS, specifically stated that the Coast Guard would transfer completely intact, with all mission areas, authorities, capabilities, and assets. We are the same Coast Guard, now on a new team.

For us, being on the DHS team greatly facilitates our operations, since now many of the key federal agencies involved in those operations are all within DHS. With our increased emphasis on homeland security missions, we are now America's Shield of Freedom.

From my perspective, there are five key factors to our success in these historic events:

1. the military character of our Service;
2. the multi-mission capability embedded in our cutters, aircraft, boats, systems, and people;

3. investments we in the sea services have made to interoperability and jointness;
4. our transfer to the Department of Homeland Security, which strengthened both our partnerships with the other DHS agencies, as well as those with other federal, state, and local agencies; and
5. most importantly, the hard work, integrity, professionalism, and adaptability of our people.

Tonight we focus on some of those Coast Guard men and women – the ones performing heroic deeds, as you heard in the awards presentations. W.H. Auden, considered by many to be England’s greatest poet of the 20th Century, once said, “Children should acquire their heroes from fiction”. Now, I’ll be the first to admit I’m no poet, but I must say I couldn’t disagree with Auden more on where to look for heroes – children don’t need fiction to find heroes, they only need to look to Coast Guard men and women. The people we honored tonight for their bravery, their courage, their actions – you don’t need to look any farther than them to find real-life, flesh-and-blood heroes.

And I’m proud to say that these Coast Guardsmen we honored tonight for their exemplary -- and truly heroic --performance of duty . . . well, they’re the tip of the iceberg. There are many examples of sacrifice and heroism that happen every day in the Coast Guard – and have happened throughout the Coast Guard’s history.

But Coast Guard men and women are heroes in every day kinds of ways too. They stand long watches, away from the comforts of home and family, to ensure the safety and security of the people of the United States. They train together relentlessly, so when conditions are tough and others might say “We can’t go there”, the Coast Guard can – and does – “go there” to save a life. They stand always ready to perform the many missions America has entrusted to them. I could not be more proud of these men and women, honored here tonight, and of all Coast Guard men and women.

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It takes the support and dedication of many people to make the Coast Guard what it is – [gesture to table with honorees] obviously those who wear Coast Guard blue and their immediate family and friends. [To honorees' guests:] I'm glad to see so many family and friends of those we honored tonight were able to join us. Thank you for your daily support of these Coast Guard heroes.

But I want to end with a heartfelt thank you to another group of supporters – the Coast Guard Foundation. We would not be as strong as we are if were not for the continuous support and dedication of the Foundation to our Service.

Our Service members benefit every day from the generosity of the Coast Guard Foundation. Your many good works touch the lives of Coast Guard men and women throughout the Service.

This past year, the Foundation has contributed well over \$500,000 to better the lives of those serving their country in the Coast Guard. 500,000 is just a number – granted, a very large number, but let me break that number down into what it really means for that Seaman far from home for the first time or that Petty Officer serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Foundation's generosity means that, among other things:

- The Cutter POLAR STAR now has a distance learning center
- LORAN Station Tok (Alaska) has a new ATV
- Station Neah Bay and Coast Guard Island's gym floors are refinished
- Over 200 new bicycles were distributed to numerous Coast Guard units for their people
- Station Michigan City has a new fitness building
- Playgrounds at Station Fire Island, Group Atlantic City, Group Humboldt Bay, and Base San Juan have new equipment

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- 30,000 enlisted men and women received pre-paid phone cards from the Foundation over the holidays
- \$20,000 went in direct support to our Coast Guard men and women serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom in the Mediterranean and Persian Gulfs.
- And the list could go on and on!

As you see, the Foundation betters the lives of Coast Guard men and women everywhere they serve.

The greatest asset of any organization is its people. And by their support of Coast Guard people, the Foundation contributes to our successes. We've honored some of those successes tonight – these Coast Guard heroes.

Thank you for coming tonight and thank you for your constant support. Semper Paratus!