

As delivered

Admiral Thomas Collins
Joshua James Keeper Award Presentation
Station Point Allerton
20 November 03

Distinguished guests, good morning: everyone, thank you for such a warm welcome. This is a warm and comfortable feeling. This is about togetherness. It's great to be back in New England – I grew up not far from here. It's great to be back in the small boat community, even if only for the day.

[Recognize VIPs]

Let me add my thanks to the Hull Lifesaving Museum – including their Executive Director, Lory Newmyer. We will be holding our reception at the museum afterwards and it'll be a terrific opportunity to see some of the goodies you have over there. The museum is in the old Point Allerton U.S. Life Saving Station, whose first keeper, as you heard, was Joshua James, so you'll get the chance to see his Station and learn a little more about his history.

This ceremony this morning is all about celebrating a tradition of selfless service to the maritime community . . . and the memory of Joshua James as you heard from Master Chief Bowen serves an incredibly perfect focal point for such a celebration.

In other communities within the Coast Guard – afloat and aviation – we honor the longevity and outstanding performance of their specialists with

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an Ancient Mariner and Ancient Albatross awards, longstanding awards. We're closing the loophole here. It is fitting that we similarly honor our Boat Forces community, whose men and women are ensuring safe and secure boat operations, across all Coast Guard missions.

It is important for us as an organization to recognize the performance of our best people. It is also important to recognize and celebrate our core competency areas and Boat Forces certainly fit that bill. This is an opportunity to recognize not only Master Chief Downey, but for every Boat Forces person to share in this recognition of their community in two ways: with the Keeper Award and with the Boat Forces Insignia. Our Boat Forces have capably, honorably, and often heroically served this nation for over 213 years -- and they're even more relevant today than ever before in history. Coast Guard boats and crews are essential to this nation's maritime security and safety. We have over 1700 boats and 9700 people operating from over 300 locations in our service. We're the world's largest public safety and security boat operations. These men and women go in harm's way as we know very well in this room, to save lives, to protect our natural resources, to prevent illegal drugs and migrants from entering our country, and to keep our homeland secure. We recognize the importance of our boat forces professionals and the missions they perform and the competencies that are required to do their job. Accordingly, especially in the last 4-5 years, we've invested a significant amount of resources in this particular competency set:

- We've added over 900 billets to stations and groups around the country
- We added professional development to ensure our people are the best-trained:

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- We have new specialized Boatswain's Mate and coxswain training at Yorktown – as a matter of fact, in a couple months, we'll have our first Response Boat – Small Coxswain school at Yorktown.
- For our Boatswain Mate strikers, we've contracted with the STAR Center in Fort Lauderdale for piloting and navigation training aimed specifically at them – this is targeted training for them.
- We now have boat training teams for non-standard boats that go out to the units and train the crews.
- We've increased our Personal Protection Equipment – a high priority from my perspective -- budget from \$4.4M in 2002 to \$10.6M recurring in 2004 to outfit our men and women with the required survival equipment. It's a high, high priority.
- We've awarded a \$14.5M contract to purchase 700 Response Boats – Small over the next 7 years
- We'll be adding 180 Response Boats – Medium to replace our aging Utility Boats, providing a faster, more capable multi-mission platform.
- We're just about through rolling out our MLB fleet.

Our Boat Forces community has made a substantial portion of the Coast Guard's cherished history over the past 213 years. And with this level of investment and reinvestment in them, they'll continue to make that kind of great history for us and the nation.

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When looking for a name for this new Boat Forces Award, naming it after our most notable lifesaver, Joshua James, was certainly an obvious choice. This was not brain surgery – this was a clear and natural choice. The basics of eligibility for the award are that the awardee must be an example of our core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty; must have a minimum of 10 years service in the Boat Forces community, of which a minimum of 5 years be in command; and must have qualified as a coxswain on one of several small boats. It is not just a longevity award. It is not just who's around the longest. It is who has senior service, accumulated service, and exemplifies the core values of our Service.

Well, Master Chief Downey was an obvious choice as the first recipient of the Joshua James Keeper Award. He has served longer as an Officer-in-Charge, in command of small boat stations, than any other Coast Guardsman on active duty – a total of 17 years! In addition, he first qualified as a coxswain in 1969 and he has over 20 years in the Boat Forces community! And he is the embodiment of our core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.

Master Chief Downey has had an exceptional career and we in the Coast Guard are lucky that he picked us to join. Those of you in the First District are especially lucky to have Master Chief Downey, since he's one of those guys who's managed to spend his entire career in the First District. I thought John xxxx had that record. The only time we got him out of "D1" was when we sent him to Boot Camp and a TAD stint here and there.

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He joined the Coast Guard in 1966, and after boot camp, reported to the CGC CASCO in Boston, then went to our Air Station in Salem, MA. I might have run into you there, Jack. I was a new Ensign on VIGILANT and that's where they sent Landing Signal Officers. It was after the Air Station that Master Chief began his career in the Boat Forces community with his assignment to "PJ" -- Station Point Judith. As he continued to rise in the ranks, he transferred to the 95-foot cutter, CAPE GEORGE, out of New Bedford, MA, then he transferred to the Reserves in 1970, drilling out of Station Point Judith in Rhode Island. In 1978, we got him back on active duty when we recalled him, to fill his first Officer-in-Charge billet, at Station Point Judith and then he reported on board cutter CHASE, out of Boston. Then Master Chief Downey began a string of five – count 'em, five -- Officer-in-Charge assignments in a row: Station Woods Hole; Cutter TOWLINE, in Bristol, Rhode Island; Station Chatham; Station Brant Point in Nantucket; and finally, back to "PJ".

The Coast Guard Academy is currently benefiting from Master Chief Downey's expertise, as he is now assigned as an Instructor in the Academy's Command and Operations School. What a tremendously good fit that is: if there's something Master Chief Downey knows, and knows well, it's Command and it's Operations. I rest comfortably, knowing the Coast Guard's future COs and OICs are reaping the benefits of Master Chief Downey's knowledge and experience, and shaping and molding. And Master Chief Downey will again transfer this summer to take command of his seventh Coast Guard unit, the cutter HAMMERHEAD, out of Woods Hole.

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With the Coast Guard transferring to the Department of Homeland Security this year, Master Chief is one of a few who can say they were on active duty in the Coast Guard under three different departments. Are you really that old, Master Chief? First, Treasury, then Transportation and now, of course, Homeland Security.

There's one comment I should also offer about Master Chief and this is from Admiral Jack Lennon, retired, who sent me an email, but couldn't attend the ceremony. He obviously served with Master Chief on a number of occasions. His son was in the Coast Guard at one of our stations and his son had a mishap while on liberty which left a lasting physical impairment. So, Admiral Lennon had a very personal stake with how stations were run and he offered the following thought: he said, based on his personal experience and his service experience, he always applied a maybe less-than-objective standard during all his command assignments and when assessing the performance of his station keepers. It goes something like this: "Would I want to turn over my young son or daughter to serve under this individual – to have him or her be part of their maturing process; would I expect them to learn skills that would prevent them from injury or death in the performance of their duties; would I expect them to complete such a tour bigger and better, more mature than when they reported. And my top-of-the-line choice, having looked at more than a hundred such officers in charge, is Jack Downey." That's quite a tribute.

Now, through this legendary experience, Jack, you benefited from a very strong family and we have that family here today in force and that's terrific. We have wife, Judith, five children, Jennifer, Heather, Shawn,

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Ryan, and Rebecca, and their three grandchildren, Jayson, Justin, and Talha. Thank you all for being with us and thank you for supporting your husband, your father, and your grandfather – and thank you for sharing him with us for all these years.

The Joshua James Keeper Award is an award that comes with some duties, Master Chief. You will carry the namesake of Captain Joshua James throughout the remainder of your active duty career. Just as Captain Joshua James kept watch at the U.S. Life-Saving Station here at Point Allerton over 100 years ago, I charge you with keeping watch over the Coast Guard's boat operations to ensure our Service's traditional professionalism remains intact. And cut me no slack. Keep me honest, that I'm making the right decisions and the making the right investment in this core competency. As the "ancient keeper", you will attend official ceremonies that involve our Boat Force community and share your experience and wisdom with those who are attempting to follow in your footsteps by speaking at our Coxswain, Surfman, and Officer-in-Charge courses. I know all of you who have the chance to hear his words on these occasions will be the better for it.

Now it's time to pin the decoration on the Master Chief, so, Master Chief, would you please join me? And Ms. Newmyer, would you please help me?