

**CG Veterans Day Speech  
11 November 2003  
CG Memorial, Arlington Cemetery  
Admiral Thomas Collins**

**Thank you, Master Chief for your kind introduction. I am deeply honored to be hosting today's event as we gather to recognize and remember our Coast Guard veterans. I'd like to extend a warm welcome and thank you to all the Coast Guard personnel who are in attendance, and to their families and friends. Secretary Ridge, thank you for joining us.**

**Other acknowledgements ...**

**Veterans' Day is both a somber and joyful celebration for all Americans. We honor the men and women who have given of their time, youth, strength, endurance, and family separation to serve their country. We pay profound tribute to the men and women who have given the ultimate sacrifice, their lives, to secure the safety and freedom of our nation and of the world. Finally, we stand together to embrace and celebrate the dedication and valor of the Coast Guard men and women of today, active and reserve, who are standing watch**

**around the world, linked to this proud legacy, as we fight the global war on terrorism and secure the safety of our homeland.**

**Here at Arlington Cemetery, we gather before a memorial that honors the actions of those Coast Guardsmen during World War I, specifically, the crews of the SENECA and the TAMPA. But we are here to honor more than just the crews of these two vessels. We are here to remember every Coast Guard man and woman who served in defense of our great country over the years.**

**The Coast Guard has deep roots and great breadth with combatant exploits dating back to the first decade of the new nation ...through each and every war ... to the diligent endurance of our cutters and crews deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom: BOUTWELL, DALLAS, and WALNUT, WRANGELL, ADAK, AQUIDNECK, BARANOF, GRAND ISLE, BAINBRIDGE, PEA ISLAND AND KNIGHT ISLAND ... Port Security Units 305, 309, 311 and 313...and our two Patrol Boat Support Squadron Staffs.**

**We know that, collectively, peace and wartime contributions have been defining moments for both our Coast**

**Guardsmen and our service. Those challenges brought out the best in them and provided the rich legacy of service that is the U.S. Coast Guard.**

**Last month many of us stood together on this hallowed ground as we sorrowfully and proudly brought home one of our heroes, LT Jack Columbus Rittichier, United States Coast Guard. LT Rittichier embodied moral integrity and dauntless valor, dedicating his life to the safety and security of others. In two months in 1968, while serving with the Air Force in Vietnam, he made several daring rescues of fellow Army and Marine pilots. His last rescue attempt was of a downed Marine pilot. Confronted with intense, accurate hostile fire, LT Rittichier and his U.S. Air Force crew established a hover over injured First Lieutenant Walter R. Schmidt, Jr, USMC, and persisted in the rescue attempt until their aircraft was shot down. All aboard were killed in action and missing until their recent discovery. LT Rittichier epitomizes the proud legacy of the men and women of our Armed Forces, who place themselves in harms' way every day, in the service of their country, and the security of the world.**

**We are clearly proud of the service of the Coast Guard in the wars and conflicts of our nation. We also cherish the many peacetime activities and heroes who too have risked their lives so others may live. So today, we remember both our combat and peacetime veterans; those who have served for over 213 years to guarantee our freedoms and security, to protect and save lives and property, and to secure our marine resources and environment. They have shaped the character and principles of our service. We can best offer tribute to them by our re-dedication to our values of honor, respect, and devotion to duty. Our competency and success as America's Shield of Freedom has everything to do with their selfless service.**

**And now we are writing history again as we contribute to the Global War on Terrorism and the need to secure our homeland. I can assure you that this Veterans' Day finds the Coast Guard vigilant, resolute, united and committed to the defense of the homeland and our fellow countrymen.**

**We are also very fortunate to have a service secretary who understands the contributions and significance of the Coast Guard's legacy. He has been the leader in directing the comprehensive national strategy to strengthen the United**

**States homeland.** A dedicated public servant, an army veteran who served as an infantry staff sergeant in Vietnam, earning the Bronze Star for valor, he is the Secretary of Homeland Security and Secretary of the Coast Guard ... Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the honorable Tom Ridge.