

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Remarks

to the

Ancient Albatross Change of Watch

Coast Guard Air Station Astoria, OR

July 14, 2011

Shipmates,

It's truly an honor and a privilege to be here to preside over the Ancient Albatross Change of Watch and honor two of our best shipmates who have spent their careers working "over" and "above" the water.

I'd like to give a special welcome to members of the Order of the Pterodactyl also known as the Coast Guard Aviation Association. They are to be commended for their sponsorship of this award and their efforts to preserve Coast Guard Aviation history for future generations.

Welcome to the Blore family --Vera, David and Anna.

And to the Currier family, Mary Jane, unfortunately sons Benjamin and Andrew couldn't join us...but we are thinking of them.

I am so pleased so many of you are able to join us on this special occasion.

I also want to thank the crew of AIR STATION Astoria for preparing their hanger to host this ceremony -- I personally would have preferred a location where I could see or smell the ocean -- but being in Astoria, I understand the appeal of having a roof overhead...

Today, we change the Ancient Albatross watch from RADM Gary Blore -- Coast Guard Aviator number 1850 -- to VADM John Currier -- Aviator number 1877.

As the Gold Ancient Mariner, I can tell you that the change of watch for any of our "Ancients" is always a special occasion -- but this year's ceremony is especially meaningful for YOU -- our aviators and air crews -- as YOU join our sister services in celebrating 100 years of naval aviation.

Today, YOU fly a broad range of challenging missions --from search and rescue to arctic maritime domain awareness patrols. And, two of our aviators have reached heights we on earth can only dream of, flying in the space shuttles as NASA astronauts.

In just 5 years from now – 2016 – we'll celebrate the centennial of Coast Guard Aviation, commemorating the courage of pioneers like CDR Elmer Stone, Coast Guard Aviator Number 1 and CDR Frank Erickson the first Coast Guard helicopter pilot (Aviator number 32).

But what many people do not know is that our service's role in aviation history reaches even a few years further back. Indeed, our service played a vital role in the birth of aviation itself. Everyone knows about Wilber and Orville Wright – and the history they made on December 17, 1903 in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

But, do you know how they know this? One of the reasons is because Surfman John T. Daniels of the U.S. Life-Saving Service was there – he took what is the most famous picture in all of aviation history – Orville Wright lying prone as the Wright Flyer first powered itself into the air –

And, do you know how the Wright brothers were able to accomplish this historic feat? It was because the men from lifesaving station Kill Devil Hills were serving as the first ground crew in aviation history!

The Kill Devil Hills lifesaving station crew did everything from assisting with the assembly of the Wright flyer—including sewing the fabric onto the wings to delivering the Wright brothers' mail...these surfman were there at the beginning of aviation – I would argue they were the first ones to put the NAVAL into and in front of aviation...

The story of the Kill Devil Hills surfman is an important part of aviation history – Coast Guard history – and really our Nation's history that's largely been forgotten – or lost to the winds of time – and today is simply unknown to many of the present generation. But it's our duty – YOUR duty – to preserve this history.

That's precisely one of the reasons why we have an Ancient Albatross – and Change of Watch Ceremonies...

This Change of Watch ceremony provides a link to the past – from the Coast Guardsmen who supported and pioneered naval aviation to those of you assembled here today, who continue to fly our challenging maritime missions...

For me, there are three words that symbolize this important link... Tradition, Seamanship—and Character...

And you can certainly substitute Airmanship for Seamanship --

Now, I did not come up with these words on my own. When I was serving as Captain of the EAGLE I was looking for a way to stress the importance of learning our history – and celebrating our rich heritage as the Nation's oldest continuous maritime service – to my cadets, officer candidates and crew.

And I found these three words staring right at me – Tradition – Seamanship – or Airmanship – and Character are emblazoned on the Eagle’s crest.

Tradition. Traditions are important. Service in the Coast Guard is not a job, it’s a vocation. A calling. No matter what job you perform in our service – whether you’re serving as a cutterman, and aviator or aircrewman, a marine inspector or otherwise, it is vital to recognize and protect your traditions...

Traditions bond you with the Coast Guardsmen who have gone before you – and knowing them allows you to carry our traditions into the future – and pass them down to the next generation.

Doing so will infuse you with your profession’s values – its culture – and it will fill you with a sense of duty. This is how you – how we – honor our profession.

Seamanship – or Airmanship. Every profession that I know of requires learning basic skills – you have to understand wind, waves and weather – and develop the skills to manage them – to ensure routine actions become second nature – so that when the SAR alarm sounds on a stormy night your crew works instinctively – as a team. Mastering the basics allows you to take on greater challenges – and become leaders in your field.

Character. Good Character is a trait that must be nurtured. Character encompasses your work ethic, your core values and your sense of duty. Proving to yourself that you can succeed in challenging circumstances is the key to building the confidence that will enable you to lead. It’s the essence of character. The more you succeed at difficult things, the easier it becomes to handle and lead through them.

The Ancient Albatross is one of our most cherished traditions – observing this tradition **preserves our identity** – it is a **sign of respect** to experience, airmanship and seniority – and it celebrates our heritage as a unique maritime service that pioneered naval aviation.

Indeed, the Albatross has often been thought by sailors, fisherman and poets to serve as a guide. An Ancient Albatross – much like a good Chief Petty Officer – can mentor. They can “hangar fly” – ensuring that our crews are on course to proficiency.

And an Ancient Albatross can exemplify character – and its building blocks including wisdom, knowledge and experience.

During RADM Blore’s watch as Ancient Albatross, this is precisely what he has done. During one of the most challenging times in our aviation community, he made it his mission to travel to many of our aviation commands, work with our crews and pilots, and refocus on airmanship and safety.

And, as the most senior aviator in our service, VADM Currier has been right by his side – serving in a similar capacity – to ensure our pilots and crews continue to be known as the best maritime search and rescue pilots in the world.

I thank RADM Blore for his inspirational service – he can take pride in a duty well performed.

As the aviators flight jacket, scarf, goggles and cap are passed, I know VADM Currier – along with all of YOU will stand a taut watch – to ensure that our traditions are continued, our airmanship is honed, and our character nurtured. YOU are now the custodians of our rich naval aviation heritage...

I am proud to share this sacred duty with YOU...

Semper Paratus....