

As Delivered

Admiral Thomas H. Collins
Change of Watch Ceremony for
Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard
October 10, 2002

Good morning! Thank you all for being here today. It's a delight to be here with you, and a pleasure to welcome our many distinguished guests.

[Recognize Secretary Mineta, Deputy Secretary Jackson, ADM Gracey, ADM Kime, ADM Loy, and other visiting dignitaries.]

I'm honored to preside at this ceremony to mark the Change of Watch for the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

This is a ceremony of transition. We have come here today not only to witness a transition of leadership and responsibility from one person to another. We are also here to witness the momentary transition of the past to the future.

On the wall of my outer office, a replica of the Olympic Torch is proudly displayed as a token of appreciation from the Olympic Committee for the Coast Guard's support and participation in the Winter Games this year in Salt Lake City.

The torch is really very striking in its design. The upper half of the torch is silver, burnished to give the appearance of age. The lower half is stainless steel, polished to a brilliant shine. It was designed that way to symbolically represent both the past and the future.

The torch was designed to be carried in the middle, where the burnished silver melds into polished steel. That way, each of those who had the honor of carrying the torch from Atlanta to Salt Lake City became a momentary bridge between past and future. The past and the future met symbolically in each hand as the torch was passed from runner to runner.

Of course, the flame of the torch is intended to give off light. Its purpose is to represent the light of understanding, unity, and harmony among the people of every nation.

Such a light has never been more important to the world.

Such a light has never been more important to our nation.

Such a light has never been more important to our service, as we seek the wisdom and strength needed to continue providing for the safety and security of the American people.

As Delivered

I doubt that it comes as news to any of you that the Coast Guard has never been more essential to the safety and security of the American public than it is today.

The past year has been one of great difficulty and enormous challenge for many reasons, but most of all because we have been called to take the lead in providing maritime security to our homeland.

This is a season of transition. I believe that this season of transition will be long recognized in future years as historic for the Coast Guard.

That future presents both challenges and opportunities.

But we have many reasons to be very optimistic about our future.

Some of those reasons have to do with a new integrated system of ships, boats, and aircraft that will soon provide the capability that we need for the coming challenges just over the horizon.

Some of the reasons will be found in a new communications system that will soon help link those platforms together along our shores.

Some of those reasons have to do with a growth in resources and people, both this year and in years to come.

Some of the reasons for optimism have to do with America's renewed appreciation for the enduring capabilities of our maritime, military, and multi-mission service, and for the clear example of stewardship that we have set.

But mainly, our reason for optimism rests in our people.

And if that is true—which it undoubtedly is—then we have no greater need than the need for leadership...leadership at every level...leadership that is deeply concerned with the well-being of our people.

We need the kind of leadership that Master Chief Vince Patton has provided for the past four years.

Many of you know that Master Chief Patton was one of those who carried the Olympic Torch through the streets of Washington, DC, last December, as it traveled on its way to Salt Lake City. It was a great honor for him to be chosen to be one of those torchbearers.

And you also know that he has also been a torchbearer for our service on many occasions, both here and around the world.

As Delivered

He has carried the torch of understanding, harmony, and unity among the diverse people of our service. He has held the torch of our heritage high with pride.

As our highest ranking enlisted member, he has demonstrated exceptional leadership. His reputation is renowned throughout the Coast Guard and among the other four military services.

He is widely respected for his diligent work in gaining better parity with the Department of Defense, regarding pay and allowances for our people.

He has been an ardent champion for the quality of life of Coast Guard members.

He has relentlessly taken every opportunity to raise the visibility of our service, and to preserve its heritage.

He has run the race, and he has finished with honor. We thank him for his devoted service as the eighth Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

Master Chief Patton, front and center, please. I'd like to ask Secretary Mineta to please join us at the podium, too.

[Present award to Master Chief Patton.]

Thank you, Master Chief.

And now we look to his relief, Master Chief Frank Welch, with great expectations.

He comes highly recommended as the former Officer-in-Charge of the Cutter *Sockeye*, out in Bodega Bay, California. He has been a gold-badge Command Master Chief for two flag officers, and he has a long history of sea-time as a quartermaster, having served in six cutters over the past twenty-two years.

For the next four years, he will have the challenge of carrying the light of understanding and unity throughout our service. I know that he is up to the challenge.

He understands the importance of our commitment to people. He sees the need to improve our readiness. And he knows the value of good stewardship.

Master Chief Welch has gained my full confidence that he will lead with integrity, that he will communicate the needs of our service clearly, and that he will do everything in his power to accomplish necessary change within continuity. These are vital qualities for the next Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard.

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Master Chief, I am deeply grateful for your willingness to step forward and take on this very important position as an advisor to me and as an advocate for our people. It is a real pleasure to have you, your wife, Mari Lynn, and your entire family aboard.

The time has now come for you to take the torch as it is passed to you and hold it high, so that it might continue to shine for all to see.

Thank you all very much. Semper Paratus!

It is now my distinct pleasure to introduce a gentleman who—apart from being very well known as the Coast Guard's Service Secretary—also has the distinction of being an Honorary Master Chief.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honored to present to you the Secretary of Transportation, the Honorable Norman Y. Mineta.