

**Purpose:** Provide keynote address at CPOA Graduation.

**Strategic Intent:** Engage the service.

**Duration:** 10-15 minutes.

## **OPENING**

**[Extemporaneous Welcome]**

**So great to be here!**

**First, to all the family and friends that could make it tonight – welcome! I know many couldn't be here, but to all the spouses at home and present, you are so important to the overall success of our Service. When your Chief deploys – maybe to respond in wake of disaster like the hurricanes in the Gulf... maybe to man the front lines against the vicious criminals who would smuggle people and deadly drugs to our shores... or maybe even to Antarctica on our Nation's only heavy icebreaker – you are left to manage the home front alone. Make no mistake, you serve right alongside your Chief.**

**And whether at home or deployed, you are always their sounding board and support. And if you're like my wife, Fran, you're sometimes the only one that's there to keep your Chief in line... So, thank you for what you do.**

## **THE ANCHOR**

One of the most treasured parts of my uniform isn't the stars on my shoulders, it's this *[show anchor]*... my anchor, worn closest to my heart. The different parts of it – the anchor, the shield, and the chain – each have their own meaning. But together, for me, it represents the strength of our Service. Our Service is nothing without our people and it is the Anchor – the Chief – that is their mentor, their teacher, their guide. It is the Chief that grows our Coast Guard workforce.

And we are the world's best Coast Guard because of our people... because of our Chiefs.

## **HURRICANES**

Your class motto says “the anchor holds in spite of the storm,” so let me talk a little about the storm. Or, should I say, storms...

Our Nation just faced 3 historic hurricanes. Harvey dropped 52 inches of rain on Texas – the wettest tropical hurricane on record in the contiguous U.S.

**And then came Irma. The U.S. had never been hit by two Category 4 or stronger hurricanes in the same season – but, we faced two in less than two weeks.**

**And then, without a minute to breathe, Maria.**

**Our men and women were there for it all and saved nearly 12,000 lives.**

**Back to back to back... working in miserable conditions – sleeping on cots in malls... hours on end... and many of these folks were facing their own crushing losses – their spouses left home to evacuate the kids, the pets, the grandparents.**

**And I know, when I travel around people put their best foot forward... I get that I'm not likely to get the whole truth – that's what my Chiefs are for! But, I'll tell you, to a person – the morale was high.**

**There is gratification in the mission. They were making a difference. They were saving lives. Despite the hardships – working to their limits – they were all in.**

**And I'll tell you where I *didn't* find the Chiefs – they weren't sipping coffee in the mess. I actually have this great shot – it's up on Facebook – it's of Master Chief Wesley Powell**

cranking the wrench on the tail of a 65. It's indicative of where the Chiefs were everywhere I traveled... On the watch floor... cranking the wrenches...

These Chiefs sent their folks away to rest. They were letting – maybe more accurately *making* – their people take a knee.

## FATIGUE

That's the character of our Service. The character of our people. That service before self is in our DNA could not have been more apparent.

But, as the storms pass... as the members that deployed head home and as our impacted members start to put their lives back together, that is where the stress and fatigue will start to show.

I've had a lot of conversations back in D.C. about this.

Master Chief Petty Officer Cantrell is one of my most trusted advisors. He's my first stop, right along with the Chaplain of the Coast Guard, to get the ground truth about the health of our workforce. And I was getting indicators even before the hurricanes hit that of our workforce is stretched thin.

**As Chiefs – this is where you come in. It comes down to duty to people... knowing your people... taking care of your people.**

## **KNOW YOUR PEOPLE**

**You can't know your people if you never leave the Chief's mess. True leaders don't only crank the wrenches during hurricanes.**

**About a year ago, I presided over the Joshua James Ancient Keeper Change of Watch at Station Saginaw River. Our last Ancient Keeper, Master Chief Terry Lathrop, blew me away.**

**As the OIC, he logged over 800 underway hours. He was out with his people, every day, coaching and training – truly getting to know his people because he was right there next to them. He empowered his people. Motivated them. Inspired them. And, he ensured he ran an inclusive station.**

**Follow that example. Or, better yet, think back to when you were a non-rate – which Chief inspired you? It was the Chief that took the time to know you and care about you as a person. I need you to be that Chief. The Coast Guard needs you to be that Chief.**

## **TEACH YOUR PEOPLE**

**It is your job to grow our next generation of leaders. And you are *the* experts in your fields as well. So, take the time to impart your wisdom.**

**You've got a talented and motivated group of people who will work for you. On Friday, I'm headed back to Cape May for Week 5 of my Recruit Class Mentoring. I mean – what an incredible group of individuals. Well spoken. Hungry to learn. And eager to get out in the field to learn from you!**

## **CONCLUSION**

**I bet, after being out of the field, learning and refining your leadership skills for over 3 weeks, you are almost as eager to get back out there and lead as those recruits are.**

**But before you do, tonight, enjoy yourselves! You are the trusted leaders and mentors of our workforce and you should be proud where you are and what you do for the Coast Guard and your Nation.**

**So, a toast! To the Chiefs Mess!**

**God Bless. And, *Semper Paratus!***