

Pearl Harbor Memorial Ceremony
CGC TANEY – Baltimore, MD – 07 Dec 2008

December 7th, Pearl Harbor Day, serves as a solemn reminder of the ultimate sacrifice American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Coast Guardsmen have made to defend our nation, protect its citizens and preserve our freedoms. Over 2,400 people died on the day that “shall live in infamy”.

We stand here onboard the Coast Guard cutter TANEY – the last surviving warship still afloat after the attack – to confirm that those men and women did not die in vain. Their legacy continues to inspire us even after 67 years.

It is an honor to conduct this ceremony in Baltimore – a city with rich patriotic traditions. Just across the harbor back in 1814, Francis Scott Key watched the British bombardment of Fort McHenry. He was inspired by a rather simple sight – our Nation’s flag. As we know, the flag carried much more significance that night. As the smoke cleared, our flag continued to wave defiantly, embodying the will of the American people, and it motivated him to pen our National Anthem.

The most inspirational sights are sometimes the most simple. This ship is probably seen by thousands of people each year but are they aware of its significance or is it just another floating museum? Just like the flag flying over Fort McHenry, this ship is much more than it appears. TANEY is part of America’s story. Its decks hold stories of courage, dedication, and perseverance. This ship is home to the siren call that urged the Greatest Generation to take its place in history.

It was also heard by Chief Petty Officer Allen – my father – who lied about his age to enlist in the Coast Guard and defend his country.

That siren call can still be heard today – by a new generation of patriots who are willing to give so much so that others may be free. We just need to listen.

Any sailor will tell you that a ship is a living creature. If you listen closely, you can hear this one tell the story of December 7th, 1941. What started as a peaceful morning at Pier 6 in Honolulu Harbor, ended as one of the most tragic days in American history. Despite our losses, it was a day where common people performed with uncommon valor – As Ronald

Reagan once said: *“The willingness of some to give their lives so that others might live never fails to evoke in us a sense of wonder and mystery.”*

Sixty-seven years ago, the words *“Air Raid, Pearl Harbor. This is no drill.”* echoed throughout this ship at 0755. The skipper, Commander Louis Olson, immediately recalled his crew and ordered them to General Quarters. As Japanese planes swarmed over Honolulu and Pearl Harbor, TANEY’s guns were ablaze. At one point, the attackers targeted the power plant near TANEY’s berth but were repelled when the crew threw up a curtain of lead that drove them off. In Olson’s words: *“The officers and crew bore themselves well although most members had no training except drills.”*

TANEY’s aviation officer, Lieutenant Frank Erickson, was the duty officer at nearby Ford Island when the first Japanese planes arrived. He took control of the aircraft control tower and placed machine guns on the roof. From that vantage point, he could see the entire assault unfolding before him. His lasting memory of that morning was watching a long line of oil soaked men, many wounded and being helped by shipmates, coming ashore.

Nobody expected to have to fight on a Sunday morning, but fight they did. Coast Guardsman alongside their Navy and Army brethren stood tall – in defiance of withering fire and overwhelming odds. Like their predecessors at Fort McHenry, they suffered mightily but their spirit never wavered.

The attack on Pearl Harbor ignited tremendous pride, courage, and determination among common Americans and motivated the Greatest Generation to accomplish more than they thought they were capable of. It still motivates us today.

More than a Coast Guard cutter, the TANEY connects the Greatest and the Current generation – it is both a reminder of past sacrifices and a promise for a better tomorrow. As the last floating warship from Pearl Harbor, TANEY’s holds are filled with enough inspiration to fuel future generations.

It is the simple things in life that inspire great works and push us forward. A parent’s love, a crimson-hued sunrise, and this humble Coast

Guard cutter – these are all simple items but they contain much more than the eye can see.

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the veterans who served at Pearl Harbor, throughout World War II and all of the conflicts that followed. They fought an unrelenting enemy, endured terrible hardships and overcame tremendous obstacles. They were inspired not by grand strategic concepts but rather by simple ideas like protecting their shipmate or their buddy in the next foxhole.

Our current soldiers, marines, sailors and Coast Guard Guardians have been influenced by the courage of those who came before them and now they serve to make the world a better place for our children.

This continuing legacy is handed down from one generation to the next – from the sailors onboard TANEY and the other ships in Pearl Harbor to the newest boot camp graduates. It is the reason we serve, it is our commitment to our fellow Americans, and it is why we are willing to sacrifice as soldiers, sailors, airman and Coast Guard Guardians.

President Eisenhower envisioned this enduring spirit when he said: *“...let us solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores, to preserve our heritage of freedom, and let us reconsecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace so that their efforts shall not have been in vain.”*

For all veterans past and present, thank you for your service and let God’s simple Grace guide you home.