

Remarks of VADM Sally Brice-O'Hara
Change of Watch
Vice Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard
24 May 2010
Ft. McNair, Washington, DC

Suddenly these shoulder boards feel a little heavier!

Good morning Secretary Mineta, Deputy Secretary Lute, Admiral Allen, distinguished guests, men and women of the U. S. Coast Guard. Thank you for joining us to witness this change of watch, and, more importantly, to celebrate Vice Admiral Pekoske's distinguished career.

Dave, during your time in uniform, the Coast Guard has undergone many changes; for the better I would add. I credit your vision and leadership for helping secure the Coast Guard's reputation as the premier maritime service it is today.

Michele, Kristin, the new college graduate, Corrine, Jillian, and Matt, who is on duty as the new Commanding Officer of USCGC Tern, you are right to smile proudly. Dave adeptly balanced his roles of military officer, husband and father, but I also know that it took a good deal of Pekoske family support and sacrifice. Thank you for sharing him with us and congratulations on his - and your - retirement.

This is a tremendous day, here on the National Defense University's beautiful campus, with the Band's wonderful music and song, the precision of our attendants, the food you will soon enjoy, our units as a backdrop. I appreciate the effort by so many working behind the scenes as well as very visibly to make this occasion perfect.

And, I am delighted to be here. Truthfully, I cannot say that I ever expected to become the Vice Commandant – but I have always wanted to continue serving the Coast Guard for as long as I am deemed useful. What an honor! Admiral Papp, thank you for your confidence. I will dedicate my full focus to working for and with you to meet the demands on our Service in these challenging times.

I would not be ready for this position without the guidance and effort of incredible women and men, many in this audience, others not here, all who deserve acknowledgment and gratitude. First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my family and extended family, thank you. And of course, a multitude of mentors, friends, and colleagues who helped me succeed.

My career started with the favorable decision of an OCS selection board in 1974; the president of that board, CDR Milt Thompson remains one of my strongest cheerleaders, and he is here on the front row, thank you sir. Classmates from OCS 2-75, there were only 70 of us, yet we proved our endurance. And thirty years ago, I gained lifelong friends when I married into the Academy Class of 1973.

Numerous crewmembers, commanding officers, and chief petty officers - from my early assignments in the Fifth District, Station New London, Station Cape May, Group/Activities Baltimore - all contributed to the operational experience that I needed to lead the Fifth and Fourteenth Districts.

Coworkers at the Academy, Training Center Cape May, Support Center Kodiak, and Headquarters showed me how to garner, manage and allocate resources. I relied on those essential skills then, most recently as Deputy Commandant for Operations, and realize that they will be indispensable to my responsibilities as the Vice Commandant. I am indebted to all of you. Indeed, you are more than teams and co-workers – you are shipmates. I counted on you in the past; I expect to return to you for honest advice and wise counsel.

Some years ago, the Army had a popular slogan, “Be all that you can be.” The greatest challenge facing the U.S. Coast Guard today is to “Be all that we are.”

Our eleven statutory missions are complex, often performed far at sea in a harsh and unforgiving environment little known to the American public we serve. We are military, integral to the strength of our nation’s Armed Forces. As an agency in the Department of Homeland Security, it’s our duty to defend and protect the security and safety of America’s ports, the marine environment and ocean’s resources, as well as the people and commerce transiting our waters. We rescue, we regulate, we enforce. We excel at finessing partnerships, domestic and international, to meet national objectives.

“Be all that we are,” is a huge task, marked by danger and risk whenever a crew is dispatched. Yet, there is far more to the Coast Guard than operational demands and mission support.

At our core are people and families - fathers, mothers, daughters, sons and siblings - dedicated active duty members, patriotic reservists, stalwart civilians, selfless volunteers of the Auxiliary, and faithful retirees. Being what we are includes and extends beyond the workplace. As public servants and family members, we are obligated to perform professionally, efficiently and safely. To do so, we must also recognize the bounds of our capabilities. Mission excellence is a function of people, equipment and fiscal limitations.

As Vice Commandant, I pledge to work my hardest to optimize operations and support, to recapitalize our assets and facilities. Yes, there are budget constraints; I will join with ADM Papp to build a persuasive case for the necessary funding to remain effective and relevant.

Working with the Commandant and our department, I will do all that I can, to make us be all that we are. We are the United States Coast Guard; we value honor, respect and devotion to duty in service to the United States of America. We are Semper Paratus!