

Thank you Jay for that introduction. Man, it is really great to be here today isn't it... What a beautiful day!... How about that police escort we had today? Wasn't it wonderful. Our cities and towns owe a great debt to our men and woman in blue. How about a big round of applause for them?

The last time I was in a police escort, I was in a bullet proof car in Jarkarta, Indonesia. The last time Jerry Mouton was in a police escort was being brought back to the ship by Shore Patrol in Olongapo, Phillipines.

Well, well, isn't this memorial a magnificent tribute to a great ship and her great Sailors... I can not think of a better day than Armed Forces Day to celebrate commissioning this memorial. Teruyo and I feel so privileged to be here at this moment in Ponchatloulou history – not only the ship history, but city's history as well. Thank you for allowing us to be here.

You know folks, as I stand up here and look out at the crowd... The former Sailors... This memorial... And think about what it all means... It reminds me of time when I was stuck in an air terminal, coming back from one of my wonderful Pentagon visits and I found myself listening to a conversation between an old navy Chief Petty Officer and an old Marine Corp Gunny Sergeant... And they are arguing about who had the tougher career.

The Gunny is going on and on how he did 30 years in the Corps, "fought in three of wars. On how right out of boot camp, he hit the beaches of Okinawa and clawed his way up blood soaked sand. He goes on talking about how he took out an entire enemy machine gun nest with a single grenade."... As a sergeant he said, "I fought in Korea alongside General Douglas MacArthur. He talked talked about how he pushed back the enemy inch by bloody inch all the way up to the Chinese border - always under a barrage of artillery and small arms fire.

He then exclaims... **And I quote** - "And finally, as a gunny sergeant, I did three consecutive combat tours in Vietnam. We humped through the mud and razor grass for 14 hours a day, ducking under sniper fire during the day and mortar fire at night." He said "We'd fire until our arms ached and our guns were empty, and then we'd charge the enemy with bayonets!"

Then the Gunny stopped – looks at the old Chief and says "Now that's tough... How 'bout you squid boy???" ... "What do you got?"... Well, at that point the old crusty Chief... not even flinching... looks right at the Gunny Sargent... Squints his eyes... Leans forward and says – "Mmmm, all shore duty, huh?"

When I heard that, I stood up and started singing Anchors Away!... That my friends... Is a United States Sailor and the reason I spent over 30 years wearing that uniform...

So, today, on Armed Forces Day, I am not going to talk much about the history of the ship USS PONCHATOULA. Others will do that... I will not talk about the city that is her namesake because the Mayor is better equipped for that than me... Today I am going to talk about the SAILORS of USS PONCHATOULA... I am going to talk about the Sailors that operated her... Maintained her and ... Fought her...

Although a fighter pilot by trade, I spent 30 years of my career forming a deep love affair with and a deep respect for the underway replenishment fleet of our Navy. Those ships and their crews had the **amazing** ability to combine speed and large cargo capacities to accomplish their extraordinary mission of rapid underway replenishment... And they did it over extended operational periods... in the day... in the night... in the good weather and the bad... They were always there... They were always ready...

As commanding officer of a fighter squadron – I knew full well where our ordnance and gas came from... As the Captain of an Amphibious Ship filled with Marines going into battle... I knew where the beans and the boots came from... As the Captain of the Nuclear Powered Aircraft Carrier USS ENTERPRISE, I spent many hours alongside ships, just like PONCHATOULA. I spent hours getting replenished so that I could quickly take ENTERPRISE and her embarked airwing back up into the North Arabian Gulf so that we could support the ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan...

Little did I know back then, that as a Rear Admiral, I would soon become fully immersed into the world of afloat logistics when I was given command of Logistics Group Western Pacific and Task Force 73. A position that had me responsible for all the U.S. Navy's afloat logistics in the Western Pacific. As Commander Task Force 73, on any given day I had 35 or more logistics ships under my operational command in the Western Pacific. USS PONCHATOULA would have been under my operational command.

It was during that time, that I would always remind my staffs, everyday that amateurs do tactics, but professionals do logistics... I would tell them everyday – it was all about logistics... If you look through history, you will find that most major battles were not lost because of poor tactics, rather they were lost because someone ran out of boots... bullets... beans... or fuel...

But the boots, bullets, beans, and fuel did not miraculously just show up on their own. PONCHATOULA did not miraculously just show up on her own... Someone had to get her there and someone had to make sure she was loaded and ready to deliver... **And then someone had to deliver...**

So, I would be hard pressed right now to talk about Sailors, and in particular the crews that walked and worked the decks of PONCHATOULA, without talking about heroes. Our world is full of so-called heroes... They are in comic books... They are on TV... They are in the movies... They are in the theme parks... They are everywhere right?

But, they are not real heroes... Many of them are imaginary and many of them simply play heroes in a movie or on TV... This memorial represents real life heroes... Admiral Halsey once said "There are no great people, there are only great challenges that ordinary people are forced by circumstances to meet."

Well, I agree with him. You see, US Navy Sailors, past and present all have one uncommon thing in common... They were ordinary people who through focus and commitment, did extraordinary and uncommon things... And made them look easy – every day...

They were ordinary people who made extraordinary sacrifices. They were ordinary people who were incredibly skilled at extraordinary tasks.

Today, through this memorial, we celebrate and pay tribute to these real life heroes. I had the honor and privilege of working with and leading, for 30 years, men and women, just like the Sailors of PONCHATOULA...

Just like Sailors today, PONCHATOULA Sailors were among **America's** greatest commodity and **America's** greatest gift to the free world. Sailors of yesterday are no different than the Sailors of today... They may have fought in different wars... They may have sailed different ships... They may have worn different uniforms... But the differences all end there... The blood, sweat, and tears... The heart and soul of a Sailor, will never change...

It is that blood, sweat, and tears that created that heart and soul that formed a common bond... They came from all different walks of life... Different socioeconomic backgrounds... Different cultures... Different races... But they were all Sailors... They were all very proud United States Navy Sailors...

Today, as we memorialize this ship and her crew, the city of Ponchatoula should be very very proud... There was a time when the people we memorialize here today represented the youth of America... In far off lands and oceans, they represented America's fathers, sons, brothers, uncles... They represented everything that was good and is good about America...

They stood proudly on the decks and deep in the engineering plants of PONCHATOULA... They were the heart and soul of that great warship and for that matter our great Nation.

They were challenged everyday... They were committed to the high ideals and high standards that allowed them to meet those challenges...

These men epitomized the term "Not for self but for country." Their selfless attitudes bred greatness. A greatness that will continue to manifest itself through the legacy of this memorial.

They were the leaders... They were friends and comrades... Sailors of today share a deep respect for them...

The American Flag that will fly on this flag staff was flown by the staff of a very good friend of mine – VADM Robert Thomas. Admiral Thomas now serves as the COMMANDER, U.S. SEVENTH FLEET forward deployed to Yokosuka, Japan. Robert and I were Admirals together in that very same SEVENTH FLEET that PONCHATOUOLA sailed. He was the Submarine guy and I was the Logistics guy.

When I asked him to fly that flag from USS BLUE RIDGE – which is his flagship, he **unhesitatingly** said YES... And his staff made it happen, with the pride and respect this crew and this flag deserve... They said yes, not because they had to... Not because I asked them to... Not because of obligation... They said yes because of their deep respect and great admiration for who this flag was for and for what it represented...

John F. Kennedy once wrote “a single person can make a difference...” The Sailors that sit among you today and those that could not be here, made a huge difference in the lives of many... They made a huge difference in the War in SOUTHEAST ASIA – VIETNAM... They made a difference to the ships and aviators they reloaded. They were each one person who singularly and together did extraordinary things in extraordinary ways....

It was because of them, that each and every American could get up in the morning and thank God they had the honor and privilege to live in our great nation. They ensured the highest degrees of readiness... They adapted.... And they overcame...

They were dedicated to an ideal larger than themselves... They made uncommon sacrifices... To reach common goals... They were men of honor, courage, and commitment... They never let us down... And because of these heroes, America continued to be the land of the free and the home of the brave...

John F. Kennedy once said “I can imagine no more rewarding a career. And any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile, I think can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction: 'I served in the United States Navy.'”

Shipmates, fellow Sailors, crew of USS Ponchatoula... Stand Tall and Stand Proud... Because you served... in the United States Navy... I am proud to be among you... I am proud to stand here and share this common bond with such uncommon people... This memorial will forever be a symbol of your service and of those with whom you have served with...

After I retired, people often ask me what is was that most I missed about the Navy... I would tell them – it wasn't the long cruises, or the night carrier landing... It wasn't the 18 moves my family made... Or the long separation... I told them what I missed most, was the Sailors... It was that common bond with uncommon people...

Ponchatoula Sailors always take great pride that your legacy is forever emblazoned in this memorial... It will forever be a symbol and a reminder of that common bond that you all shared with very uncommon people...

To the city of Ponchatoula, care for this memorial as if it were your children... Because this this memorial will forever be a symbol and reminder to generations to come, that there was once a mighty ship that proudly bore your name for 36 years in the service of our great nation. And that ship was manned by ordinary people doing extraordinary things... Ordinary people brought together by a common bond of uncommon virtues...

May the PONCHATOULA forever sail among fair winds and following seas in the hearts and minds of all those that graced her mighty decks... I am proud to have spoken here today... And I am proud to have called myself – A UNITED STATES NAVY SAILOR for over 30 years.

I thank you... Our Navy thanks you... And our great nation thanks you... God Bless you all... And may God always Bless Our Great Nation – THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.