

Admiral Pat Walsh
Tailhook 2009 – 12 September

Thank you [Rabbit \(RADM Jay Campbell\)](#) for your support and years of service, leadership, and mentorship to naval aviation...we are indebted to you and Faith for all that you have done for us.

Long before my first day in the fleet, or my first night trap in the mighty, venerable, constant noise-variable speed A-7...at a time when my wings of gold glittered in the late summer sunshine in Lemoore...I was an Ensign on the Tail Hook committee. I was part of a group, many years ago, in an earlier life, that arrived early and stayed late at older versions of these reunions, working with and enjoying the company of so many of you. It is special and fun for me to be back with you tonight.

I do not know if it is simply age, failing eyesight, or favorable lighting...but from my perspective up here...many of you have cleaned-up well over the years and look better than I remember.

I started my professional and personal journey with many in this room...and was able to navigate through tough (but typical) career challenges and milestones BECAUSE of the support of many of you. I feel very fortunate, lucky, and grateful for the opportunity to say simply, 'thank you' to so many friends and colleagues for your help along the way and this wonderful reunion.

I have the honor to introduce my father, Jim, and his friend, Barbara, along with my sister, Peggy, and her husband Jess who are with me this evening. My family has been a long time supporter of the Navy...and earned a 'call-sign' along the course of my career. When the Blue Angels witnessed my parents and five brothers/sisters in action with their version of the friends-and-family program at air-shows, the team gave my clan the nickname 'Wally-world,' which seemed to stick after watching the similarities between them and the Grizwalds in the Chevy Chase movie 'Vacation.'

My only regret this evening is that my beautiful and amazing wife, Andy, and kids, Jennifer and Matthew could not attend because of lost school days and the logistics to fly them here from Hawaii.

When I received the invitation for this event, I jumped at the opportunity to join you because I enjoy any occasion to celebrate our heritage, tradition, and service.

I shared this enthusiasm for naval aviation recently with our Secretary of the Navy during a stop-over visit in Hawaii while he was enroute to his first overseas trip – and suggested to him that he attend a Tailhook reunion at some future date.

In the course of that conversation, he listened intently and appeared very interested. But, it became clear that with competing demands for his time in the Pentagon; attention to the current war effort; and, his priority to visit deployed Sailors and Marines, that I needed to make the case for 'why' the Secretary (and for that matter, other national security leaders

in the new administration) needed to attend Tailhook in view of all of the other things that they have to do.

It is a simple proposition, but one, nevertheless, that I wanted to share with you because I did not want to assume everyone understands the Tailhook organization or how much it has grown in its 53 years of service and outreach. Let me start by asking the simple questions, make some fundamental points, and I will let you debrief me (as you have always done) afterwards:

A show of hands please:

How many tailhook aviators are here tonight?

How many of you have served in combat?

How many of you made naval aviation a career?

And now, the important question, how many of you are married to naval aviators? (we know how hard it is to live with ourselves...I cannot imagine how hard it is for someone else to live with us).

What an impressive group...and that is why we encourage our leadership as well as our youth to attend this convention...to meet you and for you to meet them. It is here that you will find not only camaraderie, but a sense of community...not only esprit de corps, but passion in the profession of arms...not only will you witness coaching and mentoring, but you also sense loyalty, respect, and the brotherhood that goes with a family that has experienced triumph as well as tragedy, personal sacrifice, self-less commitment, and courage under fire.

It is at Hook that we honor the past, recognize those who stand watch today, and commit ourselves to the future...with honest, frank, open discussions...that candor...those personal insights and the penetrating assessments that go with it from those who serve in operational roles...brought us TOPGUN and Strike University (NSAWC)...we sometimes forget our own history, which means...in other words...some of our best programs that bring us victory are born out of tragedy.

It is here, at Hook, on the panels and in the halls, where one generation passes on what they have earned and learned to the next.

While it may seem like an abstract notion to some, the fraternal spirit passed from one generation to the next is real, has value, and gives us a competitive advantage. It sets us apart from other navies; it is the envy of other services; and, it gets us through the tough days during protracted at-sea periods, extended deployments, combat, as well as times of personal loss, family separation, and budget environments that wax and wane...and **IT IS OUR JOB TO ENSURE THAT THIS SPIRIT IS NEVER BROKEN**. If you want to know how naval aviation can 'operate at the edge of the envelope' and why we do it...you have to come to Hook to understand the answers.

In the course of a career that has lasted longer than most of you could have imagined, I had the unique opportunity to spend time at this reunion with experienced war fighters, test pilots, astronauts, MiG killers, and Blue Angels, as well as larger than life figures from the fleet such as Admiral Ron Hayes former CINCPAC who is here from Hawaii, and other heroes in naval aviation – such as Admiral Jim Holloway who served from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, consistently on the front lines...whose destroyer was hit by the Japanese in World War II, whose plane was hit by the Chinese in Korea, whose flagship was shot at by the North Vietnamese, whose lifetime of service guided us into and out of the Cold War and culminated as the Chief of Naval Operations...we are indeed fortunate to call this officer and gentleman, who has dedicated himself to the nation with a lifetime of service, one of our own.

While we celebrate the heroes among us this weekend, a solemn observance quietly took place yesterday, which serves to remind us of another group of Tailhook aviators in our midst who operate at the edge of the envelope, yet collectively, we know little about their contributions to the current war effort.

We all remember where we were – and what we were doing – on the morning of September 11, 2001. Did you know that since that moment of national tragedy, over 70,000 active duty and reserve sailors answered the nation's call in a unique way and completed individual augmentee (or IA) assignments on the ground predominately in Iraq and Afghanistan? Naval aviation has contributed its fair share to the ground fight. For example, aviators such as former Blue Angel – Ryan Scholl, and other leaders such as Sam Paparo, and Dan Dwyer all commanded Provisional Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan in addition to their primary duties of squadron command and prior to selection for major command, nuclear power pipeline and for some, eventual CVN command...what a career path!

All of us should make time and find a way to express both pride and gratitude to those who have honored us by the hard jobs that they have taken and the remarkable distinction that they have earned for the United States Navy.

I guarantee to you that when YOU have a conversation with those who have served on the ground in CENTCOM, it will prove to be nothing short of inspirational and memorable for you.

For many Sailors, their assignments on the ground and oftentimes in a combat zone were defining moments in their lives that have brought a tremendous sense of personal satisfaction, contribution to a national mission, professional success, and intrinsic reward.

Yet there is an aspect of this mission where I need your continued focus and leadership and they would benefit from your interest and assistance. Traditionally, our service culture deploys as part of a unit, such as a carrier strike group, air wing, or squadron. Instead, these sailors train, deploy, serve, and transfer without the benefit of 'traditional' support that comes from fellow shipmates.

As a result, they are disconnected from a parent organization and most of us are unaware of their service or sacrifice, even when they return home. Yet Individual Augmentees (both officer and enlisted) bring real value back to the fleet.

They have experience, insight, and perspective to share with their fellow aviators. As long as the nation is at war, all the armed forces will have this requirement to serve on the ground. I ask you, the Tailhook team, to continue to recognize them, whether it is through panels that highlight their work as you did last year or through special recognition or service awards...in our culture, what we have learned over time, is that what matters at the end of the day – is the respect of our peers and of our community...it is more important, more powerful, and more enduring than any other form of recognition. **NOTHING CAN REPLACE YOUR INTEREST IN THEIR WORK.**

When you sit down with them, be prepared to take notes. The stories of how they responded to challenge, responsibility, and leadership roles, in unfamiliar terrain, with an unpredictable mission set, and yet represented our core values of honor, courage, and commitment under fire with valor and without compromise will amaze even the saltiest among us. It is this reason why our Sailors and the culture that they represent, are in high demand.

When you listen, you validate the importance of their deployment, acknowledge the significance of their personal sacrifice and take the first steps in providing unit cohesion and a heart-felt welcome back to the Tailhook Navy. We need to facilitate their return to the familiar, cohesive team that they missed while serving away from their ships, air wings, and squadrons.

If ever there was a time and place to apply the lessons that we know about principled, accountable, and responsible leadership, then now is the time and this is the wartime mission. Shipmates take care of shipmates...it is the model of leadership that has proven itself consistently across the expanse of our successful, storied history; we owe shipmates serving on the ground nothing less than our very best effort.

This year's theme, 'Operating at the Edge of the Envelope' has a slightly different meaning with time and age...as we learn to live vicariously through the great work of young Sailors all around us. Vice Chiefs, themselves, do not operate at the edge of the envelope...no matter what Black says... ok, well maybe Fox was the exception.

As the Vice Chief, the only time that I would consider the daily routine as operating at the edge of the envelope...when I thought or was worried that I was going to die...was going to meetings. Upon check-in at the Pentagon with the Navy Staff, you turn in your flight suit for a pair of khakis, receive a blank sheet of paper, #2 pencil, No-Doz so we don't sleep, 800mg Motrin for when we are awake, a dictionary for the words we know, a Thesaurus for the words we don't know, and an opportunity on Saturday mornings to write the agenda for the Saturday afternoon meetings that we attend in the Pentagon. There are no apologies or whining allowed in OPNAV.

...but...as the Vice Chief...I was also witness to some remarkable and historically significant events, here are a few:

First, to listen to oral arguments in the United States Supreme Court in a law suit brought by the National Resources Defense Council against the Secretary of the Navy that directly challenged naval training requirements for ASW – that pitted environmental interests against training requirements for national security. When was the last time that a service in the Department of Defense went to the highest court in the land...and then prevailed in the final ruling?

Or, to join the president at Annapolis for graduation at the U.S. Naval Academy and administer the oath of office to approximately 800 midshipmen into our ranks, including the son of Senator John McCain. Seventy words in the oath of office that have real meaning but sometimes taken for granted...words passed from one generation to the next since the days of the Continental Congress, where faith is the only word repeated in the oath, which recognized that laws were not enough for those with authority to discharge national responsibilities and, by law, required those charged with public responsibilities to make a public pledge to keep faith with the constitution and with each other. You will be pleased with the energy and commitment of the next generation of ensigns who will soon join our ranks.

But sadly, I also took the news during my tour that Turk Green, ADM Wes McDonald, and other favorite sons and daughters of naval aviation had made their last trap...and that Scott Speicher was on his way home...to his final resting place in Jacksonville.

I will share with you, one other notable, remarkable, and historical aviation event that I had the honor of attending and that was the christening of the USS Stockdale (DDG-106).

Admiral Stockdale was a legendary single-seat naval aviator, test pilot, and combat strike leader. He exemplified honor, valor, bravery, and leadership in combat. He made critical decisions on his feet, and took great personal risk. You will find his undaunted courage well-documented, immortalized, inscribed in citations too numerous to count, and engraved on plaques in naval installations, in museums, and now, on ships, all over the world.

But if all you knew of Jim Stockdale was his resume, I would suggest, you would miss much of the treasure and richness of this giant of a man. While his operational record was truly extraordinary...he was a remarkable man with one foot firmly planted in the world of military operations and one foot planted in the world of ideas.

He spoke at the Tailhook Banquet in 1988...and it was clear from that speech that he applied what he learned at Stanford and brought a sense of history, a practical understanding of human behavior, and a clear view of choices that we can make as individuals, as a group, and as a culture back to Navy...and he made us better for it. It is this side of Jim Stockdale that endures today. He understands us; he knows our limitations; he knows our fragile nature; he knows our strengths; he knows how to keep us whole and how to keep us honorable. He knows the value of critical thinking, how we

need critics to challenge us and make us grow, as well as the power of ideas, truth, and character to guide us.

What adversaries of the United States Navy should understand when they attack the Navy-Marine Corps team, is the enduring result and consequences of their actions. John Kennedy once reminded us “a nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers.” We preserve the name of James Stockdale through the USS STOCKDALE with 325 men and women who will live their daily lives in his memory; we will preserve his name through 9,500 tons of American diplomacy capable of operating in any region of the world at any time. When the enemy delivered blows, ropes, solitary confinement and torture, Jim delivered a lifetime of honorable service to his nation and America delivered a man-of-war and ship of steel in his honor to WestPac.

I look forward to working with DDG-106 soon. Appropriately and ironically, this great name returns to the Pacific Fleet in a world and at a time that Ryan Crocker (former Ambassador to Pakistan and Iraq) recently commented, “success [for the United States] comes from a solid commitment of resources and attention...[where] what is needed in dealing with this part of the world (which I would suggest, applies as well to the Asia-Pacific area of responsibility) is a combination of understanding, persistence, and strategic patience to a degree that the American people have found hard to muster.” Jim Stockdale would understand the essence of his argument and the importance of our operational response to it. This is exactly what is at risk in the current resource debate in Washington.

In two short weeks, I will relieve Bob Willard and assume command in the absolute best job available on the planet—as Commander of the Pacific Fleet. I am simply honored and humbled by the opportunity to serve in this leadership role. Rat took you through his observations from the Pacific in his banquet speech last year. Today, his remarks seem especially prescient.

He said (and I will paraphrase): “in joint war planning we face a challenger who will outnumber us in the air and who believes that he can defeat you, your airplane, your weapons, and your sensors. What we require in the Western Pacific are pilots and NFOs who are ready on arrival to fight and win...in every type/model/series, who can max perform their aircraft and systems.”

In a theater that has witnessed all forms of open aggression and coercion, we (our aviation community) must have the capability to back up the national commitment our strike groups represent.

Some will debate about the likelihood of conflict, how much money and resources each service should receive, and how to reconcile competing demands for the current and future force. These are important questions that the nation must answer...but in the meantime, I will tell you what you have taught us.

The nation will call and they will expect us to be ready...regardless of the level of resources. You taught us that no matter what form of aggression, the nation's response to crisis begins with: meatball, line-up, and angle-of-attack...therefore, be honest, be critical, be forthright, and be candid...above all...listen to the Junior Officers. All other ideas are interesting but irrelevant if we cannot operate forward...because, in the words of Jim Holloway, "aircraft carriers are the difference that allow the United States to maintain a definite margin of maritime superiority."

Tailhook is important...for reasons that cut across and connect to several generations. Whether we realize it, sense it, or recognize it completely, we are part of a circle of community, history, and tradition, where one generation cares for and nurtures the next. Many in the audience have done that for us; now it is our charge to carry your example of life-long service and leadership forward for those in our trust.

The interesting part about service (and many here will agree)...is oftentimes, you do not wake up in the morning and think about your life's work in those terms. Instead, you think about what you can do for other people, how you can make a difference in their development, how you can make a difference in the world around them, how you can be an impact player and live a life of consequence...a life that matters.

The personal satisfaction and psychic income that we receive from serving gives us the greater benefit for the act that we provide to others. It puts into action the phrase President Lyndon Baines Johnson coined when he said, "Ours is not a spectator society." Those who choose to serve...play on the line of scrimmage and refuse to take a seat in the stands.

Our reunion gives us the rare opportunity to recognize the pride of a generation who has given more than they received and positively affected the lives of more people than they will ever know...and that, ladies and gentlemen, is our naval heritage and tradition.

Thank you for this reunion, this wonderful setting, and terrific evening. Now, it is our job to remember the distinguished accomplishments of naval aviation and the honor that it has brought to the Navy and nation...to remember those who have served and continue to serve...and those who have supported us.

God Bless you and your families, our country, and all who stand with us.