

# **Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Remarks**

to the

## **National Youth Leadership Forum Washington, DC**

February 22, 2011

### **“Tradition, Seamanship, and Character”**

Good evening, students of the National Youth Leadership National Security Forum!  
Welcome to YOUR Nation's Capital!

I commend you on your willingness to leave home for a week to educate yourselves on national security matters relevant to our Nation.

I very much appreciate the invitation to speak to YOU this evening, and I look forward to telling you a little bit about the U.S. Coast Guard, and answering your questions!

I trust you'll find this week rewarding and informative – some of you might be missing school – and you'll have to make up the work when you get back, but that's OK. I've found that a very important component of education along with academics is experience – so embrace this week –never let academics get in the way of a good education!

A little information about the U.S. Coast Guard ...

We trace our history to 1790 as the Revenue Cutter Service. We are the Nation's oldest continuous seagoing service. In 1915, multiple agencies were brought under the purview of the newly formed Coast Guard.

One of the things that makes the Coast Guard truly unique is that we're the only armed service that is also a law enforcement agency. Our laws prohibit the other military services from conducting law enforcement!

Our 50,000 uniformed men and women in the active and reserve force protect our coasts, waterways, and maritime interests around the world. Our rescues in perilous conditions are legendary. We board hostile vessels that carry drugs, traffic in human beings, or engage in piracy. Our maritime forces safeguard our national interests in places as diverse as the Bering Sea off Alaska—where we protect our fisheries resources from poachers, and the northern Arabian Gulf where we assist the Navy's 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet with keeping the Iraqi port safe and its oil terminal open. We rescue, we regulate, and we enforce.

Last year, we responded to 23,500 search and rescue cases; we saved 4,700 lives; we interdicted 160 tons of cocaine; we stopped 3,700 illegal immigrants; and we conducted thousands of law enforcement and safety boardings.

We kept the flow of maritime commerce moving by servicing 17,000 aids to navigation and conducting icebreaking to keep our waterways open; we performed inspections on 14,000 vessels and 17,000 shore facilities such as oil terminals, and we investigated 4,500 maritime accidents – such as vessel collisions – or one I am sure you are familiar with, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion and oil spill.

That's a lot to throw at you, but I want to give you a feel for the broad range of maritime missions we perform. Congress has actually given us 11 missions – but I like to keep things simple – when people ask me what we do, I say:

We protect people on the sea,  
We protect America against threats delivered by sea, and,  
We protect the Sea itself!

Several things make Coast Guard unique. First, because of our many peacetime missions, we are fully deployed all the time. Second, we are the Nation's first responders for any maritime crisis – or national contingency such as an earthquake or hurricane.

Last year when a devastating earthquake hit Haiti, it was Coast Guard men and women who were the first to arrive. Coast Guard cutters often patrol the waters off Haiti to interdict drugs and illegal immigrants – so when the cutters received the news that a terrible earthquake hit, they immediately headed in to render assistance – that's what Coast Guard people do – we're a service with a huge humanitarian mission.

Once inside the port, Coast Guard men and women made their way ashore and immediately began rendering life-saving first aid and providing vital supplies. Coast Guard aircraft soon followed; they began evacuating the most critically injured people out to ships where we could provide them with more advanced care.

This was what we call an “all-hands-on-deck” effort –it means everyone pitches in. While our crews often have one or two members with advanced medical training, they found so many Haitian people in need of immediate medical attention, everyone had to learn how to splint and arm or a leg, stitch up a wound, or administer an injection. That's what you have to do sometimes as a first responder – do the best you have with what you've got.

A brand new Coast Guard Academy graduate named Ensign Kevin Robinson was one of the first to arrive ashore. (If you're not familiar with the Coast Guard's rank structure, “Ensign” is the lowest rank an officer can hold). So Ensign Robinson was a rookie!

I want to share with you an email from Ensign Robinson. He said Quote -- “My peers and I are not doctors but we do have basic medical training and supplies to keep a deep cut from turning into an amputation – we are just scrambling to help as many people as we can with what we have” END Quote

To me, that email sums up the situation as our Coast Guard men and women found it – people coming together to help one another, and doing the best they could with what they had.

The type of work I just described is one of the many things that make me immensely proud to lead and command such capable, talented and caring men and women. Coast Guard men and women are a dedicated and hard-working group who truly take their profession and their work seriously.

So that’s the Coast Guard in brief.

Now, a question – Have any of you heard of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy? It’s one of our Nation’s 5 Service Academies – it’s located in New London, CT. Many young people have heard of West Point, the Air Force Academy, and the Naval Academy – and perhaps the Merchant Marine Academy. But, because the Coast Guard Academy is a bit smaller, it’s often not as well known. Though, that’s changing...the Academy just earned a perfect score of 100 and the top honor as the #1 regional college in the North based on the U.S. News and World Report’s Best Colleges 2011 issues – you can check it out on Facebook or Google it!

A few weeks ago, I travelled up to the Coast Guard Academy for my annual leadership address to the Corps of Cadets – (we call our students cadets and the student body the Corps of Cadets).

The Cadets are just a few years older than you – perhaps, in a year or two, some of you in this room will be attending one of our Service Academies (and hopefully you choose the Coast Guard Academy) So I thought I would show you the same video I presented to them...

But first, I need to give you a little background...The video begins aboard the Coast Guard’s sail training ship, the Barque EAGLE. (At the time I was the Captain – I’m the Ancient Mariner now – so this was a few years ago!)

The video also contains Coast Guard men and women—some of whom are recent Academy graduates—performing some of our challenging maritime missions—it concludes with some scenes of cadet life.

**[START VIDEO]** (5 min run time)

I’m glad all of you got a chance to see that!

Now you were all selected to attend this forum because you worked hard and your teachers and mentors see your potential to become OUR future leaders –

So how do you prepare to lead?

Do you remember at the start of the video, I told the new cadets arriving aboard EAGLE that there are 6 words they must always remember? Tradition, Seamanship, Character, and Safety, Safety, Safety.

Putting aside safety for this evening, I'd like to focus the remainder of my remarks on:

Tradition ... Seamanship...and Character...

Tradition ... Seamanship...and Character...These 3 words are key components of leadership. That's why they're emblazoned onto EAGLE's crest.

Do you know what running lights are? In the maritime world, running lights are markers used to help identify a vessel's size, location and direction – you've probably seen them if you think about it – the right or starboard side is green, and the left, or port side is red. Running lights provide mariners with information on the direction of approaching ships – this allows them to navigate safely and avoid collisions. In essence, running lights provide you with the information you need to succeed –

Well, Tradition, Seamanship and Character can be your running lights to succeed in any profession...

Now seamanship is unique to our maritime service – so for your purposes you can substitute “entry level skills” for seamanship...

Then I think you have a suitable motto for any profession....you must always keep in mind that as you seek out professional and educational experience, you must not train simply for a job. You must prepare yourselves for your profession.

Let's start with Tradition...

You need to know your profession's history, heritage, and traditions. This is true whether you're a teacher, a military officer, a diplomat, a politician – or for any profession you choose to pursue.

Pulitzer Prize winning Author and Historian David McCullough says, “History is a guide to navigation in perilous times. History is who we are and why we are the way we are.”

But just don't learn your profession's traditions and history – embrace them! Doing so will infuse your spirit with your profession's core values and culture – you'll establish a meaningful connection to its past – and this heritage will fill you with a sense of duty. Passion, enthusiasm and the ability to truly inspire will soon follow – this is how you build character!

So that's tradition... Onto seamanship.

As I said earlier, you can substitute “entry level skills” for seamanship. Each summer our Coast Guard Academy Cadets and Officer Candidates sail aboard EAGLE to learn basic seamanship skills. Why do we train our cadets aboard a historic 3-masted sailing ship? For the same reasons that your teachers required you to perform your math calculations by hand before allowing you to use calculators and computers!

You have to learn and understand the basics first. Our cadets will go on to become officers, and operate modern ships and aircraft – but they’ll forever have an appreciation of the effects of wind, waves and weather – and the seamanship skills to manage them – all because of their time aboard EAGLE.

You must learn the basic skills, to ensure routine actions become second nature. Your entire career will be spent building upon your basic skills. They are your foundation from which you will rise. Knowing the basics cold is what allows leaders to take on greater challenges... Electricians, Engineers, Doctors, Lawyers...

They all learn the basics before becoming leaders in their fields.

So identify the basics of your chosen profession – what are your winds, your waves and your weather – what fundamentals (your substitution for seamanship) do you need to become proficient in to overcome the challenges of wind, waves and weather and sail your ship? Then learn them, live them and teach them...this is how you will stake out YOUR path to success...

Finally, Character...

Good Character is a trait that must be nurtured. Character encompasses your work ethic, your core values and your sense of duty.

Did anyone here watch the super bowl? Any cheese heads or Green Bay fans? I’m sure you’ve heard of the famous Green Bay Packer’s coach Vince Lombardi whom the Super Bowl trophy is named after.

When Vince Lombardi took over as the Packer’s head coach the team was coming off a terrible season – they had only won 1 game. Coach Lombardi, speaking to his team the first time, looked them in the eyes and said:

“Gentlemen we are going to relentlessly chase perfection, knowing full well we will not catch it – because nothing is perfect. But we are going to relentlessly chase it, because in the process we will catch excellence”. That’s character. YOU build character by relentless chasing perfection...that’s what leaders so.

John F. Kennedy is one of my favorite presidents...

In 1963, President John Kennedy challenged our country in a much more eloquent statement of Lombardi's challenge to the Packers. He challenged our country to "go to the moon" in that decade and "do all those other things" not because it was easy, but because "it was hard." Just as Lombardi understood the need to raise the bar because of his character developed in sports, Kennedy understood because he had character-building experience as a sailor, ship captain and Navy man.

Proving to yourself that you can succeed in challenging circumstances is key to building the confidence that will enable you to lead. It's the essence of character. The more you succeed at difficult things, the easier it becomes to handle and lead through them.

Now we just had President's Day weekend – and you're lucky enough to be in Washington, D.C. – the home of all our Presidents – many of whom are famous for their character...I understand that you'll have some time to visit many of our memorials – when you visit them, I want you to be on the lookout for character...

One of my favorite memorials is the World War II Memorial. It sends a chill up my spine every time I visit. It's on the National Mall right in between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. I think the announcement inscription facing 17<sup>th</sup> Street says it all –in case you miss it, I'll share it with you...it reads:

"Here in the presence of Washington and Lincoln, one the eighteenth century father and the other the nineteenth century preserver of our Nation, we honor those twentieth century Americans who took up the struggle during the second world war and made the sacrifices to perpetuate the gift our forefathers entrusted to us: a nation conceived in liberty and justice."

Our veterans past – and present – many of whom are just a little older than yourselves – certainly embody character...

Tradition... Seamanship...Character...

These three traits are the fundamental attributes of effective leaders. Leaders know their traditions and why they're important, they've built basic skills, and they have the character and confidence to lead others.

As a leader, you will never wake up each day with perfect mastery of these traits– but that's OK – the important thing is to be, as Coach Lombardi said – chasing perfection – work on Tradition, Seamanship and Character every day so you too can catch excellence!

I thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts, and I'll sign off by saying Semper Paratus – which is the Coast Guard's motto – it means Always Ready....I look forward to answering your questions.