

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Remarks

At the

U.S. Coast Guard Ancient Keeper Change of Watch

July 12, 2012

Tradition is why we have Ancient Keepers, Ancient Mariners and Ancient Albatrosses – and Change of Watch Ceremonies.

We are all part of a long blue line. History tells us about the beginning of our service – but our future – our trackline of history – and how we navigate it – is up to you. We cannot know what duties we will be called upon to perform, what challenging maritime missions our Nation will ask us to undertake, or even what fate will hold.

But, we do know one thing – ensuring our Coast Guard men and women are fluent in our history and traditions will positively influence, inform and impact how we perform our duties.

There's also another important part of the Ancient Keeper's tradition . . . it's one that I've been talking a lot about lately . . . and that's proficiency.

I began speaking of proficiency in my first "State of the Coast Guard Address" in early 2011. Talking about proficiency generated a flood of questions and interest. How do we become proficient? And, proficient at what? During all hands meetings, I was frequently asked to describe "proficiency."

I reflected on how to speak about this . . . then, I found the answer right here at Station Castle Hill. As this crew knows, during an all-hands visit last year, I asked them a simple question, "Who is the best boat coxswain?" Of course half a dozen boatswains' mates immediately raised their hands. So I rephrased the question. "If the search and rescue alarm sounded and you had to go out in a severe storm, who would you want to be the coxswain of the motor life boat?"

Everyone turned and pointed to CWO Guthlein, a BOSN4 and surfman with 35 years of experience. Sometimes, you know proficiency when you see it.

And, we see it today. We see it in this beautiful station, the well maintained boats tugging at their lines, ready to answer any call – but most importantly we see it in the faces of this well trained crew. Under CWO Guthlein’s leadership they have worked, trained, and challenged each other to master their craft. So much so, that proficiency has become contagious here.

So, I hope you don’t mind, Station Castle Hill, but I’ve been using the example of proficiency I found here, at every all-hands visit I hold.

But, I’ve also been doing some thinking . . . because, there’s always more you can learn as a leader. And, what I’ve been thinking about are those half-dozen boatswains – you know who you are – who raised their hands in response to my question, “who is the best coxswain?” And, what I’ve come to conclude is that they were correct to raise their hands.

Here’s why. It’s just not practical to put a Chief in every boat that goes out on a challenging Search and Rescue Mission—it’s not even possible! But, what you can do . . . what we must do . . . is put that kind of leadership presence in every boat. And, that’s just what CWO Guthlein accomplished. When his coxswains instinctively raised their hands in response to my question, they were not being boastful . . .

They were doing so, because, in the finest tradition of ancient keepers like Joshua James they are not just willing to answer the call . . . but, because of CWO Guthlein’s leadership, they are truly prepared to answer any call.

Today, CWO Guthlein will pass his Keeper’s Cap on to Master Chief Petty Officer James Clemens. The passing of the Keeper’s Cap symbolizes the passing of wisdom, knowledge and experience . . . as well as trust and confidence in his boatmanship, lifesaving abilities and leadership.

CWO Guthlein, thank you for keeping watch over our traditions . . . instilling the importance of proficiency in your crews . . . and standing a taut watch as the 3rd Ancient Keeper! You’ve truly been a great shipmate!

Master Chief Clemens, your unparalleled experience and almost 3 decades of service, makes you more than ready to assume your watch as Ancient Keeper. Continue to extend out the tracklines laid down by CWO Guthlein, and keep our lamp of tradition burning brightly!

As the Gold Ancient Mariner, I am honored to share this duty with you . . . getting to know your family . . . and I look forward to working with you as fellow Ancient in the days ahead!

Semper Paratus....

