

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

**At the**

### **Navy Memorial Fantail Breakfast**

*Navy Memorial*  
*Washington, DC*  
*Wednesday, August 29, 2012*

Good Morning, Shipmates! Is this a great way to start the day or what!? I am so proud to be here with you all this morning! It's a real privilege to have the opportunity to talk with you.

I'm especially honored to be asked to speak during this "Year of the Chief" – and I'm especially glad so many of our chiefs could be here with us this morning. Thank you for coming down to join us.

The "Year of the Chief" being sponsored by the Navy Memorial is a terrific way to honor and celebrate our Chief Petty Officers. But, I've got to tell you - whenever I hear "the Year of" something, I'm now reminded of one of my early initiatives after becoming Commandant. As you know, one of my guiding principles as Commandant is Respecting Our Shipmates – and that includes not just our Active, Reserve, Civilian and Auxiliary members, but their families as well. And last year I issued Shipmates 11, making 2011 the Coast Guard "Year of the Family."

I wanted to focus our service on the health and welfare of our people and their families. Not only is this the right thing to do, but it is at the very heart of our operational readiness. And the Chief's mess has a huge part in making this initiative successful.

But I knew there was a problem as soon as I announced this initiative. And my wife, Linda, who is a great advocate for our Coast Guard families, pointed it out right away. You see, the problem with having a "Year of the Family" is that it necessarily implies that the year will end, and that we'll then move on to something else. However, families always have been and always will be an important part of taking care of and respecting our shipmates. In reality, every year is the year of the family.

The same is true of our Chief Petty Officers. While it is terrific and absolutely appropriate to have a "Year of the Chief" to recognize the crucial role that Chiefs have in our service – but on March 30<sup>th</sup> of 2013, when the "Year of the Chief" formally ends, the Chief Petty Officers will continue to be – as they have been since the rank was established – critical to our Services' success....

This is also an absolutely terrific place for us to get together this morning. Isn't this a beautiful setting? Thank you to the Navy Memorial for inviting us to be here. This is a wonderful memorial which will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday in a little over a month from now on the 237<sup>th</sup> Birthday of the United States Navy.

As most of you know, I love history and really enjoy spending time in places like this that pay tribute to our nation's incredibly rich sea going history. And it was great to have some time this morning to look around and also to talk with many of you. Did any of you have the chance to take a look at the Chief Petty Officer's Bell here in the memorial? It was placed here on the centennial of the establishment of the rank of Chief Petty Officer in the Navy. If you didn't see it on the way in, you should take a look before you leave today. The inscription on the plaque underneath the bell really resonates with me. It describes the important role of the Chief Petty Officer. It reads, in part:

"...the tone of the ship, the tone of the service itself must come directly from the Chief Petty Officers more than from any other group of people..."

It has been my experience over the course of my career that this is absolutely the case – and why the Chief's are absolutely critical to everything we do. But there was something else in that quote under the Chief's Bell that caught my eye. It's something written about the Chief Petty Officer, but which carries an important message for us all. And it's something I'd like to talk with you a little more about this morning.

It reads:

"The position of Chief Petty Officer is one of special honor. It shows not only that you have served successfully, but that your service has met with the commendations of your seniors, that you are proficient, trustworthy and reliable.... You have the standard; live up to it...and you will find that those under you will be more inclined to do likewise...."

Think about those words.

"...you are proficient."

"You have the standard; live up to it...and you will find that those under you will be more inclined to do likewise."

That quote speaks to the two things that Chiefs are most known for – and that we should all aspire to: Proficiency and Leadership. The quote comes from the 1914 Blue Jacket Manual. That's a Navy publication, but until we started publishing the Coast Guardsman's Manual back in 1952, that is what our service used as well. This is an idea that is very important to me and to our Service – and it encompasses something I have been talking about since I became the Commandant two years ago.

This idea of proficiency – both of craft and leadership – is something I began to share with you in my first State of the Coast Guard address in 2011. As a service we had suffered several casualties and experienced some disciplinary problems which gave me some concern that we had begun to lose our professional edge. It was something I had to address.

I spoke again about the necessity for proficiency in my most recent State of the Coast Guard address and in my birthday message to the service. I also recently published an article in the most recent issue of Naval Institute Proceedings entitled Proficiency: The Essence of Discipline.

You know, since I first started talking about proficiency two years ago, it's been amazing how often I hear that word used now and how many different places I see it pop up. I think every briefing I attend and every document that crosses my desk now has the word "proficiency" worked into it somewhere – regardless of what it's about! But that's ok – and it's only natural. And hopefully it means that people are really starting to talk and think more about it.

"Proficiency" is the word I've chosen to describe the idea that I'm talking about, and I keep using this word because in any discussion it's important that you have common terms of reference. But you hear the same idea expressed under many different names and described many different way in your everyday conversations.

"That guy is 'fire and forget'."

"She's the go-to person for that"

"He's the one with the shovel"

"She's a rock star!"

"He's a real operator"

They all mean the same thing. Proficiency.

And there is one other way you hear it. And you hear it every day at every unit. And you heard it long before I started talking about it.

"Ask the Chief"

That, too, means Proficiency.

But I need to make a distinction. When a new member gets to a unit, they are encouraged to become qualified at a particular job. They have a qualification book and tasks get checked off as they learn and complete them...

This is an important step, and we should all seek to become qualified at anything we choose to pursue. But what I'm talking about is much more than that. Getting a particular qualification - whether it's small boat coxswain or pollution investigator or helmsman on a cutter - is only the first step in becoming proficient. There is much more required than simply completing what's in our qualification books....

You can see this in the Charge given to all Coast Guard Chief's when they graduate from the Chief Petty Officer Academy. That Charge instructs our new Chief's that not all of their new responsibilities appear in print. It tells them that since the position of Chief Petty Officer was established, Chiefs have 'willingly embraced responsibility beyond the call of a printed assignment. Their actions and their performance earned the respect of their senior as well as their juniors.' And because of their actions - their proficiency - "Ask the Chief" is a traditional phrase of respect heard in and out of the Coast Guard.

When I talk about proficiency – I break it down into three essential parts, each of which is critically important – and which I see over and over again in our very best people and in the successful exploits of our service. They are Proficiency in Craft, Proficiency in Leadership, and a Disciplined Initiative.

Let me share a couple of stories with you to show what I mean by this.

I had the honor a few weeks ago to commission our second Fast Response Cutter, the RICHARD ETHERIDGE. These are terrific new ships. We're going to build 58 of the magnificent cutters. These Fast Response Cutters will all be named for Coast Guard enlisted heroes – and the RICHARD ETHERIDGE is no exception.

You'll notice that these cutters are named for individuals. While we all work together as a team to accomplish our mission, each member of our Coast Guard family – whether at a Sector, aboard a cutter or at an Air Station – is an individual who is capable – and expected – to make a difference. And RICHARD ETHERIDGE provides a terrific example that one person – with proficiency – can truly make a difference.

Richard Etheridge was the Keeper of the Pea Island Lifesaving Station on the North Carolina Outer Banks. He rose to that position in 1880 and served there for the next 20 years.

He was the first black man ever appointed as Keeper of a U.S. Lifesaving Station. What's remarkable about that is that less than 40 years earlier, he had been born into slavery near Oregon Inlet, just north of Pea Island.

And only 15 years before his appointment he had become a freeman by joining and serving in the Union Army during the Civil War.

After leaving the Union Army he served for a time as a surfman at a nearby Lifesaving Station on Bodie Island. And at Bodie, he was the lowest raking surfman at that station.

And then, in 1879, he finds himself being recommended by the Superintendent of the Lifesaving Service, Sumner Kimball, to the Secretary of the Treasury, for a position in Command of a Lifesaving Station.

In an era of such open and hostile racism, post-Civil War, why was Richard Etheridge chosen for this job?

The reason? Proficiency.

You see, he was not the lowest ranking man at that first Life Saving Station because he was the least proficient surfman or the newest member to report. He was the lowest ranking man because in that post-Civil War era, black men were always listed last on the rolls.

He was actually incredibly proficient. He had grown up on the shores of the Outer Banks and knew the winds and tides and currents as well as anyone. And his proficiency was recognized by an inspector for the Life Saving Service. This inspector was so impressed that he took the time to write a letter to the Superintendent of the Service about what he had seen in Richard Etheridge.

I know this because have seen the original letter written by that Inspector, LT Charles Shoemaker, to Superintendent Kimball, recommending Etheridge for the job. It read:

“Richard Etheridge is 38 years of age [and] has the reputation of being as good a surfman as there is on this coast, black or white...”

That’s proficiency. Those in authority recognized it and knew that it was what really mattered.

The letter continued: “I am aware that no colored man holds the position of keeper in the Lifesaving Service. I have given the matter as careful consideration as I am capable of and have weighed every argument for and against its adoption... I am fully convinced that the efficiency of the service at his station will be greatly advanced by the appointment of this man to the keepership...”

The service was facing heavy criticism in the face of loss of life and property and needed skilled Keepers. Despite the racism of the time, his Proficiency of Craft got him the job.

But he knew instinctively that his own proficiency of craft alone was not enough. He knew that he needed his crew to be just as proficient. And he knew that he needed to lead them there. He understood the requirement for Proficiency of Leadership.

He developed rigorous lifesaving drills that his crew performed 6 days a week. He demanded swift obedience and required strict adherence to standards of grooming and appearance. We know how hard Etheridge trained his men because he kept meticulous

records of their daily activities. Patrols, drills, training and inspections were conducted continuously. He trained his crew until satisfied they could take on any mission. And on Sundays, their “rest day”, Etheridge read the regulations to his crew and quizzed them on their knowledge of procedure.

He certainly sounds like a chief, doesn't he?

But this was before the formation of our modern Coast Guard, and the Lifesaving Service was not a military organization. Even though the Keepers were traditionally referred to as ‘Captain’ by their crews, Lifesaving Service members did not have the traditional military titles and ranks we use today. And even when the Lifesaving Service joined the Revenue Cutter Service to form our modern-day Coast Guard, the rank of Chief did not exist. As you all know, that didn't happen until May 18, 1920, when Congress established the rank of Chief Petty Officer in the Coast Guard. But you probably won't be surprised to hear that under Coast Guard General Order 43 of 1920, which provided to details to implement the 18 May Congressional Act, the military rank given to Keepers was either Chief or Warrant Officer, depending on how long they had served...

So I think it's certainly OK, and appropriate, to think of Richard Etheridge as a Chief...at least in spirit....

The Coast Guard still relies on – and requires – this type of leadership. It inspires us. It motivates our crews. It allows us to reach that which was thought unachievable. It also builds within us and our crew the discipline we need when to succeed when circumstances require us to deviate from our operational doctrine and exercise on-scene initiative.

This was particular evident in the most famous rescue by Etheridge and his crew at Pea Island Station - that of the E.S. NEWMAN. The E.S. NEWMAN was caught in an October Hurricane in 1896 on her way from Providence to Norfolk. When her captain realized there was no hope for making it safely to port, he grounded his ship close to shore near Pea Island and shot off a flare. That evening to the storm was so bad Etheridge had kept his men from patrolling the beach with fear that they would be swept away by the tide. But one of his surfmen, who was watching the coast, spotted the distress signal and reported to Keeper Etheridge.

When Etheridge and his crew arrived on scene, it was apparent that the normal lifesaving procedures would not be effective. Their Lyle Gun – a beach cannon used to shoot a line to a vessel in distress and establish a Breech's buoy – could not reach the ship. Strong winds and high tides kept the E.S. NEWMAN too far off shore. Keeper Etheridge later wrote in his log “It seemed impossible under such circumstances to render any assistance.”

But it was then that Keeper Etheridge demonstrated that final piece of proficiency I spoke of – one that comes only with Proficiency of Craft and Proficiency of Leadership: Disciplined Initiative.

He recognized that he needed to deviate from the normal operational doctrine and exercise on-scene initiative if he was going to rescue the crew of the foundering vessel. He trusted in his crew, and he trusted the training and discipline he had instilled in them. He directed two of his surfmen to bind themselves together with a line. These two surfmen then grabbed a second line and fought their way through the howling wind and breaking surf until they reached the foundering E.S. NEWMAN. When they reached the distressed vessel, the second line was tied to a survivor and the crew on shore pulled the survivor and the two surfmen back to the shore. They repeated this process ten times that night – ten times in the middle of a hurricane – until they had rescued all of the survivors aboard the ship.

It is interesting to note that on the first trip out to the E.S. NEWMAN, a wave caught the leading surfman and knocked the air out of him. That wave would have carried him away and may have ended the rescue right there – and meant certain death for the crew of the E.S. NEWMAN – had he not been tied to his fellow surfman. He was bound to his shipmate the same way that training and discipline binds every member of a crew to the other. While one person can truly make a difference, bound together we are practically unstoppable.

Richard Etheridge didn't make the swim with his men that night. He remained on the beach to run operations there. But he was with them in the sense that all of this preparation, his inspections, his constant drills – and the discipline and proficiency he had developed in them through his training – allowed them to succeed out there on their own.

In an organization the size of the Coast Guard, it is impossible for us to oversee the work of each individual – and even if it were possible it would not be desirable.

It is essential – and a hallmark of our service – that most of the work done by the Coast Guard be left to the loyalty, discipline and ability of our crews – our junior officer and petty officers. And we are blessed as a service to have some truly outstanding people. I was privileged to attend the graduation ceremony at Cape May a couple of weeks ago, and had the opportunity to spend some time with some of our Service's newest members. And I can tell you without hesitation that I left full of hope and extremely confident about the future of our service after meeting these young men and women. But developing the necessary discipline and ability for this to work – and for those new graduates to succeed – can be accomplished by only one thing - leadership.

Now, I understand that the Chief can't be on every facility inspection, every pollution response, or aboard every boat or aircraft that goes out – but that Chief's presence must be felt and reflected by the disciplined operations of the crew.

Richard Etheridge's dramatic rescue that night came after a career of building proficiency... And set the ground for the success of his initiative when it became necessary to deviate from operational doctrine. And that is what I mean when I talk about disciplined initiative. And it is critically important that we all continue to chase proficiency. And I say 'chase' because it is not something you ever fully achieve. But it is equally important as leaders that we develop it in new members the moment they step aboard a Coast Guard unit. Because you never know when YOU might be called upon....

I'd like to about one more thing this morning - and then I'd like to hear from you and answer any questions you have.

Remember the second part of those words from the plaque under the Chief's Bell I mentioned earlier?

"You have the standard; live up to it...and you will find that those under you will be more included to do likewise."

This is absolutely true. No matter what any of us say or talk about, those serving under us will continually "truth-check" it against what we actually do and the actions we take.

And I would tell you that it's not just those under you who will be inclined to follow. Leadership does not just work in one direction. It works in all directions. You can lead up just as readily and with just as much influence as you can lead those under you. In fact, the Chief's Mess, more than any other group in the service, has the ability – the responsibility – to do just that.

I've been – and continue to be – a beneficiary of just this kind of leadership.

Achieving the proficiency we need to be the organization the American public expects and deserves is not easy. In fact, it is hard.

But through your efforts and your leadership, we call all – active, reserve, civilian, Auxiliary - move closer to true proficiency – the kind that Richard Etheridge demonstrated over 100 years ago. The kind that the men and women of this service have consistently demonstrated both before and since.

And the purpose of this journey towards proficiency is so that when you spot a distant flare on a dark and stormy night, you are not only willing, but ready to respond.

We face many challenges out there. I call them "uncertain and stormy seas." The continued flow of drugs and migrants towards our shores. Threats to our fisheries. Increased activity in the Arctic. Our mandate to protect the safe and secure approaches to American ports.

And sometimes our challenge is the sea itself. It was 20 years ago that hurricane Andrew devastated Florida and became – at the time – the costliest storm in U.S. history. Then, only 7 years ago, Hurricane Katrina came ashore in New Orleans. We all remember what happened there. And last night, Hurricane Isaac battered New Orleans once again. Our shipmates are there now doing what we do.

To meet these threats, we must all continually build our proficiency. It will serve as an anchor – just like the ones on your collars – to which we can all hold fast in uncertain and stormy seas.

And we don't fear uncertain and stormy seas.

That's when we go to work.

That's when our country needs us the most. And that's when we are at our best.

We are Coast Guardsmen.

This is our chosen profession.

This is our way.

This is what we do.

Thank you.  
And Semper Paratus.