

Good Afternoon Shipmates,

We all have a duty today. All of us share in the obligation to observe and practice the manners of our profession. You won't find these manners written up in any book, any document, or any publication. These manners are observed, taught and experienced. They are felt in the heart. It is my duty to represent the entire Coast Guard family as we assemble to memorialize LCDR (sel.) Sean Krueger, AMT1 Adam Hoke and AMT2 Brett Banks.

But at the same time, while speaking FOR the Coast Guard, I'll take this opportunity to speak TO the Coast Guard to help us deal with this tragedy.

Our Service, Air Station Sitka, and the families and friends of these fallen airmen are all shocked and saddened by their loss.

Of all the events that we face in life, the loss of a husband, a father, a brother, a son or shipmate is one of the most difficult to accept or comprehend.

The call to muster for this memorial service is a solemn and sad duty. It is also our sacred obligation. It is the custom of our Service – and of all the Armed Services – to mark significant events with military ceremonies and honors. It is also part of the “Manners of our Profession.” This is not a change of command – or a promotion – or a retirement. No. This is the most difficult of ceremonies. You all are assembled here today to Honor, Remember and Mourn.

Governor Parnell,  
Senator Murkowski,

Thank you for being with us here today.

Our Coast Guard Senior Leaders of the Pacific, Pacific Area Commander Vice Admiral Manson Brown and his wife Hermenia, 13<sup>th</sup> District Commander Rear Admiral Gary Blore and wife Meredith, 17<sup>th</sup> District Commander Rear Admiral Chris Colvin and his wife Christie, thank you for being here as well.

To the Leaders of Alaska, and the Community of Sitka...

Alaskan communities have been home for Coast Guardsmen since territorial days, and you have warmly embraced the Coast Guard as your own. I know you also share in our anguish. Sitka's close-knit community, candlelight vigils, masses, and tributes are a source of comfort to the friends, families and shipmates of the fallen.

To The Coast Guard Foundation: Thank you, again, for rescuing the rescuers.

To all assembled, by your attendance here today, on this solemn occasion, you demonstrate your care, compassion and support for the families, friends and loved ones of our lost crewmembers. Your presence comforts them. It shows them they are not alone.

I want to also thank the United States Navy, National Park Service, Quileute Nation and Canadian Air Force for their efforts during the rescue and recovery operations.

Our native American tribal partners, the Quileute in La Push, Washington, and the KLING-kit (Tlinglet), here in Sitka are *unflinching* in their support of our Service. And we thank you.

LCDR (sel) Sean Krueger, AMT1 Adam Hoke and AMT2 Brett Banks – Sean, Adam and Brett – while dedicated airmen, were clearly our shipmates. For people who serve on or over the water, the term “Shipmate” represents the unique bond that is formed when the people you serve with, and their families, become part of your extended family. How else would you describe persons you spend 24 hours a day with, 7 days a week, flying sometimes in the most treacherous of circumstances, and other times observing the grandest spectacles of nature that few will ever see.

The term “Shipmate” also encompasses the adrenaline and emotion of our Service: the great joy and satisfaction of a rescue well performed; the deep sorrow when, despite your best efforts, you cannot save someone from the perils of the sea. It’s weathering these storms and difficulties, the crests and troughs, laughing and working—and yes, sometimes crying—giving it your utmost while cold, wet and tired that forges the bond that is Shipmates.

Alaska in general, and Sitka in particular, are fertile grounds for forming Shipmates. It’s what makes serving here unique. Special. This place, and the people you share it with, become part of you. The remoteness of South East Alaska, the demanding flight environment, the ever-changing weather, force you to rely upon one another – to lean on one another – as crewmembers, as families, to accomplish the mission. And by doing so, you form that lifelong bond of being shipmates.

There is no greater complement than being known as a great shipmate, and no better goal than to become a good one.

By all definitions, Sean Krueger, Adam Hoke and Brett Banks were great shipmates...

This is what makes their loss all that much harder to bear.

But that is also why we have assembled here today.

Many of you have made the long journey far from your homes in the “lower-48” to be here in Sitka today. This journey is not to merely attend this memorial. Your journey has a purpose.

We are called today to observe the manners of our profession. To be here; to lean on one another; to standby one another; to support, in every way possible, all of those who are impacted by their loss. To commune with, and help the families of Sean, Adam and Brett.

For the Krueger, Hoke and Banks families, we can neither bear, nor comprehend, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy.

But we feel the loss, and we’re here to support you in every way possible. We all stand by with you today as part of the larger Coast Guard family. This is our duty. It is our honor. Today we have no mission that’s more important.

Sean, Adam and Brett risked their lives, on countless missions, so that others might live.

We've grown use to the heroics of Coast Guard aircrews – flying out in gale force winds into the treacherous Bering Sea to pull fisherman from foundering vessels – bringing medical and other needed supplies to remote areas of Alaska, and protecting this pristine environment and the unique Alaskan way of life.

Our Coast Guard air crews constantly train and hone their skills to perform these challenging maritime missions. And, because they routinely perform them so well, it is easy to forget their complexity and danger. Their prowess makes heroic airmanship appear routine.

Today, once again, this tragedy reminds that us that our profession – even while performing routine missions, is hazardous. These challenging missions are performed by **people**, people like Sean, Adam and Brett – who gladly step forward to fly because of their strong desire to serve. Sean, Adam and Brett did serve – they served all of us.

I like to say something to the families here today. In particular, I want to talk to the sons and daughters of Sean, Adam and Brett. I am very hopeful the Krueger family is able to join us over the web today.

Trevor, Kerryann and Ashlyn Krueger,

Nicholas Hoke,

And for Shane and Austin Banks, and that coming brother or sister,

One of the most difficult things I think for children to understand is why their father or mother who loves them so much chooses a profession that takes them out into danger and away from their families. For years Coast Guardsmen have headed out onto the sea, or flown out over the sea, to perform dangerous missions. For you children, I have to tell you, before Coast Guardsmen take in the lines or get underway, or pull out the chocks and lift off into the air, their thoughts are always about their families. And while performing the mission, and after the mission is accomplished, they always look forward to coming back and seeing their family members.

So I am confident as the 6017 was going through that mental check-off list on Wednesday, thinking about the next thing they had to do, part of that check-off list was looking forward to getting home, to be with all of you.

To the Spouses and Parents, I know it is hard to make sense of why your sons, husbands, fathers and brothers were lost in this accident – or come up with a reason why it happened.

I can't give you a reason. I can say that you – we – can be inspired by their legacy of service – to country, community and family. Their service is a source of solace and consolation.

These things, they did, so that others might live. In doing so, they gave the ultimate sacrifice. Their spirit will always be with us – we will never forget them – they served our Nation with honor.

There's one last thing that I would like to talk about today, and that is perhaps the one small measure of good fortune that we have in this accident—the fact that we still have LT Lance Leone with us today. Lance is still here to be a husband to Ellen, and to be a father to Sophia and Brett, and for that we should all be grateful. The physical scars will mend and heal themselves eventually; it's the emotional scars that will take much longer. So I'd like to ask all members of the Coast Guard family, to reach out to Lance and give him your love, and help Lance and his family through this terrible tragedy.

As we go forward figuratively in missing man formation, to honor the service of LCDR (sel.) Sean Krueger, AMT1 Hoke and AMT2 Banks, we can draw comfort in knowing that Sean, Adam and Brett have, have, as it has been said, “slipped the surly bonds of earth” to “touch the face of God.”

Semper Paratus.

Admiral Bob Papp

Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard