

Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Bob Papp's Remarks

at the

70th Commemoration of Pearl Harbor Attack

Aboard CGC TANEY, Baltimore Harbor
Dec. 7, 2011

Shipmates,

First, I would like to thank all those responsible for Cutter TANEY's appearance – though she is a museum she looks ready for sea! You are taking great care of “The last survivor of Pearl Harbor.”

We are also especially pleased to have Lord Ambrose Greenway join us – he is Chairman of the World Ship Trust, an organization dedicated to the recognition of, and support for, historic vessels like Cutter Taney.

Second, I also want to thank all of today's ceremony participants – we are honored to have representation from so many services including the USMC Color Guard, CWO5 Fred L. Shinbur, U.S. Army (ret.) presenting the POW-MIA flag, the U.S. Navy Band, and of course the Coast Guard Honor Guard.

If we have any Air Force veterans in the audience, I think we will have all 5 services represented...

Third, I want to thank our many program participants who often get skipped -- National Anthem Singer Mr. Joseph DiCara ... who will later sing Eternal father ... and Mr. Brian Auer who will sing Amazing Grace ... and, of course our Chaplain LT Jason Ulven ... for those of you who don't know the Navy Chaplain Corps celebrated its 236th Anniversary on Nov. 28th...

Thank you.

Good morning. It's great to be aboard Cutter Taney to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor – a date that for many of you who served in WWII changed your lives personally – and, more broadly, changed the trackline of our Nation's history.

We are here today to do – what I call observing the manners of our profession. These manners are not recorded in any book, any document or any publication. These

manners are observed, taught and experienced. They are felt in the heart. And, by practicing them, we prepare other generations to carry on our traditions.

Seventy years ago today, at 0755 on Sunday December 7, 1941, members of TANEY's crew were resting in their racks right below the very deck we are assembled on, when they were blasted out of their holiday routine by an attack force of over 180 Japanese aircraft.

I took the opportunity to review the TANEY's Commanding Officer's report of the events of that morning – CDR Louis B. Olson, reported as follows:

“When the anti-aircraft fire was first observed...general quarters [was] sounded and all officers not on board ordered to return. The anti-aircraft battery as well as all other guns were ready to fire with their full crew and three officers at their stations in four minutes. The remaining officers with one exception were aboard less than ten minutes later. Steam was ordered and the vessel was ready to get underway. Without having received orders from any source, between 0915 and 0918 TANEY's gun crews opened fire on scattering formations of enemy aircraft at high altitude passing over the harbor from west to east, using #4 and #5 3 inch guns...”

CDR Olson goes on to describe several more volleys of fire put up by TANEY's crew ... though most aircraft were out of range, TANEY's gunfire is credited with saving the Honolulu Power Plant from destruction.

He concludes that “the officers and crew bore themselves well, although most members of the crew had had no training except drill and had never seen anything above a 50 caliber fired.” That quickly changed, as TANEY headed for sea the following morning, to chase enemy submarines, and on to an illustrious wartime career where she earned four battle stars for service both in the Pacific and Atlantic.

But after reading CDR Olson's report, I wondered, who was that one missing officer? That “one exception” as the CO termed it. Whatever became of him?

Well, as some of you know from being aboard the ship, TANEY was designed to carry an aircraft – a Grumman JF2 Duck. Well that aircraft, and its pilot had been assigned on December 6 to Naval Air Station Pearl Harbor. The pilot – and some of you might recognize the name – was LT Frank Erickson. Leave it to the aviator to go AWOL.

When LT Erickson reported to the Naval Air Station on a Saturday morning, the Navy officers were so pleased to have a Coast Guard junior officer aboard, that they stuck him with duty that very evening! No qualification required!

Early on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, LT Erickson was preparing to oversee morning colors, when the base was rocked by two heavy explosions...the Marine color detail did not wait for 0800 to hoist colors. The flag went up, but the tune was General Quarters.

LT Erickson then looked up just in time to see a torpedo bomber launch its weapon at the USS California.

As the explosions continued, the phone rang – on the other end of the line was the Air Station Commanding Officer U.S. Navy Captain James Shoemaker, demanding to know “What the hell kind of drills [his Coast Guard duty officer] was pulling down there?!”

With shrapnel raining down, a message was soon dispatched from the Air Station Duty Officer – “AIR RAID PEARL HARBOR – THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”

LT Erickson then took station in the airport control tower. He had a commanding view of the attack. From his position he observed oil covered men, who had abandoned bombed out ships, struggling to make their way ashore, in Pearl Harbor’s burning waters. This image was indelibly seared into his mind. But from this chaos, a vision was also born.

A vision of a helicopter capable of hovering, hoisting and ferrying survivors to safety. And, that moment his passion was cemented. His mission was clear. His calling was to bring this vision to reality. And, that’s just what he did.

Working with Sikorski aviation, he pioneered the use of helicopters for search and rescue. He would go on to become designated as Coast Guard helicopter pilot No. 1 – and his vision of helicopters would go on to save countless lives – on the sea and on the ground. His Pearl Harbor experience – like so many WWII veterans – spurred him on to pioneer a craft that would save countless lives.

So, now you know the rest of the story about Cutter Taney’s “one exception” – the missing officer -- who went on to be exceptional officer – and dedicate his talents “so that others may live.”

(On a lighter note, when Retired Captain Frank Erickson told this story later in life, he joked that CG aviators that followed him should be thankful to him – because he was never aware of another Coastie being put in charge of a Naval Air Station on their first night ashore....and he would end the story with a flourish, by stating, “And that’s how I started World War II.”)

It is particularly fitting that we reflect upon Captain Frank Erickson’s legacy today because it is not only the 70th Commemoration of the Attack on Pearl Harbor, but it is also the Centennial of Naval Aviation.

Now, you will notice that I started off by greeting you all as shipmates. For me, shipmate is a term of endearment. I use the term shipmate not only to refer to people I have served with, past and present, but also the extended members of our Coast Guard family and greater military family and supporters – who are all of you with us today.

Being aboard Cutter TANEY, on this historic occasion, the use of the word shipmate is particularly appropriate...because, to me, this ceremony is really about her shipmates, and the many other members of the “Greatest Generation.”

The lesson that they have taught us – that many of YOU in this audience have shown us – and that our newer generations must learn and pass on – is that success in WWII was not a given. Nor is it in any challenging endeavor or conflict. Rather, success was earned – and is earned because of our shipmates’ willingness to serve and sacrifice in pursuit of a common cause – freedom.

A similar ceremony to ours is being held 5,800 miles from where we are assembled – though I suspect it’s a bit warmer there – as the crowd looks out upon the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. The manners of our profession are being observed... And the same lesson is being passed on...that it is the character of our shipmates that keeps the torch of freedom burning brightly. We resolve to never forget their sacrifices and those of our military service members, and their families, past and present that continue to serve in harm’s way.

We are Coast Guardsmen. We work as a crew. We serve as a family.

This is our way. This is who we are. This is what we do.

Semper Paratus...