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Memorial Day Speech, 30 May 2016

Good morning. My friends – Fellow Veterans – Fellow Americans – It’s an honor for me to join you today as your guest speaker.

I am one of the few active duty Naval Officers in San Diego that actually grew up here in America’s Finest City. When I left for the Naval Academy right out of high school in 1985, I had no idea I’d make it this far, let alone be the guest speaker at such an amazing venue and for such a wonderful crowd.

I am a career submariner, having served on 5 submarines with command of the USS BREMERTON out of Pearl Harbor Hawaii. Let me tell you, your United States submarine force is the most talented, well-trained, and best equipped submarine force in the world. Our submarines are deadly, quiet, and have the asymmetric capacity to maintain control of sea lanes and keep an eye on world events.

There is not a single platform in our military arsenal that has the multi-mission capability of a submarine. If the President wants to know what happens in the world’s oceans or its littoral areas, we can do that without ever being seen. If the President wants to break something, we can do that too, with a torpedo, tomahawk cruise missile, or a Trident D-5 nuclear missile.

Either way, the silent service will deliver the goods day in and day out, 365 days a year, because we recruit and retain the best volunteers that America has to offer. Being a submariner is more than passing a claustrophobia test; it demands excellence, precision, discipline, situational awareness and a healthy sense of humility.

No sea story better captures these traits better than the one about three Lieutenants interviewing with an Admiral for the duty of being his Flag Aide. The nuance here is that this Admiral was rather self-conscious about his appearance since he had been in an accident as a young Lieutenant that resulted in the amputation of his right ear.

The first interview was with a Supply Officer from the surface navy and the Admiral was duly impressed. At the end of the interview the Admiral asked him, "So, do you notice anything different about me?"

The Supply Officer answered, "Why yes, of course Admiral. After taking a visual inventory of your appendages, I couldn't help but notice you are missing your right ear."

The Admiral was not at all pleased with this lack of tact and threw him out of his office.

Next the Admiral interviewed a Naval Aviator and that interview went splendidly as well. The Admiral asked him the same question at the conclusion of the interview and the Aviator replied, "Um, well, I guess I can't help but notice that you are missing your starboard flap."

The Admiral threw him out also.

The third interview was with a Submarine Officer. As you would expect, he was articulate, extremely sharp, very friendly and seemed to know more than the other two Officers combined.

The Admiral really liked this Lieutenant and hoped that he had more awareness and tact than the other guys so he went ahead with the same question, "Do you notice anything different about me?"

To his surprise the Submariner said, "Absolutely. It's obvious that you wear contact lenses."

The Admiral was impressed and thought to himself, what an incredibly observant young man, and he didn't mention my ears.

"And how do you know that?", the Admiral asked.

The Submariner replied, "Well, sir, it is pretty hard to wear glasses with only one ear!"

On a more serious note, I would like to take a moment to read the Medal of Honor citation from one of our submarine community's WWII heroes, CDR Howard Gilmore, if for no other reason than to demonstrate that submariners value their shipmates over themselves and to remember one of the many bold and daring acts of our war time navy.

To CDR Howard Gilmore, for distinguished gallantry and valor above and beyond the call of duty as commanding officer of the U.S.S. Growler during her Fourth War Patrol in the Southwest Pacific from 10 January to 7 February 1943. Boldly striking at the enemy in spite of continuous hostile air and antisubmarine patrols, CDR Gilmore sank one Japanese freighter and damaged another by torpedo fire, successfully evading severe depth charges following each attack. In the darkness of night on 7 February, an enemy gunboat closed range and prepared to ram the Growler. CDR Gilmore daringly maneuvered to avoid the crash and rammed the attacker instead, ripping into her port side at 11 knots and bursting wide her plates. In the terrific fire of the sinking gunboat's heavy machine guns, CDR Gilmore calmly gave the order to clear the bridge, and refusing safety for himself, remained on deck while his men preceded him below. Struck down by the fusillade of bullets and having done his utmost against the enemy, in his final living moments, CDR Gilmore gave his last order to the officer of the deck, "[Take her down](#)". The Growler dived; seriously damaged but under control, she was brought safely to port by her well-trained crew inspired by the courageous fighting spirit of their dead captain.

Memorial day is about reflection. It is a time to pause and pay tribute to those who gave their lives while wearing the uniform as an American warrior, and it is a time to support those who live with the loss of their loved ones... parents, spouses, children, brothers and sisters, and friends. Their ultimate sacrifice echoes in eternity through the spirit of the living.

Memorial Day's origins date back to 1868, when General John Logan, the commander-in-chief of the Union veterans' group known as the Grand Army of the Republic, issued a decree that May 30 should become a nationwide day of commemoration for the more than 620,000 soldiers killed in the recently ended Civil War. On Decoration Day, as General Logan called it, Americans should lay flowers and decorate the graves of the war dead "whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village and hamlet churchyard in the land." General Logan apparently chose May 30 because it was a rare day that didn't fall on the anniversary of a Civil War battle, though

some historians believe the date was selected to ensure that flowers across the country would be in full bloom.

Regardless of his motivation, he recognized that our nation was founded by men willing to stand up for a cause greater than themselves. These same men not only laid the foundation of the principles upon which our nation was built, but they set the cornerstone of patriotism for generations to come.

Words like honor, courage, commitment, sacrifice, valor, and perseverance are often used to describe the virtues of the military services. These are not just words uttered out of habit; these are words that make up our ethos as warriors and patriots for this great nation.

San Diego's military is blessed. We have the good fortune of being surrounded by a community that wholeheartedly supports our Sailors and Marines. For generations, San Diegans have taken a great interest in preserving a positive relationship with the military and I don't foresee that changing any time soon with this new 21st century group of sailors, soldiers, airmen, and marines.

While we have established that our World War II Veterans were the "greatest generation", I firmly believe that the men and women who voluntarily choose to serve our country represent another "generation of greatness". Many of today's recruits and officer candidates were born in 1997. They were 4 years old when September 11th occurred. They are a generation of young people who have no clear memory of September 11th 2001, but they grew up with a continuous

war against radical Islamic forces and other forces of evil that challenge the freedoms of mankind. Despite this constant threat, our nation's young men and women continue to volunteer to serve in some of the world's darkest and most difficult locations. They are a generation of young people who have chosen to put their feet in boots, their legs at sea, and their hearts behind the uniform to venture into harm's way, just as many of you here today have done so in the past.

I also want to add that the young men and women serving our country are increasingly becoming part of a smaller footprint in our domestic landscape. Today's active duty volunteers represent barely 1% of our nation's population, when we include veterans that number swells to a whole 5% who are serving or who have served. As our nation's population grows, the size of our military remains the same or in some years, takes a decline. Yet the mission for our military continues to grow and take on new lines of effort.

The threats to our nation are very real, and hoping they go away, or appeasing their existence, will only embolden their determination to take us down. Evil forces do not care about our values, our families, our way of life. They only care about power and establishing rule through fear and the crushing of the human spirit. This is the essence of war; to destroy an enemy's will to fight such that they succumb to the victor's demands.

As long as there are forces trying to oppress freedom, and as long as the United States of America remains committed to preserving the freedom of mankind, we will continue to see conflict manifest itself on the heels of these two ideologies. And I have no doubt that we will

continue to fill our ranks with incredibly brave men and women who are up to the challenge to defeat those forces.

I know this because I have faith in our American values of independence, charity, self-determination, and freedom to choose a path in this great land of opportunity. Despite the attention afforded to unsavory behaviors by main stream and social media in our country, I know for a fact that we have a nation of communities who are instilling confidence, responsibility, and American pride in their children. My family and I have moved 18 times, hit all 4 corners of the United States, completed 3 tours in Hawaii and 2 tours in Washington D.C., and we even spent some time in the south with a tour in Tennessee. I can assure you, based on the families I have met and the communities we have lived in, America will never fall short of volunteers to defend our great nation because they fully grasp Edmund Burke's statement of "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing".

I myself am a second generation submariner, preceded by my father, who nobly served his country on multiple submarines through the Vietnam and Cold Wars. My grandfather served in the army during WWII and my father in law is a retired marine who is also a WWII Iwo Jima veteran. In fact, chewing up the black sands of that island weren't enough for him so he came back for service in the Korean war and the Vietnam war. All three of these men have played a pivotal role in shaping my career as a naval officer. In fact, my father in law taught me a lesson in being a humble leader shortly after I received my first personal award, a Navy Achievement Medal (NAM).

Way back in 1992, when I was awarded the NAM I was quite satisfied and proud of myself. Since there wasn't any internet back then, I made copies of the citation and mailed one to my father and one to my father-in-law with a hand written note in each envelope. My dad wrote me back, and predictably, said, "Well done! You earned it and you deserve it, there will be many more to follow!". My father-in-law also wrote me back and said, "Well done! You earned it and you deserve it, there will be many more to follow!". But he also wrote, "I have included a copy of my first personal award for your review and consideration." As I unfolded the page, I saw by the citation preamble that I was looking at a Bronze Star with valor, awarded to Private First Class Romano for action on the sands of Iwo Jima. Never again did I ever publicly celebrate my personal achievements.

While service to our country is not measured by the number of medals on our chest, the medals do signify the sacrifice that many sailors, soldiers, airmen and marines have made in defense of our nation and our constitution. The legacy of all of the heroic and incredible deeds recognized in award citations, many of them posthumously, are carried on in perpetuity with every name inscribed on our national and local war memorials. The memorials we build are not so much for our personal benefit as they are to remind us of our obligation as citizens to never forget our veterans and the causes that they undertook.

The day we Americans accept being told what to believe, the day we accept lawlessness from our government, the day we no longer think it is exceptional being an American with the rights and protections afforded to us by our constitution, is the day that we embrace defeat and tell our fallen veterans and founding fathers that their sacrifice was meaningless.

Even more egregious, the day we give up on free thought, free markets, self-determination, the rule of law, and the protections of our constitution, is the day we tell our living veterans and all active duty men and women that their lives and sacrifices no longer matter. I can think of no greater insult to such a noble cause.

So when we celebrate Memorial Day, we celebrate more than the ultimate sacrifice made by generations of veterans and civilians in our nation's defense, we celebrate the resiliency of our country in its communities and we celebrate the foundation of our great nation that continues to be strengthened by the American Dream.

I will conclude with President Lincoln's remarks at Gettysburg as they demonstrate the resolve of a great American leader in ensuring the fabric of our country, our states, and our communities remained intact in full honor of the fallen. On that 19th day of November in 1863, at the site of the battle field, President Lincoln said -

“We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate -- we can not consecrate -- we can not hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

I can think of no greater tribute to our veterans than those immortal words. So as we reflect upon the legacy of our fallen veterans, let's not be saddened by their loss, but emboldened by their commitment to keeping me, you, and this great nation of opportunity forever free from tyranny and oppression.

Thank you all for joining us today to ensure our veterans and their service will not be forgotten. God bless you all and God Bless America.