

**Chief of Naval Operations
Adm. Gary Roughead
Navy League Sea, Air, Space Banquet
May 5, 2009**

Good evening and once again Dugan, congratulations and thank you for all you've done. Mike, thank you for your leadership of the Navy League. And to all who have made this evening possible, I congratulate you on a truly successful event and I would also say that you're selection of this venue is really extraordinary. What a place it is especially being in the harbor, on the water, where all of us who serve in the sea services feel very, very much at home.

But despite the wisdom and the thoughtfulness of the Navy League, I think that everyone in here must be a glutton for punishment because this is my second time with you in two days, and especially on Cinco de Mayo, you're brave to be out here. Although as some of you may know Steve Pietropaoli and I go back quite a ways and I'm fairly well assured that about half way through my remarks, there's going to be a Mariachi band that comes marching through here. So Steve if you could just hold them in advance and I will keep my remarks fairly brief.

We have spent the last few days talking about ships, airplanes, logistics cycles and weapons systems, but flowing in around and under all of our conversations is something we all equally appreciate, but something that we seldom discuss directly and that is the importance of the sea and the importance of naval strength. I stand where I am today because in my younger days I was captivated by the sea. At that time, new discoveries and exciting events were happening at sea, and I might add that the Navy was very much involved. In the news, the talk was about things like the Trieste and its dives to the deepest points on Earth, the sea lab and the advent of nuclear power in ships that made Jules Verne's fiction a reality. People those days were calling the oceans inner space with the same wonder and excitement that now many attribute solely to outer space. The seas were revealing new opportunities every day. They were important in the public discourse and they held the unmistakable lure of exploration. They drew me like a moth to a flame. And so here I stand today trying not to be consumed by the flames of Washington, but here to talk to you about building the ships and airplanes that we need to have at sea as a nation.

There was a French pilot and author, Antoine de Saint Exupery, who put it, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood, and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." And not to exclude our aviators but I think they would agreed that if you want to build an airplane, you need to talk only of the enormity and the wonder of the skies above.

Many of us here are organizing and budgeting and planning for the ships, submarines and airplanes that, with our incredible Sailors at the helm, make us the dominant Navy that

we are. I think those of us who work in the business long for the sea and believe in the importance of the maritime domain both to our way of life and to our options for national defense. And even though it doesn't take long in this town to have one's attention captured and held hostage by the budget, I believe that our minds are really on the sea. But if we want to build the ships that we need to sail the seas to protect and advance our society, we must take the lead in showing others, in teaching others, about the immensity of our oceans, their value and their inexplicable link to our way of life.

To many, the oceans while present, are invisible. People look quickly at our Navy and think "My, those ships are so incredibly powerful and there seem to be so many of them." They don't always consider that the 283 ships that serve in our Navy today are the fewest that we've had in our fleet since 1916. And that they are not there to be solely engaged in the type of battles that are epitomized in the 1950 TV series "Victory at Sea" where battles are conveniently began and ended in one episode, without a full explanation of what it took to make all of that possible. The Navy today is meant to win battles at sea, to be sure. But it is much, much more. The fleet must cover America's responsibilities around the world, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and at an unforgiving pace of operations. The security of the oceans is an assumed constant, and so the security is forgotten at least until there is a significant or newsworthy interruption like the attempted pirating of the Maersk Alabama or the devastating attacks in Mumbai that came from the sea.

Though there may not always be a threat on our oceans, there is always an incredible amount of risk. Throughout history, global powers have relied on equally global navies to mitigate that risk. We require unimpeded use of the sea and the global commons to conduct 90 percent of our trade. We use the cables on the ocean floor for 95 percent of intercontinental communications. We use the sea to project power ashore from our aircraft carriers, our amphibious ships, our destroyers and our submarines. And at sea there are precious resources to be found, resources that keep our society running. In my mind, the oceans are like air - vital to life -except you do not notice it until it is gone. My European colleagues refer to this as 'sea blindness.' Not all nations, however, are so affected as you can see from the growing investments that we see around the world in stealthy submarines, in missiles and in advanced weapons systems. Regardless of how you characterize it, we as leaders in the maritime community, must capture and recapture the enthusiasm for teaching the endless immensity of the sea before it is disrupted. It is important that our nation has an understanding of the importance of our dominance at sea and that we reignite the debate on what is needed to ensure our operations and way of life can be assured for generations to come.

And now is the time. We are at an inflexion point. Now perhaps more than any other time in recent history. We have a unique privilege and an obligation to define what we see as our maritime requirements and a future that will ultimately define our Navy. It will take very hard work to do this and we cannot realize the opportunities alone. The citizens of our nation, those who are the ultimate benefactors of our maritime strength, must be brought into this important and critical discussion. It is up to them to drive the debates on where to invest for the future. It is up to us as leaders to communicate the opportunities

that lie ahead, from deterrence of our enemies and those who use the seas for criminal and harmful effects, to improve partnerships, to free and open sea lanes. And it is up to us to evenhandedly discuss the challenges: from advanced weapons proliferation, like submarines and ballistic missiles, to transnational criminal activity, to violent extremism, to climate change, to resource competition, to demographic shifts and an increase in disruption and disorder that we read about every day.

This year's theme, "National security, maritime superiority, global presence," holds great significance to those of us here. I applaud the Navy League for its considerable efforts to raise awareness and to be a part of the team that teaches others about the immensity and the importance of the sea. But each of us make sure, however, that we are not the only ones who understand this and value it. We have every opportunity to do this. Indeed we have an obligation to do this. The oceans are intrinsically important, even if they are remote for some. I am confident that we in the maritime community will work hard to build the ships our nation needs to assure allies, deter enemies and ensure free oceans. Let us not forget that the way to build those ships however is not to drum people together, to collect wood and assign tasks, but rather to teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

The challenges may seem great but as we approach the June 4th commemoration of our Battle of Midway at the Navy Memorial here in Washington, we should remember that the ability to influence events at sea is still a crucial element of national power. We have the greatest Sailors today that have ever sailed in the United States Navy. We have the greatest, most powerful fleet in the world. We will retain that advantage long into the future. That is the story, that is the history that all of us who are drawn to the sea must write. Thank you for what you do and thank you for being part of writing that history.