



**Remarks for Admiral Patrick M. Walsh
Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet
Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet Change of Command
7 September 2011
USS BLUE RIDGE (LCC 19)**

Thank you very much, Scott, for your kind introduction.

Ambassadors, Admirals, Mayors Yoshida and Mori, distinguished guests, fellow Flag and General officers, family and friends, on behalf of our Chief of Naval Operations – ADM Gary Roughead, good evening, Aloha, and KONBON WA!

I am especially grateful for the opportunity to be with you this evening, to re-connect with many dear friends, to spend time with many distinguished colleagues, and to call attention to...as well as highlight...the strong, enduring alliance between the United States and Japan. It is an honor and a privilege to participate in this formal ceremony...in this historic setting...and recognize the important work done by the men and women of the SEVENTH Fleet, to express the gratitude of our Navy for their service and sacrifice, and to honor the departing and arriving commanders and their families. I would like to offer a very warm welcome -- especially to those who have traveled far to join us as we recognize the many contributions of Scott and Mindy Van Buskirk and welcome Scott and Trish Swift to the SEVENTH Fleet family.

It is truly wonderful to be back in Yokosuka, aboard this great flag ship among Sailors of our Forward Deployed Naval Forces. As we gather here, more than 80 ships, over 200 aircraft, and more than 40,000 Sailors are operating under the command of the U.S. SEVENTH Fleet in an area where life at sea influences the largest populations, economies, and militaries of the world. In a region where the sea affects so much of our daily lives, seapower has returned to its traditional role in the sea lines of communication as an instrument of peace, stability, and protector of trade and development. We have the honor and good fortune to be part of this wonderful, naval profession, in a time and place of great consequence.

In the Asia Pacific community, we are at an extraordinary moment in history - when the movement of information, the shipment of energy, goods and commodities, combined with the ability to communicate beyond national borders and opportunities for travel... have resulted in linkages and connections that make us increasingly reliant on partners in the community of nations... and dependent on the sea, for many elements of our lives...with these benefits come responsibilities to each other...for each other...to be vigilant, ready, and responsive to address coercive, unsafe, or unhealthy conditions that can at-once affect the lives and livelihoods of so many populations and nations.

Our alliance has been the keystone of regional security and an enabler of stability and prosperity..... and the relationship between the JMSDF and the U.S. Navy has grown and matured over the years not only through professional interactions, exercises, and operations but especially through the personal connections of our families that make us so aware and appreciative of each other.

In times of crisis, in the hour of tragedy, and at the moment of calamity, we learn about ourselves and about the brotherhood of humanity. In the days that followed the March 11, 2011, earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis, the work done by the Japan Self-Defense Force was heroic and honorable. Despite incalculable personal loss and grieving for their own loved ones, the Self Defense Force shouldered the burden of responsibility with a deep sense of personal honor and commitment for the mission. Admiral Van Buskirk was our first responder; he did not wait for orders or formal tasking. He called his colleagues in the JMSDF; he moved SEVENTH Fleet forces swiftly; he positioned forces precisely to assist our friends for the most unprecedented humanitarian assistance operation in history.

As the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander, he employed 22 ships, 132 aircraft and more than 15,000 personnel in response to what would become a very complex operation in the wake of an overwhelming story of human tragedy. In the days and weeks that followed the Great Earthquake, our Self Defense Force and SEVENTH Fleet team delivered hundreds of tons of relief supplies to groups of people isolated by the disaster, systematically mapped and cleared harbors from obstructions to navigation, provided fuel and supplies, meticulously searched for

survivors in thousands of square miles of ocean, and flew hundreds of aerial reconnaissance flights as part of the search and rescue effort.

If ever there was a time and place to witness where the wrath of nature has met the best of humanity... it was here... where the chaos of the sea confronted the orderly life of the Japanese culture... But also, where the same powerful wave summoned an equally powerful force – the essential purity and resolute spirit of the Japanese people, possessed of the wish for peace and security, yet emotionally resolved to meet any challenge. I had the privilege to witness this positive force in action ...and to see U.S. and Japanese service members side by side adapting and learning together in an unprecedented crisis as they would move from relief missions to offer humanitarian assistance and then pivot to missions associated with the radiological crisis. While none of us could have prepared for this specific mission, the mark of an impressive team is to learn and grow under fire, in crisis conditions and adapt, improvise and to fight the fear of the unknown – with a force that together, could land on its feet within hours of a disaster, and prove by its actions what it means to be a friend.

Admiral Van Buskirk led an impressive organization as a consummate leader. While he openly laments the prospect of leaving here abruptly after one year on the job – the Pentagon has called him back for his unique skills and background to return to service in Washington. I will share with you, though, that we do not join the Navy for a long career...we join the Navy for a distinguished career...and Scott distinguished himself here with this opportunity of a lifetime.

In the profession of arms, we share a proud heritage. I would suggest that, regardless of nationality, all of us place a high premium (more than any award or form of recognition) on the view of our colleagues; to earn the respect of one's peers is a form of personal satisfaction that lasts a lifetime. I suggest that whether or not we fulfilled our responsibilities to the mission and to each other should be measured by four simple, straightforward, but nevertheless penetrating questions:

First, were we truly men and women of courage?

Second, were we truly men and women of judgment?

Third, were we truly men and women of integrity?

Fourth, were we truly men and women of dedication?

For Scott Van Buskirk, the answer to these questions is a resounding ‘yes.’ Through his brilliant performance, SEVENTH fleet went to work in an environment of uncertainty, of the unknown, and of risk, it set new standards of strategic and operational advancements, and his personal contributions helped forge positive and long-lasting relations with leaders of the nations in the region. Command of U.S. SEVENTH Fleet is a significant responsibility and a special privilege reserved for only a select few. Through his dynamic and visionary leadership, Admiral Van Buskirk has raised U.S. naval force readiness and improved interoperability with our many partners. Under normal circumstances, the high operational tempo within SEVENTH Fleet is challenging and demands much of our Sailors and their families. But this past year will certainly prove to be one for the record books.

Thank you, Scott, for your dedication to mission and the welfare of Sailors and their families.

Those of us who wear the uniform know that the most important part of our lives, the most important source of strength and support, is our family - so we understand and appreciate the personal sacrifices that the Van Buskirk family has made. In addition to the same always ready smile, Mindy, shares with Scott his strong love of the Navy and dedication to service and to people. She has been a strong advocate for SEVENTH Fleet Sailors. On behalf of the Pacific Fleet, please accept my heartfelt thanks for all you have done - we are grateful for your support.

Scott and Mindy - Andy and I know it must be difficult to bid Sayonara to Japan and the wonderful community here in Yokosuka. We wish you Fair Winds and Following Seas as you take on your next assignment in the Pentagon. I have every faith that you will continue your many successes.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Swifts, who come to you from Hawaii well prepared for the dynamic pace of SEVENTH Fleet. For the past year, Scott has served as Director of Operations at U.S. Pacific Command and has a profound appreciation for the

importance of maritime security and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. Admiral Swift is an award-winning aviator and proven combat veteran - highly regarded by those senior and junior to him for both his brilliance and common-sense approach to solving problems. I have worked with Scott in many locations around the world, under difficult circumstances, including crisis conditions – and have been impressed by his commitment to mission, enthusiasm for people, and calm, unflappable demeanor...and through all of the diverse views, fractious issues, and enormous challenges, he and Trish will build a team that will make all of us proud.

Scott, I have every confidence you will serve the Pacific Fleet, the U.S. Navy, and our friends and allies in the Asia-Pacific region well. Command of SEVENTH Fleet will be a rewarding experience, and I know you and Trish will cherish the opportunity to live among a very special community of shipmates, friends and allies.

I would like to express my gratitude to our regional partners, joint services, and all those who stand with us as friends. My deepest thanks and regards also go to the government and people of Japan, the citizens of Yokosuka, and the Japan Self Defense Forces, for your hospitality and unwavering support. It is an honor and a pleasure for our Navy to live and operate here, with you.

Finally, I want to extend my thanks to the men and women of the United States SEVENTH FLEET who have dedicated their lives to the defense of our nation and to the cause of freedom; your Navy and your nation are grateful.

Thank you.

Admiral Van Buskirk, please join me so that we can recognize you formally for your achievements in command.