**244TH NAVY BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

Thank you for that warm introduction.

Admiral Hughes, Admiral McClane, Admiral Cheeseman, Distinguished guests, shipmates, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Memphis 2019 Navy Ball Celebrating our Navy’s 244th Birthday.

I’d like to begin by thanking the Navy Ball Committee who organized this event. This is incredible! It is no small feat to pull together all the detail and logistics for an evening as impressive as this. So many hours of planning and coordination. You have done an absolute fantastic job! (applause)

On October 13, 1775, at 1022 in the morning, Congress signed our Navy into being. At 1238 that afternoon at Bookbinder’s Pub, the first liberty incident was reported, truly establishing the United States Navy.

It is truly an honor to be the speaker for tonight’s festivities. In 31 years of Naval service, the one thing I learned without a doubt is Sailors love long speeches, hopefully I will not disappoint you.

244 years… just about two and a half centuries of Maritime Dominance that almost wasn’t. That’s right, you see after the commissioning of the original two ships in 1775, the government went bankrupt and had to scuttle the continental Navy. Our independence had recently been won and our Nation’s sentiment was that we could do without a Navy. Fast forward a few years, our Nation being a multi-maritime boarder country began to invest heavily in international maritime commerce. Traveling the seven seas to buy and sell goods that would ultimately shape our super power status we enjoy today. It was not long before other Nations and bad actors, like Barbary pirates, realized our merchant fleet was alone and unafraid, far from the comfort of America, making them easy targets. We endured numerous attacks decimating our merchant fleet and putting our burgeoning economy and Nation at risk, what we today call, National Security.

The Continental Congress acted swiftly and in 1787 our Navy in earnest was born with the famous 6 frigates. The flagship of this fleet being the USS Constitution, Old Iron Sides, which today is the oldest commissioned ship in our Navy. She and her sister ships are truly the bedrock of our Navy, serving through the civil war.

Now it is a widely held belief that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. Hence, my brief history lesson showing you cannot be a super power if you cannot protect your interests around the globe.

Fast forward 244 years, 2019 and our Nation once again finds itself at risk while protecting the sea lanes of communication and commerce. Only this time instead of pirates and rogue Nations, we find ourselves in competition with Great Powers, Russia and China. One is a cold war adversary, and the other, a country trying to regain its ancient glory by controlling the silk road from Europe to Asia.

Unlike 244 years ago, today’s great power competition is one built on the speed of technology. Our adversaries, although not quite equals, are outpacing us in developing their capabilities. Now, like 244 years ago, our Nation is faced with exploding debt at the same time our Navy needs to expand in order to compete, deter and win.

Thankfully, our Congress is finally resourcing our military deficit and we are moving forward with building the Navy our Nation Needs. We are working toward a Navy that is 355 ships strong, up from 273 a few years ago. A Navy that is going to be rooted in the latest technologies: hypersonic missiles, directed energy, lasers, and 5th generation fighters to name a few.

This new technological Navy will require highly qualified sailors who can operate these ships, airplanes, and weapons systems.

This is where our local Memphis Navy team shines. RDML Mclane and his NRC team finding our talented young men and women across the nation. RDML Cheeseman and his PERS 4 team assigning these new sailors to the fleet and RADM Hughes and his NPC team providing sailors exceptional customer support to ensure we retain our sailors.

With these three teams working together we can ensure we maintain the one asymmetric advantage we enjoy over all our adversaries: our people. OUR Sailors along with our civilian workforce. It is this combined force, wholly committed to serving our Navy and Nation, that makes tonight’s celebration extra special.

Now just when you think I am about to wrap up my remarks, I am here to tell you I am just getting started… and you have the Chief of Information (CHINFO) to blame for that. In prime Navy fashion they have put out a theme for this year’s birthday celebration, “No Higher Honor.” Now if it was any other theme I would have stayed with my Great Power narrative. But when I saw “No Higher Honor” and how it drew upon the extraordinary service and sacrifice of the Sailors who fought the greatest sea battle in history, Leyte Gulf, and in particular the heroism of the crews of USS Samuel B Roberts and USS Johnston, I knew I had to be all in.

That pivotal battle was fought to retake the Philippines, a major objective to achieving victory in the Pacific during WW2. In order to allow American forces to land on the islands, LCDR Robert W. Copeland, Commander of the USS Samuel B Roberts, along with a small group of accompanying destroyers, known collectively as Taffy 3, bravely charged into a line of Japanese battleships blockading the islands.

 The fighting was ruthless and our American destroyers were decimated in the action.

In addition to the heroism of the crew of Samuel B. Roberts, Commander Ernest Evans, who commanded USS Johnston, told his crew at commissioning, “This is going to be a fighting ship. I intend to go in harm’s way, and anyone who doesn’t want to go along had better get off right now.” When the Japanese were closing in on Taffy 3, Commander Evans stayed true to his word and led Taffy 3’s charge into the fight. He commenced a solo daylight torpedo attack against the Japanese force in a desperate attempt to buy time for the Taffy 3 escort carriers to get their planes off the deck and into the battle. To be clear, a daylight torpedo attack in the face of the Japanese battleships and destroyers was a suicidal move. As the JOHNSTON charged into battle, CDR Evans’ order to his crew was to “prepare to engage a major portion of the Japanese fleet.” Dodging a hail of Japanese fire, JOHNSTON raked the lead Japanese heavy cruiser KUMANO with accurate five-inch gunfire and caused extensive topside damage to the heavily armored ship. JOHNSTON was credited with hitting KUMANO with at least one torpedo that blew off her bow, taking her out of the battle.

Commander Evans went down with his ship, but succeeded in meeting his and LCDR Copeland’s objective. Taffy 3 had successfully turned back the Japanese, allowing us to establish ground troops on the beachheads and ultimately retaking the Philippines in support of our push to mainland Japan.

LCDR Copeland would later recount the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the incredible valor of his crew in the face of such overwhelming odds, stating that there was “No Higher Honor” than to have the privilege to command such a crew. The cost of the battle was high. 1,117 ships’ crew and 43 aviators were killed, and other 913 wounded. Although the Battle off Samar is now rightly regarded as the most gallant in U.S. Navy history, our US victory came at a staggering price.

Please join me now in a moment of silence to remember and honor the men and the families of the USS Johnston, USS Samuel B. Roberts and the Taffy 3 battegroup. (30 seconds)

It is difficult to know how Commanders Copeland and Evans felt that day back in 1944, as they and their crews prepared to sacrifice themselves for the good of our Nation. However, it is not difficult to know what it means to feel the overwhelming sense of honor that comes from leading brave and committed sailors and civilians.

It is Taffy 3’s legacy that we carry on today in attributes like character, toughness, and resiliency. Attributes that will be required to compete, deter and win the Great Power Competition. Like RDML Sands from NSTC states, the fire is coming and our sailors, like those who fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, need to face it head on, take the blow, and continue to fight.

This sentiment is extended to our civilian employees as well. The continuity and care that you provide daily does not go unnoticed. If Millington is the brain of the Navy, then you, our civilian force, are the heart of Millington. You keep the mission going, you provide the voice of wisdom and maturity, and most importantly you remain committed to serving the Navy the Nation Needs. Thank you for what you do.

Heroic acts are not isolated to Taffy 3 and WW2. They continue to be part of our fabric every single day.

Whether it’s the Seaman Apprentice who gave life-saving CPR to a 10-month old child, or the SEABEES who used their quick wits and engineering equipment to keep a car from going off of a bridge. Whether it’s the 24-year-old Master-at-arms who lost his life saving his shipmate, or the Sailor who started a non-profit to build houses for homeless female Veterans. Whether it’s the SEAL who died trying to get a clear signal to request immediate support for his men, or the Chief who scoured the internet for hours to obtain the information needed to save a suicidal Sailor.

These are but a few examples of how you carry the souls of those who went before you. Many of you took your oath in a time of war, knowing what you were signing up for, yet answering the call anyway. Now together we are in the business of building the Navy the Nation Needs, a Navy not only based on numbers, but on a fighting spirit that runs to the fire.

Regardless of your role in Memphis, recruiting or retaining, sailor or civilian, know that you are making a difference. You are all warriors in the great power competition, like our predecessors from Taffy 3 many years ago. Continue to honor them by your selfless service to our Nation and Navy.

Our Navy is 244 years old this year, yet its true age is frozen in time by the sailors and civilians who serve. We never seem to grow old thanks to the next generation who boldly hold service above self as a noble calling, who raise their right hand to support and defend the constitution of the United States. The Navy has come a long way from its birth in 1775, to the Battle of Leyte Gulf, to Iraq/Afghanistan, and to Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea, but one thing hasn’t changed...the honor, courage and commitment of our Sailors and civilians.

Happy Birthday Navy! There truly is “No higher honor” than serving you.