

2015 VADM James Bond Stockdale Award for Inspiration Leadership Ceremony

Chief of Naval Operations ADM John Richardson Remarks as Delivered

Hall of Heroes, 10NOV15

Really, I must say the privilege to be here today is all mine. And it first of all kind of gives you tingles on your spine to be in the Hall of Heroes—a place dedicated to heroism and bravery and the Medal of Honor recipients. To be here to award the Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership is also a tremendous privilege. And then, we're all privileged to be in the company of these two great leaders who are today's recipients—this year's recipients of the Stockdale Award.

There are three things about this award that make it—I would argue—the most prestigious award the Navy can bestow on someone. One was already mentioned. It is peer-nominated, and this is a very special quality of the award. Only those people who are also in the hunt for the award can nominate others to be competitive or compete for this award. The idea that these two leaders distinguished themselves amongst their peers, which are arguably the most real assessors of true talent—that peer leadership, standing out among ourselves, is a true testament. You know, when you recognize someone among your peers who has been particularly outstanding—that in and of itself bears a special quality.

The second thing about the award is that it bears the name of Vice Adm. James Bond Stockdale, who was a super hero in the Navy. When Adm. Stockdale, who wrote prolifically, talked about how he saw the commanding officer and what roles the commanding officer would take, he saw it in terms of five roles. First of all there was the role teacher. There was the role of jurist. There was the role of moralist. Then as a steward. Then also, a bit surprisingly unless you know the Stockdales, a philosopher.

If you've read any of Stockdale's works, you'd know that he was heavily influenced by philosophy, the Classics, particularly the Stoics. He was a scholar of Marcus Aurelius and, in particular, Epictetus. He wrote extensively on what he learned from Epictetus and the Enchiridion about how the stoic philosophy can help and did help him in command. And in particular interest to him, and very useful to all of us, is that the stoics were very clear: there's no such thing as good news or bad news; there's just news. And you just have to deal with it.

As you're parsing through your situation, the first question a stoic would ask himself is 'What part of this situation is under my control? What can I do something about? And what part of this situation is clearly beyond my control?' And therefore, I've got to just deal with that. There's no need to spend a lot of intellectual energy on something I can't control. I need to concentrate on those things I can. And it's that philosophy that served him tremendously well, particularly during his time in the Hanoi Hilton as the senior prisoner of war confronted with this situation, that I think we would all have, before we became stoics, characterized as "bad" news. Right? And yet he just dove into that leadership challenge. Quickly set aside those aspects of the situation over which he had no control, and set about leading that group of prisoners and also leading the families of the prisoner back at home. I'll say a little bit more later on that.

The key to that leadership, and Adm. Stockdale knew this better than anybody, is communication. You can imagine yourself in a prison, where everybody is in isolation, and one of the aims of your captors is to prevent communication. Just merely getting the simplest word to your fellow prisoners and then back home is a tremendously challenging task. But he knew that it was absolutely important that in order to have command and in order to exercise those five roles, he had to have a way to talk to his people. So he, at great risk to himself and to the other prisoners, they devised this code to communicate amongst themselves so that they could have some kind of mutual command, and some kind of mutual support, and some kind of mutual effort. You just have to talk to any one of these prisoners, and that ability to connect with each other, connect with their leader, something through a chain, was absolutely critical.

Another thing about this award that I think is particularly special is that—one of the books that Adm. Stockdale wrote he wrote with his wife Sybil, called In Love and War, and part of the responsibility that Adm. Stockdale felt when he was a prisoner was to reach out somehow back home.

Adm. Carter and I had the privilege of attending Adm. Stockdale's wife Sybil Stockdale's funeral just last Friday at the Naval Academy. And it was just a magnificent time to mark the passing of another true hero. Sybil was just a remarkable woman, who again at great risk to herself and understanding the risk that her husband was accepting, found ways to communicate with Adm. Stockdale in the Hanoi Hilton, and resolved tremendous uncertainty of the families that were still back home who, in many cases, didn't know whether their husband was alive or dead, didn't know the rules about how do we pay somebody in that situation. And some of this was just basic blocking and tackling. Here was Ms. Stockdale, who was under tremendous stress herself—she had four boys right in that age when boys are super challenging, right? So she was wrestling with that on her own. Her husband was confirmed to be a prisoner of war, and yet found the strength to rise above all that and lead this community, staring down world leadership, staring down the North Vietnamese at the Paris Peace Talks, staring down some—sometimes staring down people here at home to make sure we could get the rules set in place to take care of these families who were back home continuing to stand the watch while their husbands were held captive in North Vietnam.

So for all those reasons, I think that this is an extremely special award. When we talk about privilege, it is a true privilege to preside over a ceremony like this. Can I ask all the Stockdale winners—former Stockdale winners to stand up? Let's give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

The reason I did that is because, as I arrived at the Naval Academy, and showed my ID to the guard there to greet me, the very next greeting I made was to the family—the Stockdale family, the four boys and their families. And I mentioned at the time, you know it just so happens—I think it was to Dr. Stockdale, Dr. James Bond Stockdale III—that both Admiral Carter and myself are recipients of the Stockdale Award that's named after your father. And he said, 'you know it didn't really hit me until just now that there is this fraternity, this group of people out there that are sort of a living tribute to both by mother and my father. And I just wanted to pass that on to all the winners here today. You carry on and have a great responsibility; I think we all do, to carry on that tribute to the Stockdales. To see that family in action at

the funeral, you can feel indirectly through their presence, their poise, their being totally together what a deep, not only respect, but also deep affection they had for their parents—particularly their mom who did so much to raise them while their dad was held captive.

So, for all those reason, I think that it's just a tremendously special award. Thank you for being here to honor, to help honor, our recipients. We have some terrific recipients.

First the Atlantic winner. Tony and Erin Grayson—just a fantastic job in command of USS Providence. A little bit of service, leadership and sacrifice in his blood. Tony's grandfather was a Black Cat Raider in World War II. This is a pretty special unit. They had these old PBVs, which were these Catalinas, which were by no means the hottest aircraft serving at the time. They would paint them black and they only flew at night—that was their thing: the Black Cats. And by virtue of doing that and by doing everything they could to be effective, they just inflicted tremendous damage on the enemy. So Tony's life of service starts early.

In the finest Naval tradition, both of our Stockdale awardees have married well above their heads. Erin has just completed divinity school at Yale. Just a terrific lunch that we had together to learn about everything that Erin has going on. They're looking forward to getting up there to the Pacific Northwest and then hopefully find a church and become ordained. Again, just like Admiral and Ms. Stockdale, were a tremendous team, so are Tony and Erin. And so we have Aden here, and Karin and Caleb—three wonderful kids and congratulations to the whole family. I know you're just super proud to be here to help honor Tony. So that's the Atlantic.

Now, we're going to rebalance to the Pacific...

To Matt and Mary Duffy. Again, Mary is a super talented tax accountant.

Matt in charge of the Goldenhawks of VAW-122. Matt is actually accompanied by, he said, 40 people. So parents on both sides, extended family, friends, and who are the Chicago Five? They're in the back of course. Anybody named the Chicago Five you know is in the back of the class. These are friends that Matt has had—grew up together right in Chicago, and have been best friends ever since. What a special time it is to come and be part of this.

One more show of hands—I'm a kind of an audience participation person—who is spending their first time in the Pentagon? So I think that's also kind of special, as you come in here and poke through the mystic of this five-sided crazy building and just get a chance—hopefully you had a chance to walk around and see the tour and some of the special things that are here in the building. And this is just a long way of saying welcome to all the families. And with that, I'll get off the stage.

Thank you for being here and for the privilege of presenting this award.