

NATIONAL COMMODORE'S REMARKS

COMO Gene Seibert

Presented at the 2005 N-Train

St. Louis, MO 26 January 2005

Admirals Kunkel and Van Sice.

Fellow members of the Coast Guard family.

It is a pleasure to share some of the thoughts of the Auxiliary National Leadership with you, as we embark on a new direction, a newly charted course over the next two years. As previously stated, our theme for this conference and a major thrust for the Auxiliary for years to come is Maritime Domain Awareness.

As I thought about what particular message I wanted to convey to you today, I considered talking about our plans to invigorate the transformation of the Auxiliary from an organization solely concerned with maritime safety, to one that gives added attention to maritime security, and to stress the importance of our intended course to wrap maritime safety and security into one balanced effort.

However, this has been formally communicated to you already in our vision and mission statements, our new direction document, the Maritime Domain Awareness White paper and our strategic business plan. These documents are available on the Auxiliary Website for all of our members to review.

This national training conference provides us the opportunity to further develop and share plans for the upcoming year, to discuss this new direction and what we need to do to meet the challenges ahead. Some of this has already occurred over the past several days and still more will take place today and tomorrow. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity in your various training sessions or just in one-on-one conversation with each other.

However, today I want to discuss something I feel is very important, something that binds us together in a common cause and makes us who and what we are.

For 65 years, the Auxiliary has done the tasks assigned to it by the Coast Guard. We've done them well. We know that and so does the Coast Guard.

We've been there when otherwise boring patrols were interrupted by emergencies, in which lives and property were saved.

We've been there for the 20th Vessel Safety Check at the ramp on that hot summer day and we've been there when we found that leaking gas line and kept some family on a boating holiday from possible disaster.

We've been there in the classroom when everyone's trying to stay awake for an evening class and we've been there when a boat operator, on some foggy night off a rock-bound coast remembers the tip he learned in a boating class on how sound travels differently in the fog.

We've been there, flying a practice SAR grid for the umpteenth time, our eyes hurting from the sun's glare on the water and we've been there, with eyes tired and sore and saw that flash of color that locates the person in the water.

And we've been there when nature turns deadly and we've been there when the terrorists brought our innocent world crashing down with the twin towers, the Pentagon and in a field somewhere in Pennsylvania.

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We've been there, done that and done it again and again and we'll keep doing it, training, patrols, classroom or administrative tasks, humdrum or crashing reality, because that's what we do. It's what the Coast Guard expects us to do and more importantly, it's what we expect us to do.

And now, even more will be expected of us.

One of those tasks, Marine Domain Awareness, is a lot like the mythical bird, the Phoenix, which never dies but rises up again and again from its ashes, renewed. The Phoenix flies far ahead to the front, always scanning the landscape and distant space.

It represents our capacity for vision, for collecting sensory information about our environment and the events unfolding within it.

When we're doing what we do, from the classroom to the docks, on the water and in the skies, we're out there – as always – boring holes in the water, teaching a class, augmenting at a station, watchstanding or filing reports – whatever – until that moment when drill becomes reality and we see, WE SEE, something that's not right. Something that doesn't fit. Something that needs to be reported, so the Coast Guard can react.

We are the first line. We are out there, doing what we always do but with an added responsibility to help safeguard lives, property and our Nation from further terrorist threat.

In so doing, there are many things to be on guard against and one of those is complacency.

We're out there doing what we do, again and again. We know we do it well. And because we do it well, it's easy to fall into a routine. It's easy to see only what we expect to see. It's easy to do the same repetitive routine the way we've always done it. It's easy to become locked in process and it's easy to stop seeing what's different. It is just easy to become complacent.

I want to use this conference to call for a re-dedication – a reaffirmation – of who we are and what we stand for. Let it be a wake-up call, that jolt of caffeine, for us all.

Like that Phoenix rising from the ashes to renew its search, let us rise up from the ashes of comfort and complacency, renewed in our dedication to our missions.

The future holds new missions and new tasks. Plans are already in the works for Auxiliarists to assist in security programs. There are already discussions for Auxiliarists to take part in Operation Deepwater. There is talk of Auxiliarists who would fly unmanned drones.

Likewise, Operation Patriot Readiness, America's Waterway Watch, and our Recreational Boating Safety programs, to mention a few, offer us new ways in which to meet the challenges of the future.

These are just a few of the possibilities for Auxiliarists to make a difference.

A key challenge facing us in the upcoming years will be to strike the proper balance between our traditional missions and newly emerging programs. Maintaining this balance

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will be difficult, as our operational tempo will certainly increase. But it is fundamental to our success.

However, in planning for the future, we need to look back and reexamine our reasons for joining this organization called the United States Coast Guard.

Some of us saw ourselves teaching classes. Others dreamed of saving lives in small boat rescues. Yet others joined for largely patriotic reasons.

For whatever reason we joined in the past, it is just as valid and compelling today. If anything, our country needs us more now than ever. This realization can form the basis for a renewal, a rededication and with it a heightened pride in service.

Which brings me to a question I'm often asked, and I am sure it is the same question that you too are often asked as well, "Why do you do it – what do you get out of it? The preverbal "WIFM". What's in it for me?

For most of us, though we might not admit it, it is pride of service. Others may feel that perhaps that isn't enough for today's generation of volunteers. Frankly, I'm willing to bet that we all will step up to the plate just as we always have, no matter the reason why we as individuals do it.

And I'm further willing to bet that our members will be there to help others set their course to give of themselves as much as they can and in areas where they feel they can make a difference – just as we do.

Although we strive for continuous improvement, it comes as no surprise to any of us that our organization has flaws. At one time or another most of us have been frustrated by impediments to excellence. But, through it all, most of our members have compensated for these problems and performed outstanding service.

I am convinced that the principal reason for our continued success is that our missions, all of them, are worthwhile and that — at every level in the organization, we can find like-minded individuals with a "can do" attitude.

So, in a curious way, the real thrust of my remarks is not about the new challenges that we face and necessary changes — although these are obviously important.

It is about continuity with the past, the value of our missions and the respect of our peers that are the ultimate attractions and the ultimate member benefits.

And ultimately, that comes down to trust.

Trust that our members will be there when needed. Trust they will adapt and change as the mission demands and trust that they will stand ready, responsive and resolute.

I have that trust.

Our members are far ahead of President Bush's second inaugural speech when he called on Americans to "Make the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants, larger than yourself, and in your days you will add not just to the wealth of our country, but to its character."

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We've been there all along, doing that and we will keep on doing it.

I trust that each of you will continue to serve as you have in the past, just as I trust that pride of service will continue to be the highest reward in this noble service of ours, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

I ask you to join me in rededicating and reaffirming who we are and what we stand for.

I ask that like the image of the Phoenix, let us renew our search, and let us rise up from our level of comfort and complacency, renewed in our dedication to our missions.

We have come a long way. We have set our direction, we have charted our course. Now the race is on and with your and our membership's commitment and continued support, we will, as we have for the past 65 years, contribute to the safety and security of our nation.