

**Remarks as delivered by ADM Mike Mullen
Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command Change of Command
18 May 2007**

Well, good morning. And to all of you who have taken the time to come and honor John and Sue Nathman, we are indeed thankful for your participation.

It's a great Navy day on the waterfront. I was here in Norfolk a couple of weeks ago interacting with lots of Sailors, and in the end, what we do is about what they do, and it is a terrific, terrific opportunity always to return to the waterfront, and on a great ship. CVN-65 has been around a long time and we are grateful for what you've done, Captain Rice, and what this great crew has done.

And I understand the weather – actually, Chaplain, I don't know how you explain it. Normally, we're thankful for Chaplain's making sure the sun shines, but the weather – there was a late call to come inside, and at the same time, the ship looks great; the crew looks great; and we're greatly appreciative of that.

We're also in a great Navy town. The Tidewater area and all the communities are wonderfully supportive. I know a couple mayors are here today. I see Meyera, I assume Paul is here somewhere, and the other communities of Hampton, Newport News, Chesapeake, there is not a community that supports us like this Tidewater are. And we're grateful for that.

The Change of Command is a very special ceremony, and it is to be cherished. It is part of our tradition. It is a very special tradition, a tradition in which we all acknowledge publicly the change of great responsibility, the change of authority, as well as the change in accountability. And we have two very special individuals here, one to relinquish command and one to assume command.

First, I'd like to say just a few words about Admiral Nathman, "Black" Nathman. I'm always curious how aviators get their nicknames. He served for 37 years. Those of us that went to the Naval Academy know what a Black N is. And Black N, for those of you who don't know, is awarded to those individuals who manage to commit major offenses. It's not one we seek, but is one I wonder if that's what Black N means. On the other hand, I have been told that when Admiral Nathman was young, he didn't have gray hair.

He's a special, special guy that I've known very well over the last 10 years, and I'd like to focus on that -- on our friendship, on our challenges together. And in focusing on that, if you read about historic admirals, the one who comes to mind for me is Ernie King who was intense, sharp, precise, demanding, unrelenting, devoted, passionate. And all those characteristics apply equally to the man we honor today.

Fighter pilot – and he'll tell you that – Naval aviator – we know that – great, great naval officer, a friend, a patriot, a mentor of mine that I respect greatly. A warfighter, and he's

a warfighter's warfighter – always on his mind – and a wonderful commander – commanding officer and commander.

We had the privilege of serving together in the Gulf first in 1997 and 1998, where actually there were three carrier strike groups – INDEPENDENCE, commanded by Willy Moore; myself on GEORGE WASHINGTON; and John on NIMITZ.

And he was there first and he set the stage to put three CSGs and all that combat power in play at a very critical time in that part of the world. And today, we have two carrier strike groups there.

And one of the things that John taught me back then was how to do that, how to structure it, how to think about it, how to keep it in warfighting terms, and that was his mantra every single day. Nobody did it better.

What I did notice then, however – or in addition to – is on his first liberty port, when I was there, they went to Jebel Ali. And the staff came back and said, one of the fun activities that the staff had for Admiral Nathman ashore was to go to the go-kart track at Jebel. And I kind of wondered why, but if you know John over time, you know go-karts, machines, speed, living on the edge is what he likes to do.

But I wondered, who is this guy as I was getting to learn more about him. And what I took away in that time in Gulf over several months was that he was a leader and a brilliant strategic thinker.

We had an opportunity after that to go ashore together in the Pentagon. He represented Aviation and I represented the Surface Warfare community. And we had some fun with that.

Washington, as many people know, concentrates a lot on money. There is never enough. But again, above the fighting for your own community, which nobody did better than John Nathman, there is always a part that moved him above that, moved to discuss a higher level – the Navy, the nation, how we do those kinds of things. And he again expressed routinely his passion for what we do and his desire to make a difference. And it was contagious for all of us who were around him.

We then went our separate ways. In fact, he went first – one of the stories that I'll always remember was when he got promoted in a very private ceremony, with Vice Chief Pilling at the time, nobody else around, because that's how he likes it.

The Nathmans don't like ceremonies like this or like that. They want to contribute and move on. And that's what John wanted to do.

And he was promoted to vice admiral, and was on his way to Naval Air Forces on the West Coast. But before he left, he came down to my office, and I hear this burst through the door and this loud voice through my door – since he was a vice admiral and I was a

rear admiral – and he goes, “Attention on deck!” With very high expectations, I would stand up. And I can’t remember whether I did or not – I did, he said, okay [laughter], an individual who at that point who had garnered the greatest respect from me and so many others.

And he was then to go out to the West Coast – he and Sue both loved. And it was in that tour he planted seeds that I think will impact on the Navy for the next 20 and 30 years – the whole issue of how we handle resources and how we combined the warfighting requirement with the resources that we have to make a difference.

And I give him credit more than anybody else for putting that in significant play then in naval aviation, and that construct has spread throughout the Navy. And he has been a leader in that, again, passionate about it.

And one of the reasons the Navy is executing so well today around the world where our operational tempo is up – we should be mindful that over 64,000 sailors are deployed around the world today – in ceremonies like this we should always be mindful of those who are serving in harm’s way today around the world – but it was that leadership that John Nathman provided for Naval Air Forces and really for the Navy that puts us in a position to execute so well today, to understand what we need to do.

I then came to Norfolk, and I was the fleet commander down here. And this is, to me, a wonderfully Nathman story. I had actually had major surgery, and I was here about seven or eight months, and Ed Giambastiani gets the call to go be Secretary Rumsfeld’s MA.

So, I am recovering quietly a few days after surgery and John calls up. And his first message was, gee, I hope you’re feeling okay. You doing all right? And I appreciated that. But the second message was, don’t you think you ought to go back and be N8? There are three guys who had just come out of town – Nathman, myself, and John Grossenbacher, and he thought that I ought to be the detail, and in fact, that’s what happened.

In that time, not too long after that, when we were looking for someone to come back and run the requirements side of the world, I called John, and I said, John, don’t you think you should come back and be N6/7 at the time? And he did. And so we were together again. And I don’t think anybody had as much impact on us as a Navy from a warfighting requirement standpoint as John Nathman.

He also opened the door in ways that allowed – in terms of other part of the OPNAV staff that heretofore had not been opened as well as it should have been, particularly in N4, as Willy Moore showed up and the three of us who had all had CSGs together in the Gulf were now in positions back in Washington to try to make a difference.

And John put together a structure, vision, alignment, and organization. And he also moved his go-kart in next door to our house. Again, a great privilege to be with him and he made a big difference.

That was post-9/11 and nobody has focused more on making sure the Navy is balanced, both for our expanding mission set and our traditional mission set, than John Nathman. And he keeps the entire Navy leadership honest with respect to that, and for that I will always be grateful. A couple years ago, John came down to CFFC. And CFFC is still a growing institution. In fact, back then, it was still Atlantic Fleet.

And in a time of great change, while we're at war, in transition, making sure that the Navy can contribute, and in fact the expanding mission set no better represented than by Don Bullard and the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command, the 30,000-plus sailors who are in that command now. Nobody thought about it better, organized it better, led it better, mentored it better – nobody could have.

But also, it was a great opportunity for those of us at the senior level to collaborate. And we committed together, with the other four stars, to lead the Navy in collaborative fashion. And we worked to do this across a myriad of activities from those missions and operations we carry out to those people we care about so much. The first individual to talk to me about standards in the fleet for our people was John Nathman. To impress upon the leadership and chain of command, we needed to make sure we had that right. He's done so much for so many and set in place so many parts of what are and will be our future Navy that we are all extremely grateful.

Last week, he had one more briefing that he wanted to get to me, one more idea that was going to take our readiness and tie it directly to what our future looks like in terms of our structured fleet. And 313 ships is where we need to be, and we're 276 today. We're starting to grow again; we need to.

The demands for naval forces are up. The forces that will be needed in the future will be expeditionary, rotational, engaged, whether it's in Africa, South America, the Gulf, the Western Pacific, or other parts of the world. And John wanted to make sure that I understood again the strategic view across the full spectrum of warfighting and deterrence and presence, all of which we do so well, because of his leadership.

We are in a new era. Nobody has led us better into that than John Nathman. And John, I am eternally grateful for your contributions.

John didn't get here alone. And up here in the front row is his wife Sue who has been at his side this entire journey. She wouldn't want me to say much, so I won't – I've learned. She's a very special woman who has dedicated her time, her energy, her effort to our families, to our spouses, to make a difference so that the Navy can be better, and in that, the nation can be better. And Sue, we are grateful for your dedication, your patriotism, your passion for us as a service and for our people. And we thank you for that.

We welcome today a great Navy family in Ellen and Gary Roughead who traveled – some would say – at light speed. We did a ceremony like this with the Keatings – it seems like yesterday – just last week.

From command in the Pacific to command of our fleet forces, there isn't anybody better prepared; there isn't anybody who has contributed more to our missions, to our improvements, from warfighting to those which are those needed to be dedicated to our people and our families than Gary and Ellen Roughead.

We are excited to have you back in Norfolk. If you look at his bio, it would show you he was here as a fleet commander, here as a group commander, here as a CO of a ship. So he is, in ways, back home.

Thank you both for making this continued sacrifice that you do to serve our nation. We are a Navy today busier and better than ever. We need to be because of the challenges that are out there.

When I came in as CNO, one of the things I tried to do was get a message out there that I would listen, learn, and then lead.

I have listened to John Nathman for these past 12 years with great intensity, with a sense that there was wisdom there. I have learned an extraordinary amount, and I give him credit for a tremendous amount of impact on me and our Navy and our ability to lead.

And for that, John, I am grateful, so is our Navy, so is our nation. Thank you.