

Remarks as Delivered by Admiral Mike Mullen  
Oklahoma City Area Navy Birthday Ball  
28 October 2006

Thanks Dan. Lieutenant Governor Fallin, Senator Aldridge, Representative Banz, Admirals Yorge, Slavonic and Ackerman, Colonel Correll, Captain Gudmunson, Gary Ritchie, Fred Hall, distinguished guests, friend and family, ladies and gentlemen.

Deborah and I are honored to be part of this terrific event and to be with all of you.

It is not lost on me how this great community works so hard to honor our Navy's Birthday. Few know that you host the largest Birthday Ball in the country, here. It is a real testament to this wonderful city and this base.

Thank you for your terrific support of our Navy, of our young men and women in uniform, and of their families.

To those in uniform, I want to thank you for your service. What you do every day. I never take it for granted.

I also never miss an opportunity to talk about the service of our families.

I know that we couldn't succeed without strong Navy families on our team. To all the spouses here – this is clearly your night as well.

I can think of no better place to celebrate our birthday than here at the National Cowboy and Western Museum – this fantastic memorial to the spirit of the West and of Oklahoma, to the spirit of independence that drives our nation forward.

As the proclamation tonight pointed out, Oklahoma has a rich naval heritage.

Tonight you have already heard about Rear Admiral John Kirkpatrick.

When he passed away earlier this month we lost not just a terrific naval officer and a great American, this city, and all of us, lost a hero.

On Wednesday night, I had the great pleasure of being with another hero of mine.

Admiral Bill Crowe, who grew up right here in Oklahoma City.

He was given the Lone Sailor Award by the Navy Memorial Foundation for his tremendous service both in the military – where he rose to become Chairman of the Joints Chiefs – and as our nation’s Ambassador to the Court of St. James.

There was perhaps no one in uniform more influential in helping win the Cold War.

This year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of that epic struggle for freedom.

Because our military was ready and capable, we sent a clear signal to the Soviets – waging war would never be worth the cost.

To the Cold War veterans here, know that your steadfast efforts preserved a delicate balance, and, because of you, the global war that many feared never came to pass.

We are thankful for you, as we are for all the veterans here with us.

When he received his award earlier this week, Admiral Crowe spoke almost exclusively about you. About how the ingenuity and professionalism of our military personnel were then, and are now, the envy of the world.

But he couldn’t help but give a fair share of the credit to Oklahoma.

He was quick to tease me that the large immigration of Okies to my home state of California raised the I.Q. of both states.

But then, Oklahoma is known for providing our Navy sharp Sailors and terrific namesake ships.

Our submarine the Oklahoma City is performing well, doing great things.

I’m delighted to see her Commanding Officer, Ed Mayer, and some of his crew here tonight. Ed, thanks for your leadership. Keep it up.

And of course, the legendary Battleship Oklahoma took nine torpedoes in her side on December 7th, 1941.

She listed and then rolled over. Much of the crew was trapped. 429 perished. Others would escape and go on to fight another day.

Sailors like Airman Wilbur Webb – who had been on board the Oklahoma for just a day – pushed himself through a port hole into the murky waters of Pearl Harbor.

Spider – as he came to be known – gasping for air, finally made his way to the surface.

As he swam through water thick with burning oil – he became determined to fight back.

He, like the entire country at that time, faced an uncertain future.

And there were no guarantees of success. Things were tough.

Our Fleet had taken a devastating blow.

Japanese troops occupied Korea, China and would soon take over the Malaysian peninsula, Singapore and the Philippines.

Nazi Germany controlled a vast empire that stretched from the Bay of Biscay to the Volga river, from the Arctic circle to Africa.

It was, in the words of historian David McCullough, "among the darkest times in living memory."

There were clearly two competing visions of the world – one of freedom – the other of tyranny.

And tyranny appeared to have the upper hand.

Fast forward to today.

If the attack on the destroyer Cole, the treachery of 9-11, if events across the globe from London to Lebanon, Baghdad to Bali, from P'yongyang to Tehran, have taught us anything – it is that the struggle we currently face is also about two competing visions of the future.

About our vision of hope and prosperity and of secure future for our children, for all children.

And about the dark vision of our enemies, who offer no hope at all – just fear, death, despair and, yes, tyranny.

Theirs is a small world, led by small-minded men.

The immediate danger, of course, is that their ambitions are not small. Their ambitions are global in scope and deadly in practice. They crave instability and look for opportunities to exploit it.

We can and must always defend freedom – at sea and ashore to prevent that instability – to protect our people and our values.

Today, our brave young men and women are doing just that, you see it in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in other places. You see it across the globe.

Over 12,000 Sailors are on the ground in the Middle East teaching people about freedom in countries that have known only tyranny.

It's Sailors like the ones in Afghanistan as part of six Navy-led Provisional Reconstruction Teams. A joint unit that is fixing roads, repairing schools and clinics, and drilling wells – and making every imaginable effort to improve the lives of the Afghan people.

We saw the same types of things in Indonesia when a tsunami ravaged hundred of thousands of lives.

The Lincoln Strike Group and our hospital ship Mercy came together with other countries and other agencies to quickly provide relief.

Dozens of ships and helicopters and thousands of Sailors and Marines, all collected and connected for one purpose: to save lives, provide security and restore a sense of hope.

An editorial in the Boston Globe called it Stethoscope Diplomacy. It argued that these types of missions are exactly what are needed to help win this war.

Our ships and the Sailors, it said, “carry the best possible defense against the demonizing of America by its enemies abroad.”

I couldn't agree more.

Sailors make a huge difference wherever they go.

That is so true of our great Navy team here in Oklahoma.

Those who work day in and day out to ensure our national command authority has rapid and secure communications links.

Young pilots that by their instincts take action to prevent their plane and crew from entering harm's way.

Air crews who keep their plane flying safely and operate vital equipment on mission after mission.

Families who wait and work – who encourage – who uplift them when they return.

It is every single person who wears the uniform – active and reserve – and all the people who support them.

Yes, it is all of you. Those who take charge and move out, that are making such a huge difference.

Just like Wilbur “Spider” Webb did after December 7, 1941.

Through his resolve and determination, he earned his Wings of Gold as an enlisted naval aviator.

He flew and fought all across the Pacific.

His toughest day of action came over the Marianas when he found himself alone, facing an entire Japanese air wing.

As turned his Hellcat to engage the enemy against overwhelming odds, he radioed back:

"Any American fighter near Orote Peninsula, I have forty planes surrounded and need a little help"

That day, he shot down six of those enemies planes, and is credited with assisting in two other kills.

The battle was so intense that his canopy, his goggles, and his helmet were shot off.

Not until he crash landed back on the carrier Hornet, did he realize his landing gear had been severed as well.

His plane – wrecked with 147 bullet holes – had to be pushed over the side.

For his courage, he earned a Navy Cross, two Distinguished Flying Crosses and nine Air Medals, making him the most highly decorated enlisted man in the Navy during World War II.

But after the war, Wilbur didn't talk much about his own heroism. Instead, he always said that his lost shipmates on Oklahoma – the ones he knew for only a day “were the true heroes.”

I think he would take pleasure knowing that on December 7th, 2007, there are plans to dedicate a memorial at Pearl Harbor to their sacrifice.

When Spider finally slipped his chain, he died knowing that the best memorial to them, however, was that he had done his part.

That is what this long war on terror is really all about. Doing our part to preserve freedom.

Like Spider, and all veterans, those in uniform today know that tyranny in this world must be defeated.

We know that tolerance is better than ignorance, that hope for a better world and a brighter future really can make a difference.

That freedom and liberty are not just the provinces of the American heart, they are the domains – the dreams – of hearts beating all over the world tonight.

So, as Spider 's greatest generation of sailors look upon us here tonight, I think they and all of our ancestors in navy blue would be proud of how we strive to live up to their legacy.

I think they would tell us, that while times may be tough and the future uncertain, our ultimate victory over tyranny is not.

I think they are also looking down with great pride and thinking, well done, we stand relieved, keep a tight watch, we expect a lot, and happy birthday.

God bless you all, God bless the United States Navy, and God Bless this great nation we serve.