

**Chief of Naval Operations
Adm. Jonathan Greenert**

Eglin Air Force Base, Fla.

44th Annual EOD Memorial Remarks

4 May 2013

Admiral Greenert: Thank you, Captain Polanin.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're here today because we honor and respect this wonderful institution. The Captain just spoke to courage. From courage comes a lot of confidence. If you don't believe that, this morning when we all awoke it was pouring down rain and it was pretty cold. So we called over and we said what's the foul weather plan? They said, "It won't rain." I said okay. So between understanding how this community understands what's going to happen and the Chaplain, we've got a wonderful community here, as you can see.

Members of the Joint Explosive Ordnance Disposal community and my fellow service representatives and shipmates -- General Amos, General Fetter, and General Smith -- and most importantly, a special welcome today to the families that we honor.

I am personally humbled to be here. We've been here numerous times, Darleen and I, and it gets better every single time. It's a milestone for us and we commit. As long as we're in the United States, we'll be here. It's about true heroes. And true heroes tend to be anonymous, they are always humble, but what's wonderful is this community and this monument insists that they will be remembered in a manner that is dignified, a manner that is really genuine, and it's enduring. The weather may be cool and it may be wet, but the spirit here is warm and embracing, and there's no doubt about it. We're here to pay tribute this morning.

EOD is really a unique community in many ways. The military's preeminent team of explosive experts. Really the country's team of explosive experts. The Boston Marathon bombing showed that out. The first group that they asked for there in Boston, they asked for EOD people to help deal with that crisis.

Today's technicians trace a heritage of battle going all the way back to the Battle of Britain in World War II where unexploded ordnance caused fear, anxiety and a real uncertainty in the allies' ability to get the job done. The United States realized we need service members with a truly special skill set. The first Explosive Ordnance Disposal School was formed in 1941. Shortly thereafter, others were formed.

Today that training starts right here. Right here under one joint, and it's the most joint community that I've observed in our military. One joint EOD school. The school that is in front of you today is a unique institution. No matter their service, each technician shares a common beginning. Everybody comes here. It's a beginning of language coming together, camaraderie,

and a lifelong bond. You see it in front of you. And those of you who come here again and again know exactly what I'm talking about.

IEDs, Improvised Explosive Devices, are a growing threat, and as I just mentioned, the Boston Marathon was a vivid example.

Over half of the United States casualties in the past decade of war caused by IEDs. Twenty thousand in Iraq and over 10,000 in Afghanistan.

However, casualties have reduced dramatically, over half, in the past year. It's about prevention. That's a major reason for that. People here today that do this job, the men and women that serve, they don't just disarm ordnance, they get to the left of the event, as we say. They prevent it. They're also key to providing forensics. Just like the TV shows, only better. This is the real stuff. This is not just CSI on TV. This is the real stuff. They track IED materials to the source. They identify and target the terrorist organizations and they stop events. And casualties go down.

DoD continues to actively serve worldwide. It's not just Afghanistan. They're very very important. In Joint Task Force Paladin, supporting the ground forces and training our Afghan forces. But they're also in the Philippines supporting our Special Operations Forces in several sites around the world today. Their response also here in the United States, as I mentioned is needed to support and ensure our national security.

Today we honor special Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. Some say it's sometimes easier to be brave from a distance, but these are people, these are men who believe in putting others' safety before their own. They ran toward the event. They ran toward danger, not from it.

They came from all over the United States. Some grew up in the Midwest, others on the Eastern Seaboard, some from the West Coast, the Pacific Northwest. Some of our heroes today play competitive sports, others play the guitar, and others, like me, well, they play the radio. Some are outgoing, bombastic, really the chum, the person in the group that pulls everybody together. Others are quiet and unassuming. But despite all of that, despite the disparity, and maybe their mannerisms or their personality, they all believe in serving others before themselves.

There's a book by James Michener, the Bridges at Toko-Ri. It's a pretty popular book. A movie was made. It's long been since shown and if you go into the depths of Netflix you can find it. But there's a line at the end of the book and at the end of the movie, a movie about pilots who had the guts to go in, to try to get the bridges at Toko-Ri in the Korean War, and risked their lives despite really difficult odds. A question that was asked by a flag officer, the admiral on the carrier from where they were flying to the captain at the end of it. He said, "Where do we get such men?" The answer, it's a question you could ask yourself here. Where do we get such men to do this? Well, they're people. We get them from people. We get them from Americans. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. It's you out there, the families, that help them develop the qualities that made them so special. They came from you. That's where our heroes came from. You taught them the importance of making a difference. Parents and grandparents referred to

today as “The Greatest Generation”, well, your sons, your husbands, your fathers are cut from the same cloth.

Today we not only honor the 11 heroes, we honor the families, we honor you who are with us today. Thank you for giving us such special men. Your sacrifice is cherished by us, as you cherish those who go before you.

Today we begin upholding their honor and their memory at this memorial here with us. This grand memorial is a testament to their spirit of sacrifice. It’s one monument to represent the entire joint community that brings us together annually. It represents the brotherhood that they all shared. This memorial currently honors 287 EOD technicians. Today we honor 11 more and we become the 298 that we honor and cherish.

Thank you very much.

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