

CPO Pinning Bahrain. 16 September 2009

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to be part of this special day for our Navy's newest Chiefs. I want to first offer my personal congratulations and tell you how proud we all are of you. Today's ceremony is more than just a pinning. Today you are formally welcomed and accepted as a member of our Navy's Chief's mess.

Over the past several weeks you were challenged in ways that you may not have fully understood.

You've been through the ringer for six weeks. For some of you, it didn't sink in until a few hours before this ceremony, and I'll bet there's at least one who may not really understand the significance until you feel that combination cover placed on your head in a few minutes.

To me, there are two things that really symbolize the Navy Chief petty officer...that combo cover and the anchors you'll wear every day. Each of those things tells all of us something very important...

You get it.

That's a Chief's phrase, an Initiation phrase that has stayed with us through name changes and various philosophies on how to train a Chief selectee. Through the decades of Initiation and the years of transitions, rites of passage and seasons of pride it always came down to one question.

When the time came to accept a Sailor into our mess: does he or she get it? Do they understand what it takes to be a Chief Petty Officer? Do they comprehend that wearing anchors is more than just being a deckplate leader...it's taking those qualities home with you and on liberty. It's a 24-7 vocation and way of life.

Those of us who have been around for a few years know what that means.

It comes down to the difference between simply being a Chief, putting those anchors on every morning as a matter of routine, or understanding what it is that Chiefs do, understanding the essence of the mess.

Within the lifelines of our mess we talk about our roles as leaders, about knowing our Sailors and developing them beyond their expectations. If you understand what a Chief does...if you get it...that principle describes you to a tee.

You were selected for Chief Petty Officer because you've proven to your Sailors, to your leadership and to the Navy that you care for those men and women and that you care for their families.

You're here today and you're about to enter our mess because you've proven to the Chiefs that you are ready to walk among us with anchors on your collars.

You understand that our Sailors and their loved ones are being asked to do more than ever before. You know that better than anyone. Every single one of you understands the stress of Navy life and how harmful that stress can be to a family or an individual Sailor.

I'm asking you today to be even more mindful of each other and our men and women who wear this uniform. I'm here to tell you that after twenty eight years in this Navy, twenty years as a Chief petty officer...there is no greater honor, no greater privilege, than leading Sailors while wearing anchors on your collar.

And if you do it right? If you dedicate yourselves to leading and developing our Sailors? Then you're a damn good Chief.

That's a strong phrase..."a good Chief." To me, it's one of the noblest goals any one of us could ever have. I like it because it's not something you can determine on your own. It has nothing to do with the opinion you have of yourself.

Only your Sailors and the Chiefs you serve with can make that determination and it's based on how you lead them, how you support them, how you interact within this mess.

You're our Navy's newest Chiefs ...but none of you have the luxury of using that as a crutch. I look out at you and I don't see new Chiefs or boot Chiefs. I see only a mess. That's what your Sailors are going to see. They don't consider that you've only worn those anchors for ten minutes or ten days.

Just as you trusted this mess to train you and make you ready to be the Chiefs, your Sailors now look to you as the benchmark for success and the guardians of their well being, their family's well being.

Earn their faith. Lead them well. Demand their best and support this mess.

Be a good Chief and anchor up.

Welcome to the mess, shipmates. Hooyah Navy Chiefs.