

MCPON remarks to SEA 11 February 2009

Good evening my fellow Chiefs. Thank you for the invitation to be here tonight and celebrate your graduation from an institution I consider to be vital to our Chiefs' Mess and to our Navy.

I'm proud of this school I'm proud of what it stands for and what it's become. I believe each of you will leave Newport better deck plate leaders, fully prepared to support and develop our sailors.

Master Chief Ford, I appreciate what you've done to bring a sea going spirit back to the S-E-A. I look out at this group tonight and I don't see close to one hundred Chief Petty Officers. I see a mess, one that is unified and relevant. You can consider that your legacy, Jim...your ability to lead an institution that brings Chiefs together for the good of our entire Navy.

You've learned a lot the last six weeks. The interaction in the small groups, the lectures in leadership hall, and the PT. All have given you more insight into the best ways to lead Sailors and the best ways to lead Chiefs.

But nothing has been more important than the relationships you've formed with your classmates, the other members of this mess. You'll call on each other in the future and you'll help each other with issues that directly affect our Sailors.

That's what happens in every mess in our Navy and I guarantee it's happened here already and will again in the future. I view that as critical because I'm going to need your help this summer.

We're going to continue to push the mission, vision and guiding principles.

It's the backbone of our evaluations, our Chief's Mess training and our induction training. I expect you to continue to emphasize that document in your mess.

At the same time, all of us have to stay true to the basics of Navy leadership: mentorship, career development boards, sponsorship and indoctrination. Brilliant on the basics is what we call that and the importance of those programs are prove and timeless.

I need you to continue to focus on our Sailors' safety. Alcohol abuse, motorcycle safety, domestic violence...these are all areas that are literally killing our men and women and their families.

The only way to truly protect our Sailors from those dangers is to get personally involved. We used to call it intrusive leadership. I don't care what term you use: just know your Sailors and be the Chief. Protect them from themselves if you have to.

Induction is right around the corner and I expect each of you to be involved.

Train our new Chiefs and prepare them to function in our mess. Every one of them is going to reflect who we are as Chief Petty Officers.

My guidance will have more information on those issues and others. It will also point out some of the things I'll be working on along with the Fleet and Force Master Chiefs: A new Sailor of the year instruction that we'd like to roll out next year, revamping our Enlisted Warfare Programs and a gradual revision to our E1 through E6 evaluation.

It's going to be a busy summer shipmates. Aside from the standard challenges our Sailors give us every day, we're all dealing with a difficult economy.

And as we're finding out: it's affecting everything. Just because we wear the uniform doesn't mean our men and women are immune from financial stress. Be on the lookout for that.

So we're going to have plenty of opportunity to impact a lot of Sailors and their families. I'm looking forward to it and I hope you are as well.

But as busy as you'll be, you're going to have some down time at some point or another. Let me tell you briefly how I spent a little bit of mine recently...I stopped in at the Balboa Naval Hospital in San Diego and visited some of our wounded warriors.

Let me tell you something. If you think you're having a bad day some time, a bad week?

I want you to stop what you're doing and head to Portsmouth or to Balboa or to a VA hospital. Talk to some of our Sailors and Marines lying in those bed, recovering from injuries they suffered defending this nation. Your entire outlook on life changes and so does theirs.

They need to see us, need to know that we're thinking of them and their families. Make time to visit those men and women.

I look at you tonight and I'll tell you right now I'm envious. Most of you are headed back out to lead Sailors, to lead Chiefs and to take the fight to our enemies.

You're going out there to do the job we all love to do. I know what it's like to leave this school with some new skills and with a renewed enthusiasm for being the Chief.

Take that enthusiasm and make sure it's infectious on the deck plate. Let your sailors see it. Let your fellow Chiefs see it. Lead our Navy.

Chiefs, congratulations and thank you for your time tonight. It's been an honor to speak with you.