

**Prepared Remarks of the Honorable Thomas Modly, Under Secretary of the Navy**  
**Formal Swearing In Ceremony**  
**U.S. Naval Academy**  
**January 5, 2018**

Secretary Spencer, Captain Lang, distinguished guests, family, friends, and most especially, classmates from the Class of 1983, thank you for braving the hazards of this cold weather and for taking time from your busy schedules to be here this morning here in Annapolis. Thanks also to my personal staff and the staff here at the Academy for making the arrangements for this event. I recognize that my request to hold this ceremony here was unconventional and created logistics and practical challenges that interrupted the normal routine here in the Yard. As many of you are aware, it is extremely meaningful for me to be able to hold this ceremony here as I took my original oath of office during Plebe Summer in 1979 just a few steps from this spot on a day that was considerably warmer than it is today. Captain Lang, please extend my thanks to Vice Admiral Carter for mobilizing your team to make this happen. I am incredibly honored by the opportunity to hold this ceremony here and I am humbled by the presence and support of those who are here to mark this event with me and my family. And speaking of which, I am elated that my wife, Robyn, and all of our children are here today to participate in this event. Their love and support over the many years of my extensive business travel and long commutes to Northern Virginia and DC have been the constant force that sustained me through some very long days away from home, whether in Brussels, or in Baghdad, or in Kabul, or in the most dangerous and odious place on earth, the DC Beltway.

I would be lying if I didn't admit that this event is a little overwhelming. This beautiful historic space, this tremendous band, the inspiring rendition of our national anthem, and most importantly the faces of so many friends and colleagues who made the journey to be a part of this ceremony makes me wonder if there is something else going on after this is over. To know that you are all here to support me is, as I said, overwhelming. That being said, my executive assistant at the Pentagon, Johnny Jaramillo, has frequently reminded, and grounded, me whenever I display any similar discomfort with the pomp and circumstance that have accrued to me in my official role as the Under Secretary of the Navy. He has told me something very simple, and starkly true, by telling me, "Sir, it's not about you, it's about the office".

In a similar way, this ceremony is not about me, or the office, but rather it's really about the Department of the Navy—and our nation's Navy and Marine Corps. Those of us who are privileged enough to serve in senior positions in the Department are merely temporary stewards of an incredibly proud tradition of service, and courage, and commitment, and sacrifice. The Sailors and Marines who serve us today, and who came before us, have kept this nation free and secured liberty for millions of others beyond our shores. We in leadership have an obligation to defend the legacy of those who have served, and to protect those who serve us now. Most importantly, —as we grapple with how our Navy and Marine Corps must evolve to address an increasingly complex global security environment- we must commit ourselves to creating strategies and capabilities that protect and empower those will serve us in

the future. The challenges we face as a nation, and as a community of peace loving people that aspire to build a world in which liberty and prosperity and peace reign supreme, are pushing us to think differently about defense. For us, in the naval service, these complex challenges are compelling us to consider how we must prioritize our investments and our organizational focus to maintain the maritime superiority that has served us and our friends around the world so well. When I look at the recently published National Security Strategy of the United States it becomes clear that our world has become increasingly complex and that this complexity will require us to think creatively about how best to protect the nation. The four pillars of this strategy are 1. Protect the American people, the homeland and the American way of life; 2. Promote American prosperity; 3. Preserve Peace Through Strength; and 4. Advance American Influence around the World. Whether taken individually or in their totality, all four pillars are critically dependent upon the sustainment of dominant naval forces that protect vital sea lanes for trade, build maritime bridges of understanding with our friends and allies, respond to natural disasters, protect our shores, and when needed, dominate and defeat those who wish to do us harm. We must never let this element of our national power diminish because we were unwilling to abandon conventional thinking in a time of rapid change.

The Academy is perhaps one of the best places I can imagine to inspire creative thinking in this regard. As my classmates know, because it was drilled into us during Plebe Summer, every inch of the Academy Yard has significance in some form or another. Whether it is a statue, or a building, or a quote, or a monument, or a walkway, or a staircase-- you can't walk more than a few feet without being confronted with some longstanding tradition or piece of history that requires reflection, or gratitude, or awe, and sometimes even a smile because of some ridiculous thing that happened to us on that particular spot. If you indulge me, I would like to focus on three of these iconic Academy touchpoints because I believe they are particularly relevant to the challenges we face today as a Navy and Marine Corps team, and perhaps more broadly as a nation.

The first is the motto of the Naval Academy. *Ex Scientia Tridens*. This phrase has a very personal meaning to me. While I was here as a midshipman, almost every evening I took a very familiar walk after dinner from Bancroft Hall to Nimitz Library to my favorite study carol on the second floor. It was in that same carol, with its distractingly picturesque view across the pedestrian footbridge that spans College Creek to Hospital Point, that the nexus of my academic life was framed. From that study carol I learned about electrical engineering, and thermodynamics, and weapons systems engineering, and naval history, and calculus, and naval science, and Soviet politics, and a myriad of other seemingly unrelated subjects of which I had zero understanding or comprehension before I became a midshipman. Every evening at 2230, the librarian at Nimitz would announce in a raspy familiar voice, "it is now 1030, please check out books by 11 O'clock." As I would pack up and leave the library at about 2245 I would see multiple renditions of the Naval Academy crest in both large and small form—it was everywhere. Emblazoned on this crest was those three words, "*Ex Scientia Tridens*." For those who don't speak Latin, or who did not attend the Academy, those words roughly translated mean "Through Knowledge, Sea Power." As we think about the future of our Navy and Marine Corps no words seem more relevant than these. While we surely must invest in more ships,

and aircraft, and submarines, and armored vehicles, and new weapons systems, nothing will be more important than the investment that we make in knowledge—and on creating a force made up of people who thirst for it. Rapid technological advances are driving the raw technical requirements for this mandate, but knowledge is not purely defined by technical competence. For knowledge to truly produce sea power we must create a culture in the Navy and Marine Corps that is committed to learning as a lifelong process—and a lifelong passion. Such a culture is not merely defined by certificates or degrees accumulated at regular career intervals, but rather it is one that encourages innovation and risk taking and produces Sailors and Marines who are prepared to excel in circumstances that are characterized by uncertainty, and by adversaries who are agile and unpredictable. Most importantly, the thirst for knowledge we must foster has to be focused on how to fight --and how to win. We ask great sacrifices from our Sailors and Marines when we enlist them to enter a profession of arms. We ask them to defend us, and our liberty, and our ideals, and our Constitution--and we ask them to pledge their lives and honor to this mission. Therefore, we must make sure that no adversary is smarter, or better prepared or, simply put, more knowledgeable than they are with respect to what it takes to FIGHT and WIN.

Without this commitment to learning and knowledge, and an understanding that they translate into a more effective fighting force, we invite aggression and risk catastrophes that are potentially devastating to our security as a nation and to everything we hold dear. This institution, as well as the Naval War College and the Naval Postgraduate School, must be at the center of this effort. When you look at the faculties, and student bodies of these institutions, we should recognize that we have literally thousands of years of accumulated knowledge and experience directly applicable to the big questions we must answer as a naval service as we look forward into this new century. We must be aggressive in leveraging and sharing this knowledge, and institutionalizing how we access it to advance sea power for the nation.

Ex Scientia Tridens should be our battle cry as we think about and execute the strategies for Navy and Marine Corps of the 21st Century. It is only through the elevation of knowledge as a core characteristic of the Naval Service that we will maintain our strategic and competitive advantages. It is only through knowledge that our Sea Power can be sustained.

As I would walk back to Bancroft Hall from Nimitz Library most every night for four years, at about 2250 I would pass by the Naval Academy Chapel and the crypt of John Paul Jones—the father of the U.S. Navy. Of the many memorable quotes of John Paul Jones one in particular is the second point of inspiration and focus I would like to mention today. Jones famously said, “Men mean more than guns in the rating of a ship.” Since John Paul Jones came of age during an era when only men served on naval ships of war, we are obligated to modify that great quote, and adopt it appropriately to modern times. It loses nothing in the translation when we say, “People mean more than weapons in the rating of a service.” Jones’ quote recognizes a profound point of truth that is perhaps even more relevant today than it was over 200 years ago. Our maritime advantage is, and will continue to be, almost entirely dependent upon the quality of our people. They are our most precious, and limited, resource and so our efforts and focus must be on them if we are to retain our superiority on the seas. As I enter into

this office, I have grave concerns that 16 years of wartime operations, compounded by unpredictable, nonsensical, and disruptive budget cycles have taken their toll on the quality of this, our most precious resource. As I prepared to take on this assignment, I spoke with many experts and observers of our Navy and Marine Corps who fear that we are approaching the point of creating a “hollow force”—a force that is tired, and underequipped, and not sufficiently trained, but also one that is being asked to do more and more with fewer platforms, and less rest, and no relief in the operational tempo. Eventually conditions like these will break our people, and as they go, so will go the rating of our “SHIP”. We cannot allow this to happen, and Secretary Spencer and I are committed to reversing the trajectory of the last several years in this regard. The Secretary’s Strategic Readiness Review, which he commissioned to examine the recent shipboard tragedies of the USS McCain and the USS Fitzgerald, have lessons for us that extend beyond the Surface Navy. We will address these issues head on—and we will attack the root causes with ferocity because we have an obligation to our people to ensure WE RESPECT THEM by PROTECTING THEM, while we ask them to pledge their lives to protect us.

There is no greater mission for us in the leadership of Department of the Navy than to ensure our Sailors and Marines can operate safely, but we also must think about how changing global circumstances will demand more of them and how we must facilitate changes in our professional culture that is best suited to address, and defeat, those who may challenge us on, and from, the seas. As I mentioned in my Senate confirmation testimony a few months ago, we must advance agility when we think about our people. We need to recruit and train those who are innovative and creative and courageous—people who are comfortable with uncertainty and who can collaborate and trust their teams and leaders under stressful conditions. We must also tap into the vast knowledge and spirit of the private sector as partners with our men and women in uniform, as well as our civilian workforce. This emphasis will challenge the status quo. Necessarily, it must do so. Such challenges are not pain free and they will require the Navy and Marine Corps to think differently about themselves, but this can and should happen often with any organization that wants to survive in a world that is changing as rapidly, and as disruptively, as ours is. We must not resist this—we must embrace it.

To put it in context, examples of unconventional thinking changing the nature of our Navy and Marine Corps are not without precedent. 120 years ago we had nearly 150 years of a professional Naval Service in the United States, but not a single naval aviator. 70 years ago we didn’t have a single nuclear submariner. 35 years ago, not a single cyber security specialist or drone pilot. All of these disciplines, and the creative thinking that inspired them, have been integrated into what many considered to be a proud, yet change-resistant culture that was steeped in tradition. Today, we can hardly imagine our Navy and Marine Corps forces without a large number of people with any one of these skills. These types of changes embodied new ways of thinking about naval force, and how to deploy it. We must embrace this kind of innovation, but with urgency and at a faster pace because the conditions require it. What we cannot lose, however, is the warrior spirit and ethos that have carried our Sailors and Marines to victory over and over through the course of our history. These qualities must be refreshed and never be allowed to atrophy. The prospect of a hollow force is the greatest threat to this ethos and I will work tirelessly to ensure we do not allow our budget and operational

circumstances to decay the spirit of our forces any further. At the end of the day, the “Rating of our Ship” is what will determine our collective fate as a maritime nation, and in this regard, people will always mean more than guns.

As I would end my nightly journey from Nimitz Library back here to Bancroft Hall, I would often take the long walk up the steps that ascend from T-court into the main rotunda area just outside this hall. As I entered Bancroft, I would be careful to go up one additional flight of stairs to avoid passing by the Commandant’s office which was on my path back to the 8<sup>th</sup> wing, 2<sup>nd</sup> deck. No offense intended to the many great naval officers who occupied the Commandant’s office in the past, like Colonel Steve Liszewski, who is here today. Steve is one of only two Marine colonels to ever serve in this role, with the other being the highly esteemed and world famous General John Allen. Sorry Steve, but in all candor had a Marine officer like you or John been Commandant when I was here I probably would have gone up two flights of stairs to avoid walking by your office. Not sure where that paranoia came from, but it probably had something to do with haircut standards. I suspect every classmate of mine who is here today knows exactly what I am talking about, and I know that some of them are still a bit nervous about being this close to the Commandant’s office this morning, but I will leave it at that.

At any rate, the ending point of my journey here in this massive building, the largest dormitory in the world, and particularly here in Memorial Hall, is symbolic of the final point I would like to make today. It was here that everything I ever needed to know about the United States Naval Service came together into one, big, holistic picture. Most everything I learned in my classrooms, and in Nimitz Hall, and in the chapel, and on the parade fields, and the athletic fields and gyms, was reinforced here in Bancroft Hall surrounded by some of the finest young people this nation has to offer, who eventually became cherished friends. It was here that I learned about leadership, and integrity, and honor, and military history, and commitment, and struggle, and spirit, and comraderie, and perhaps most important of all to me ---creativity and the power of a sense of humor. All of these things were on display on a daily basis—none to perfection, but always with an implicit understanding of the value in seeking it. And in this crucible I was exposed to people from every part of this country of different races and ethnicities, and accents, and passions, and strengths, and weaknesses, but all of them committed to the same ultimate goal—all pledging their lives to protect and defend the same document. It was, and is, a remarkable thing that happens here. It is a unique and precious reflection of the character of our country, and it is a microcosm of the qualities that define our United States Navy and Marine Corps.

As I stand here before you in Memorial Hall you can see draped behind me one of its most famous artifacts: a replica of the flag which was raised high on the mast of Commodore Perry’s flagship, the USS Niagara, during the Battle of Lake Erie. As a native of Cleveland, Ohio and avid Cleveland sports fan, the flag is extremely ironic to me as it proves what I thought was a virtual impossibility---the reality that any home team can achieve decisive victory on the shores of Lake Erie! In my lifetime, to my great distress, this has never been the case for the Browns or the Indians. Nonetheless, what is inscribed on this flag is the final message I wish to

impart to you today. Commodore Perry adorned this flag with the words of his dying comrade in arms, Captain James Laurence, as his ship, the USS Chesapeake, was being overrun by the British during the War of 1812. Captain Laurence, mortally wounded from a gunshot, famously instructed his crew to sustain the battle with this one final order, “Don’t Give Up the Ship”. After Laurence’s death, this phrase became the rallying cry for Commodore Perry in honor of his fallen friend. Over the years it has also become a part of the lexicon and ethos of our Naval Service. In this broader Service context, the “ship” that Captain Laurence spoke of is really just a metaphor for something greater. When you read about the heroism displayed by our Sailors and Marines over the long course of U.S. history, you will see that this phrase precisely describes what they embodied in their character: **THEY DON’T GIVE UP THE SHIP...They Fight.**

They fight for the ship.

They fight for each other.

They fight for you.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, some predictable and some not, the burdens of their commitment, and of this ethos of self-sacrifice, are not truly understood by wider swaths of the American public, many of whom have no relationship with a person who is currently serving in the military. I fear that the values and selflessness embodied by this simple command is underappreciated by many in this country, perhaps too many, because everyone here benefits from the bravery it demands.

We as a nation, and as a Department of the Navy, are certainly faced with a long list of geostrategic threats. Russian revanchism, Chinese territorial and economic aggression, Iranian murder, mayhem, and mischief across the greater Middle East and beyond, North Korean flagrant violations of international norms regarding the proliferation of nuclear weapons and general bellicosity, and the growing and morphing threat of Salifist-based global jihad, are combining to overwhelm our ability to respond in traditional ways. Nonetheless, we face no greater threat than the erosion of the relationship between our Naval Service, its maritime mission, and our broader citizenry. To sustain our superiority on the seas we must ALL believe it is necessary. It will require a renewed national mandate to invest in a linearly larger, and geometrically more capable force. This cannot be done without the support of the American people, and through their elected representatives in Congress.

A popular question being asked today, (and it has been asked of me countless times since I was publicly nominated for this position) is whether this future force should be 275 ships, or 300 ships, or 355 ships, or some other number? I would say that the right answer to this question in my opinion is 355 PLUS, because while we certainly need more sea-going platforms, we also need to increase their lethality and their ability to operate in a networked fashion with both manned and unmanned assets that contain, restrain, confuse, overwhelm, and decisively defeat our enemies. This is an ambitious objective, but that, ultimately, is a very good thing. We must set our sights high right now on building the Navy and Marine Corps of the future—because the only thing we can say with confidence about that future is that it will require much more than we can reasonably ask of the forces we have today. So, we as leaders

of the Department of the Navy must mobilize ourselves and our fellow Americans to fight for the Navy and Marine Corps we need, and that our Sailors and Marines deserve.

Today, we are at an inflection point not entirely different than the one the Department of the Navy, and the nation, faced in 1979 when I was sworn in as a midshipman. For those who remember, we were still recovering from a post Viet Nam hangover that alienated the Armed Forces from the general population and created “hollow force” issues in all the Services. Thanks to extraordinary political leadership, and our own national resolve, we rebuilt our military, and our Navy, to the point where our primary geostrategic foe, a militarily strong and capable Soviet Union, was forced into retreat. This palpable national resolve, and the sacrifices of many people who passed through these very halls, contributed to the demise of the Soviet system, removed the imminent threat of military force on Western Europe, and led to a chain of unstoppable events that freed millions behind the Iron Curtain from communist tyranny. There is no doubt that we honor the words of James Laurence with how we responded as a nation during this era. We did not give up the ship then, and we must not give up the ship now.

In closing I would like leave you with a message that is mostly directed to anyone in this hall who has served a full career in the Navy or Marine Corps, but most especially to my classmates from the class of 1983 and the late, yet extremely great, 36<sup>th</sup> Company. My own tenure as an active duty officer in the Navy was short, but to those of you here who dedicated a career to the naval service after leaving this Yard with me in May of 1983, you have my greatest respect, admiration and thanks for your dedicated service. To each of you, I think President John F. Kennedy said it best when he said,

“I can imagine no more rewarding a career. And any person who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile, I think he or she can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction by saying: 'I served in the United States Navy.’”

To my classmates, I want you to know that it is my great honor to represent you as I have this very unique and humbling opportunity to serve in the Navy again. You have my commitment that as long as I have the privilege to serve as our Navy’s Under Secretary....

**I WILL NEVER, EVER GIVE UP THE SHIP.**

Thank you for being here.

God Bless You.

And may God bless the Sailors and Marines who go in harm’s way on the seas, in the air, and on the land to keep us safe... and free. BEAT ARMY!