

The Time to Seek Shelter

May the words of my mouth and the meditations that are in all our hearts, be acceptable to thee dear Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Some of you may recall this message I gave eleven years ago on Memorial Day Sunday 2014. I want to give it again with modifications.

Our founding fathers wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” They closed that famous document with, “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

So, on this Memorial Day Sunday 2025, we honor and remember those men and women who pledged their lives in service to our country to preserve those unalienable rights. Some gave all and all gave some. We thank each and every one of them.

First a little history

On 05 May 1868 Gen, John Logan, Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued an order naming 30 May as a day “for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country.”

There is a lot of debate about when, where and how “Decoration Day” actually started. I may be a little biased being born and raised in Pennsylvania but I believe it all may have started in Boalsburg, a small town in Centre County, PA, nestled in the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains. Only a dot on some maps. In fact, driving along PA route 322 most drivers would not even notice this place, if were not for a plain little marker by the side of the road: "Boalsburg. An American Village - Birthplace of Memorial Day."

It was a pleasant fall Sunday in October 1864, and in the little community burial ground the village pioneers of colonial times slept peacefully side by side with the recently fallen heroes of the Civil War. On this day a young teen-age girl, Emma Hunter, and her friend, Sophie Keller, gathered some garden flowers to place them on the grave of her father, Dr. Reuben Hunter, a surgeon in the Union Army. On this very same day than an older

woman, Mrs. Elizabeth Meyer, elected to strew flowers on the grave of her son Amos, who as a private in the ranks, had fallen on the last day of battle at Gettysburg.

And so, the three women met, kneeling at nearby graves, a young girl honoring her father, a young mother paying respects to her son, each with a basket of flowers picked with loving hands. And they got to talking. The mother proudly told the girl what a fine young man her son had been, how he had dropped his farm duties and enlisted in the Union Army at the outbreak of the war, and how bravely he had fought.

The daughter took a few of her flowers and placed them on the son's grave. The mother in turn laid some of her freshly cut blooms on the father's grave. These two women had found in their common grief a common bond as they knelt together in that little burial ground in Central Pennsylvania where Mount Nittany stands eternal guard over those who sleep there.

And so Memorial Day began over 160 years ago.

Now let's get a little nautical.

Mother, mother ocean, I have heard you call
Wanted to sail upon your waters since I was three feet tall
You've seen it all, you've seen it all

Watched the men who rode you, switch from sails to steam
And in your belly, you hold the treasures few have ever seen
Most of 'em dreams, most of 'em dreams

Yes, I am a pirate, two hundred years too late
The cannons don't thunder, there's nothin' to plunder
I'm an over-forty victim of fate
Arriving too late, arriving too late

Nothing like the opening lines from Jimmy Buffet's "A Pirate Looks at Forty" to start things off.

In our little corner of southwestern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut we have a very close association with the sea. From the Navy bases that dot our shoreline from Groton to Newport, the ship building industry, the commercial fishing industry to the multitude of pleasure boaters we have always been attracted to water. Many of you are or at one time a part of one of these groups. I am one with close ties to the sea. I retired 10

years ago as the Chief Hydrographer at Leidos Corporation. This work kept me on the water surveying the depths to produce updated nautical charts so those navigating our coastal areas can do so safely.

The following story is in remembrance to those who have served in the US Navy. Especially to my father, who in 1943 took a bus to Philadelphia, lied about his age and enlisted in the US Navy. Dad returned home from the Pacific to Bainbridge, MD, where he was discharged and given a bus ride to Lancaster, Pa. From there he was on his own to find his way home to Parkesburg, 35 miles west. He spoke very little about his time in the Navy. He was one of the Americans that Tom Brokaw would write about in his book “The Greatest Generation”.

Today I want to tell you about a significant naval event that occurred in the Pacific during the Second World War. One that, ever since I heard it many years ago, has shaped my decision making while working at sea.

Eternal Father, Strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bid'st the mighty Ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to thee,
for those in peril on the sea.

Typhoon Cobra aka Halsey's Typhoon is one of World War II's most unexpected disasters at sea. In December of 1944, Admiral William “Bull” Halsey is one of the Pacific theater's most popular and colorful naval heroes. The “Fighting Admiral” and his thirty-thousand-man Third Fleet are charged with protecting General MacArthur's flank during the invasion of the Philippine Island of Mindoro. But in the midst of the landings, Halsey attempts a complicated refueling maneuver and unwittingly drives his 170 ships into the teeth of a massive typhoon.

Late in the afternoon of 16 December 1944, Task Force 38, under the command of Admiral Halsey, broke off from the Philippines where they were protecting General MacArthur's flank during the invasion of the Philippine Island of Mindoror, and began the 400-mile steam to the east to rendezvous for refueling and provisioning.

On the morning of 17 December, the winds had started to increase and ships were having difficulty in the winds and seas. All hands were ordered onto the decks to help with securing lines and carrying supplies. By noon conditions had worsened. The destroyer *Maddox* had a fuel line break and almost collided with the oiler *Manatee*. The escort carrier *Kwajalein* was attempting to transfer replacement planes and pilots to the fast carriers, canceled all air operations and personnel transfers. The crew was ordered to lash planes to the deck with steel cables and deflate the tires. Shortly thereafter as the weather continued to deteriorate, Admiral Halsey cancelled all fueling operations and ordered the ships to steam northwest and attempt refueling on the next day. Later that afternoon the sea had become too rough for aircraft recovery. The last two planes returning from Combat Air Patrol were ordered to ditch in the ocean. Their pilots bailed out and were recovered by a destroyer.

Conditions grew even worse overnight so that by dawn's first light on the 18th of December refueling was once again cancelled and the ships ordered to sail south. Many ships were now critically low on fuel. Many had already pumped out ballast to take on fuel making them lighter and riding high in the water made them top heavy and unstable. By mid-morning the storm began to consume the fleet. The light carrier *Independence* reported a man overboard; another followed within minutes and man overboard reports continued throughout the afternoon. Aircraft broke loose from their cables on the hangar deck of *Monterey* and exploded into flames. The crew of the *Monterey* spent the afternoon working to bring fires under control as the ship slowed and lost steerage. The *Wisconsin* radioed that one of her floatplanes had been torn from her deck. A few minutes later cruisers *Boston* and *Miami* also reported planes overboard. The *Cowpens* became the second light carrier to report hangar deck fires from loose aircraft.

That afternoon the escort carrier *Cape Esperance* reported fires. Her planes had broken loose on the flight deck, flames were rising to the height of the bridge, and the ship was in serious jeopardy of being lost. Fortunately, the wind and sea extinguished the fires by literally washing the clearing burning aircraft from the decks.

By early evening the worst of the storm had passed. The Third Fleet was scattered over an area of 3000 square miles of ocean. Several ships had already been directed back to Ulitihi for repair, but the overall state of the fleet had yet to be ascertained. That evening Halsey ordered a search to begin for men overboard.

In addition to the dozens of men lost overboard and the 27 ships that suffered severe damage:

- The destroyer *USS Hull* - capsized and sank with 202 men drowned (62 survivors)
- The destroyer *USS Monaghan* - capsized and sank with 256 men drowned (six survivors)
- The destroyer *USS Spence* - rudder jammed hard to starboard, capsized and sank with 317 men drowned (23 survivors)

And then there is the destroyer escort *USS Tabberer*. Late on the 18th, as the storm was starting to subside, a signalman trying to rig an emergency antenna, sighted a man in the water, and sounded the “Man Overboard” alarm. After pulling the sailor from the still raging seas, the *Tabberer* continued throughout the night, all day on the 19th and into the 20th saving the lives of 55 sailors.

No such military disaster occurs without an inquiry and on 13 February 1945 Admiral Nimitz sent a confidential letter to the Pacific Fleet, the subject: Damage in Typhoon, Lessons of. Admiral Nimitz lists 18 lessons learned from Typhoon Cobra but his most important point and one that I use to make decisions when I am at sea is number 18:

In conclusion, both seniors and juniors alike must realize that in bad weather, as in most other situations, safety and fatal hazard are not separated by any sharp boundary line, but shade gradually from one into the other. There is no little red light which is going to flash on and inform commanding officers or higher commanders that from then on there is extreme danger from the weather, and that measures for ships' safety must now take precedence over further efforts to keep up with the formation or to execute the assigned task. This time will always be a matter of personal judgment. Naturally no commander is going to cut thin the margin between staying afloat and foundering, but he may nevertheless unwittingly pass the danger point even though no ship is yet in extremis. Ships that keep on going as long as the severity of wind and sea has not yet come close to capsizing them or breaking them in two may nevertheless become helpless to avoid these catastrophes later if things get worse. By then they may be unable to steer any heading but in the trough of the sea, or may have their steering control, lighting, communications, and main propulsion disabled, or may be helpless to secure things on deck or to jettison topside weights. **The time to seek shelter is while still able to do so.**

This lesson is not unlike the lessons to be learned from today's Bible readings:

God feels our pain he knows all the storms we face in our lives. He understands, feels our pain and wants to help, to be our shelter in the storm. In his shelter we can find the strength to carry on. He will never forsake us. If called upon, He will not only see through the storms, but will carry us through them.

Most of us are not prepared for the storms that occur in life. Storms can come in many forms and they seem to come at the most inopportune times. When these storms threaten to capsize your life, do what the Psalmist did:

“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears.”

Like the lessons from Typhoon Cobra and Adm. Nimitz’s statement “to seek shelter while you can”. It’s okay to Pray to God for protection and shelter before the storm hits.

But there is one big difference: with God it is never too late to seek shelter.

In the New Testament reading, Jesus and his disciples get in a boat to go the other side. The weather was calm when they got in the boat and headed out to sea. But out of nowhere a storm comes up. The boat is tossed about in the winds and waves. Remember all was well until the storm came. What did the disciples do? They sought His shelter:

“And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.”

So, like the prudent mariner be a prudent Christian, don’t wait until the storm hits, pray before it hits. Pray for direction, pray for strength, pray for shelter, rest in the assurance of your relationship with Jesus and everything will be all right.

Does this mean when you find yourself in one of life’s storms that it is too late and there is no need to pray? Not at all. When the storms of life strike with all their fury, when you are tossed all about by the winds and the waves, about to capsize and sink, have faith and pray for shelter. Know that God will work things out for you. Then, in the midst of your storms, you will find a peace that passes all understanding.

Back to the personal meaning of Typhoon Cobra that I mentioned earlier. A couple of months ago my son Jon was doing some genealogy research and had asked me about

Dad's service in the Navy. So, I opened the box of his memorabilia and found this typed memorandum dated 21 December 1944:

USS LST 991

21 December 1944

Memorandum To: All Hands.

We have just gone through an experience which I believe we will all remember to our dying days. To say we were lucky is putting it mildly. I know I and many more, asked the Lord to see us safely through.

I wish to thank the engine room gang for keeping those engines purring; the helmsmen who did a damn fine job, even with me yelling at them all the time; the radar men; the security patrol; the aft steering gang; and to the rest of the crew who did not have specific jobs for remaining calm, cool and collected at all times.

I am proud to have such a fine crew with me.

H. W. SCHWEITZER,
Commanding Officer

Dad's ship the LST 991, Ladybug, had survived typhoon Cobra.

There are over 100 verses written for the navy hymn but let me close with one that is not well known and is considered by many to be the final verse. The date and author are unknown.

And when at length her course is run,
Her work for home and country done,
Of all the souls that in her sailed
Let not one life in thee have failed;
But hear from heaven our sailor's cry,
And grant eternal life on high!

AMEN

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the palm of His hand.