

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR
ADMIRAL JEREMY M. BOORDA
Washington National Cathedral
Washington, D.C.
May 21, 1996

Mrs. Boorda, Mike's family, Secretary Christopher and our friends from the Diplomatic Corps, Secretary Perry, Secretary Dalton, General Shalikashvili, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Unified Commanders-in-Chief, the leadership and members of Congress who are here, Admiral Johnson and the flag leadership of our Navy, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Hagan; to our great Navy sailors and all of America's Armed Forces:

Today we come to honor and give thanks for the life of Mike Boorda, a special man who earned a special place in the heart of his Navy and the heart of our nation. He lived a life that makes America proud, beginning, of course, with his family. His first words upon becoming Chief of Naval Operations were, "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Bettie, and I wouldn't want to be here without her."

To Bettie and David and Edward and Robert and Anna, your families, I know there is nothing we can say or do to ease the loss of your husband and father and grandfather. I hope you find comfort in the love and respect and honor that surrounds you today, here in this great cathedral and all throughout our great land.

I thank you for your service to the Navy. I thank you, Bettie. I thank you, Edward and Robert, for your service. I thank you, David, for your work on the radio. I thank you, Anna, for your devotion and for your husband's service; and, Edward, for your wife's service. But your entire family is a model, a reflection of Mike Boorda's remarkable love for the Navy -- a Navy in which he enlisted when he was just 16.

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At every turn he led in helping our country live up to its responsibilities as the world's leading force for freedom. He served two tours of duty in Southeast Asia. As has been said today, as Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces in Southern Europe, he ordered the first offensive action in NATO's history, the strikes against Bosnian Serb aircraft violating the no-fly zone.

I know his family is especially proud of the role he played and the role that they supported in getting food and relief to the war-torn people of Bosnia. I very much want history to record that Mike Boorda's quiet determination to do all he could to end the slaughter of the children and the innocents in Bosnia and to bring that awful war to an end had a profound impact on his President and on the policy of this nation.

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Even after he became Chief of Naval Operations, I continued to ask him what he thought we should do to get a reality check on the rest of the advice I was given. And I want to say to all of you what I said to his family this last weekend. It is my belief that perhaps more than any other military officer in this country, Mike Boorda helped to lead us to the point of peace at Dayton. And there are countless thousands of people alive in Bosnia today because of this small man with a big heart, a large vision, and great courage.

He developed new strategies to carry our Navy into the 21st century. He spearheaded projects like theater ballistic missile defense and the arsenal ship that have put our Navy on the cutting edge of technology.

Like all great sailors, he loved the sea and he loved sea stories. The stories about him are legion and now legend. I'm told that when I nominated him to be the Chief of Naval Operations, he called his mother, Trudy Wallis, from Italy to tell her that he was about to become the CNO. She asked if it was a promotion. He said, "No, I'm already a four-star admiral." She asked if he were going to get a raise. He said, "No, I'll be making a little less, I'm losing my overseas living allowance." She then said, "Well, surely you'll get a bigger house." And he said, "Actually, it will be smaller than the Mediterranean villa we have now." Apparently, his mother then said, "Well, don't you have enough time in to retire?"

Now, every family has got a story like that. Well, he didn't get a raise or a promotion or a bigger house, but he got a bigger job, and he did his mother and his family and his country proud.

Many have said before me that his lasting legacy will be his concern for the sailors. He knew the people were the Navy's greatest

asset. And every day he made the Navy stronger because he took good care of its sailors. He loved the blue jackets and he loved the officers. When he came on board a ship or entered a room of sailors, you could see the twinkle in his eye. Without ever ranting or reprimanding, criticizing or cajoling, he found a way to bring out the best in everyone, seaman or admiral, boatswain mate to battle group commander. Talk to him for just a few moments and you couldn't help but like him. You couldn't help but love our Navy even more, and want to do the best you could for our country.

He also understood that beyond the things that he fought for that were material for our men and women in uniform, beyond the better housing, the better pay, the better time at home with families, there was, above all, the importance of caring and compassion. Last year in Norfolk he spoke to a theater full of sailors. The chief machinist mate nervously stepped up to the microphone and explained his predicament. His wife had recently passed away, and he was left with two young daughters. He told the CNO that he had six months before his retirement date, but he would have to reenlist before then, and that meant more sea duty and separation from his children.

Right there at the microphone, the CNO asked, "So you want to retire in June?" The MMC meekly replied, "Yes, sir." And right then and there, Admiral Boorda said, "Your request is approved. We'll work it out."

The Admiral used to joke about being small in stature. Shortly after I named him Chief of Naval Operations, we were in the English Channel together, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasion on the aircraft carrier, the George Washington. And I spoke just as I am now, but I had the presidential lectern there. And when I finished, he was coming up, so I pulled out the stand for him to stand on. And he got up, and he looked at me, and he said, "You know, this is the second time you've elevated me in the last couple of months."

Well, that's the kind of sense of humor he had. Even though he was very small, the rest of us always looked up to him -- looked up to his ability somehow to inspire us all to do better, to reach beyond ourselves.

There was reported in the press a Navy photographer's remarks I would like to repeat who said: "Everyone was always asking me to take photos with him. They wanted to stand next to the best thing the Navy had."

Before I came over here today, I visited the Pentagon. And I went to the Navy Command Center to the briefing room that Admiral Boorda began his day in several times a week to thank the staff who

worked with him every day and who can't be with us here today because they're on duty, as he would want them to be. And they were encouraged to tell me whatever they wanted. I thought you might be interested to know what those people who are now over at the Pentagon, doing the work they did every day for Mike Boorda, had to say to me.

One said, "There's a \$5 bill over there on the wall. Do you see it, Mr. President?" I said, "Yes, I do." He said, "That's the bet the Admiral had with the weatherman every time we had a briefing. He always bet against the weatherman. And as of the last bet, he was \$5 ahead." Another said that every time there was a briefing in the morning, he brought in strips of bacon and literally shoved bacon at everyone else. He was always trying to share his bacon and make people laugh about it. A third said that the thing that meant the most to her was that at Christmastime he literally greeted every single sailor in the Pentagon. No matter how much time it took, that's what he did.

A young sailor in the office said that the thing that moved her most was that she handled his correspondence, and he would never let her send a form letter. Even when someone wrote to him and went outside the chain of command, he would write a gentle letter back explaining what the chain of command was. But it was always a personal letter, so that the young sailor who wrote would know that the CNO really cared and really read the letter.

And finally, one very large African American sailor from the state of Tennessee stood up in the back of the room and he said, "Mr. President, how can we ever replace this man?"

In the Bible there is the great story of two warriors and friends, David and Jonathan. When they prepared to part, Jonathan said, "Tomorrow there is a new moon, and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty." Mike Boorda's seat is empty and how we shall miss his warm smile, his easy manner, his wonderful voice, his sharp wit. What a legacy he has left behind -- his ferocious devotion to all of you; his commitment to give all of you a chance to be the very best that you can be; to give our country its chance for true greatness; his deep sense of honor, which no person should ever question; and a Navy that is, for all of its challenges, the finest in the world.

Now Mike Boorda's ship is moored; his voyage is complete. But I know that when the whistle blew and the colors were shifted he was welcomed on the pier by God's loving, eternal embrace. May God bless and cherish Admiral Mike Boorda as he blessed and cherished our lives and our beloved America.