

ADMIRAL LORD COLLINGWOOD

Back in the days of the old British Navy, there was a very senior and aged British Admiral that, after finishing his evening meal, would take leisurely strolls around the grounds of his home to unwind and relax. On his walks, he would take his pipe and tobacco, a glass of port wine, his walking stick and a pocket full of acorns.

While on his walk and while reflecting on the day's events, what went well and what perhaps did not, he would find some of the richest soil on the grounds and with the heel of his boot, dig a hole and plant an acorn. The purpose? When acorns are put to seed, they eventually grow into tall mighty oak trees. In those days of wooden ships and iron Sailors, the Admiral was considering the value of the trees to the future of his Navy, knowing full well that he would be LONG departed from this world before those trees would be fully grown. In a way, he was leaving his legacy in those acorns that would one day become tall and mighty oak trees that would be cut down and used to build future ships that would be used to safeguard and preserve his Navy, his country and his King."

- AUTHOR UNKNOWN

THE LEGACY

Not so long ago in the United States Navy, I met a Sailor unlike any other. Every morning, I'd see her walking the deck plates, carefully taking notice of each individual. She often carried a stained ceramic mug with the unmistakable smell of strong black coffee. Everyone knew her and she was respected. Sailors weren't afraid but they knew not to confuse her kindness for weakness. She held her head high and had a commanding, but somehow caring, voice. She wore leather shoes, so well shined one may mistake them for synthetic. The ribbons and devices that were proudly displayed on her chest were the only tangible evidence of her service; only she knew the stories they told. Her uniform was spotless. It was obvious she had great reverence for it.

She took the time to speak to Sailors as she walked the decks. Sometimes it was to remind someone of a standard or to correct an infraction, but she was always respectful, and rank never seemed to matter. More often though, she asked people about themselves, who they were, where they were from, and how their family was doing. She was always so curious and in the moment I didn't understand why. It wasn't until after she walked away that I realized she had made me feel proud. I never once heard her talk about her accomplishments. She only asked people about theirs. She was a humble woman. She smiled more than others but she also had a scowl. Her bearing and attitude was contagious. She could somehow control the temperament of a room. I witnessed her change an atmosphere in a few brief seconds from despair to hope and from impossibility to certainty. She could invoke tears of happiness, sadness, or anger. She made seemingly unachievable tasks manageable. I walked away from conversations convinced that there was absolutely nothing that we couldn't accomplish. She could make or break someone with just a look. And she wasn't afraid to reprimand a Sailor or hold someone accountable for making a mistake. She was fully aware of mistakes. She had made them. After all, she was human. She often reminded us that Sailors were there to make someone proud. She was. She never turned her back on anyone. It was as if she always knew what to do and what to say. I wonder if she did? She seemed to relish in our happiness and successes, in our careers, and in life. She also shared our pain, not only through our failures but our hardships. You could always tell she cared. We leaned on her in hard times. When she spoke, you listened. When in doubt, we asked. I found myself hanging onto her every word. She inspired us to be more than we thought capable and her influence changed our lives, as Sailors and as people.

As time passed, so did our time together. I had the honor of watching that Sailor drop her final salute. I thought I saw tears in her eyes as she turned and walked away, but that didn't stand out to me nearly as much as the sun beaming off her collar devices as she crossed the brow of the ship. She didn't say much that day. I know it was too hard for her, but she didn't have to. I think she knew she had left her legacy in me. In us. She had accomplished what her nation had asked of her, and more. When I returned to my workspace, I found a brief note lying on the desk. It simply read, "Leading Sailors is an honor and a privilege. Thank you for the honor." I never forgot that advice and I've never forgotten that woman. She picked me up when I had fallen and knocked me down when I was blinded by arrogance. She taught me how to fail, how to succeed, how to train, and how to fight. Above all, she taught us to become the leaders who would guide her Sailors to safeguard and preserve her Navy, her country, and her family.

While reflecting on the day's events, what went well and what perhaps did not, I realized that she taught us everything through her words and actions. She taught us who we are and where we came from, and how knowing our heritage, our past, and remembering those who had gone before us is what gives us our course for the future. She taught us to love the Navy and our Sailors. That respect for one another and our diversity makes us strong. Whether it was a stern word or a pat on the back, she taught us. I aspired to be like her.

Just as an acorn is put to seed, so were we.

I have faced tremendous adversity throughout my years. Many trials and tribulations, much like the ones she described when explaining to us the significance of a fouled anchor. In each instance, I found myself reflecting on her memory. Through each obstacle I'd catch a brief glimpse of her face, or hear the calming sound of her voice and the unmistakable smell of strong black coffee. As I share this story with you, you're probably wondering who she was? She watched over us like a mother, educated us like a teacher, and guided as our mentor. I will never forget her. She was a Senior Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy.

BY: BMC(SW/AW/EXW) William F. Squires