

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 him walking the deck plates, carefully taking notice of each individual. He often carried a stained ceramic mug with the unmistakable smell of strong black coffee. Everyone knew him and he was respected. Sailors weren't afraid but they knew not to confuse his kindness for weakness. He held his head high and had a commanding, but somehow caring, voice. He wore leather shoes, so well shined one may mistake them for synthetic. The ribbons and devices that were proudly displayed on his chest were the only tangible evidence of his service; only he knew the stories they told. His uniform was spotless. It was obvious he had great reverence for it.

He took the time to speak to Sailors as he walked the decks. Sometimes it was to remind someone of a standard or to correct an infraction, but he was always respectful, and rank never seemed to matter. More often though, he asked people about themselves, who they were, where they were from, and how their family was doing. He was always so curious and in the moment I didn't understand why. It wasn't until after he walked away that I realized he had made me feel proud. I never once heard him talk about his accomplishments. He only asked people about theirs. He was a humble man. He smiled more than others but he also had a scowl. His bearing and attitude was contagious. He could somehow control the temperament of a room. I witnessed him change an atmosphere in a few brief seconds from despair to hope and from impossibility to certainty. He could invoke tears of happiness, sadness, or anger. He made seemingly unachievable tasks manageable. I walked away from conversations convinced that there was absolutely nothing that we couldn't accomplish. He could make or break someone with just a look. And he wasn't afraid to reprimand a Sailor or hold someone accountable for making a mistake. He was fully aware of mistakes. He had made them. After all, he was human. He often reminded us that Sailors were there to make someone proud. He was. He never turned his back on anyone. It was as if he always knew what to do and what to say. I wonder if he did? He seemed to relish in our happiness and successes, in our careers, and in life. He also shared our pain, not only through our failures but our hardships. You could always tell he cared. We leaned on him in hard times. When he spoke, you listened. When in doubt, we asked. I found myself hanging onto his every word. He inspired us to be more than we thought capable and his 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 his final salute. I thought I saw tears in his eyes as he turned to face the Ensign, but that didn't stand out to me nearly as much as the sun beaming off his collar devices as he walked away. He didn't say much that day. I know it was too hard for him, but he didn't have to. I think he knew he had left his legacy in me. In us. He had accomplished what his nation had asked of him, 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 man. He picked me up when I had fallen and knocked me down when I was blinded by arrogance. He taught me how to fail, how to succeed, how to train, and how to fight. Above all, he taught us to become the leaders who would guide his Sailors to safeguard and preserve his Navy, his country, and his family.

While reflecting on the day's events, what went well and what perhaps did not, I realized that he taught us everything through his words and actions. He 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. He 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, he taught us. I aspired to be like him.

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 he described when explaining to us the significance of a fouled anchor. In each instance, I found myself reflecting on his memory. Through each obstacle I'd catch a brief glimpse of his face, or hear the calming sound of his voice and the unmistakable smell of strong black coffee. As I share this story with you, you're probably wondering who he was? He watched over us like a father, educated us like a teacher, and guided as our mentor. I will never forget him. He was a Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy.

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