

25 September, Arlington, VA

I stand before this distinguished crowd today a very humbled man, regretting my cause, but filled with pride and blessed with honor to be chosen by such a special family to eulogize a Naval Officer, Gentleman and friend with the caliber of LCDR Vince Tolbert.

The Naval Intelligence leadership successfully taught Vince to get the bottom line up front. Allow me to now give that charge my best effort:

LCDR Vince Tolbert is an American Hero.

He isn't a hero just because he died in the service of his country, performing a critical job in a fashion that defied anyone to do it better. No, Vince was a hero every single day, to his family, his friends, and his professional peers. He was a hero long before September 11th, and he will forever remain a hero to many of us. Today, I'd like to share with you exactly why Vince Tolbert is my hero, and why he should be yours as well.

Some of Vince's heroism was surely inherited. His Mother [REDACTED] molded the young man we'll miss so dearly in Lemoore, California while another American Hero, then Navy LCDR [REDACTED] Tolbert shared the hostile skies over Vietnam with other heroes of that age, some of whom honor Vince and his family with their presence here today. I speak for [REDACTED] and all the Tolbert family when I thank those heroes of the past and present for their time and effort to be with this special family, in the midst of a national tragedy.

The capacity crowd on this mournful day speaks volumes of the love we all had for Vince. No doubt he positively touched the lives of everyone here. That was Vince's way. He made you feel good. He made you feel loved. He made you feel respected. When you talked to Vince, he made you feel like the most important person in the world. Male and female. Young and old. Superior and Subordinate.

In Vince's case, the cause was much more than service to his country. Vince was a genuine hero because of the way he lived, in the uniform, on the job, and out of uniform, be it in friendship, marriage, or fatherhood.

I regret that I've only known Vince for a little over six years. No doubt the loss is compounded many times over for those of you fortunate enough to have known him longer. But in those six years, I knew that a more loyal and trusting friend was not to be found. When Vince was your friend, Vince's friendship had permanence.

I knew Vince was something special as soon as I met him. While he was assigned to USS Constellation, patrolling the Arabian Gulf in 1995, Vince welcomed me aboard with open arms as the new Air Wing Intelligence Officer,

and quickly demonstrated that he could get things done on America's Flagship. Vince could read a person like a book, and looking back, he probably thought of me as one who could use a lot of help. He enjoyed the unanimous respect of the entire Wardroom and the Air Wing. Those of you who've been there know that this kind of credibility is earned over sustained time, not provided upon check-in, and can be lost in an instant. Vince had it, and kept it.

One of his most special traits was his unwillingness to dwell on his many past successes, be they athletic, professional, or personal. You always had to hear about Vince's greatness through other means, never through him. Soon after you met him, you needed no reflection to his past. His present spoke for itself. Vince carried his credibility in his back pocket, available for all to observe at any necessary moment. And the only thing that surpassed Vince's every day love of life and exceptional job performance was the light of his future, the potential of things yet to come.

I would regret it if I did not include this example. After I had known Vince for a short time, I learned through word of mouth that he had earned black belt status in martial arts. When I confronted him with that rumor, he simply smiled and nodded and sheepishly acknowledged that very fact. I recall looking at him and saying, "Vince, that is surely the most unnecessary physical qualification I could ever imagine."

The irony there is self-evident. Vince was one of the most humble, respectful, and most gentle men I've ever encountered. His impressive size and strength were simply means of deterrence, and were never used in anger to my knowledge, except against those on the other side of the line of scrimmage. I feel sorry for all those having had that geographic proximity in the past.

I wish I could convey to you in this short time the love, devotion, and pride Vince had for his family. Even before I met [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], I could have picked them out of a crowd based on Vince's frequent words of pride and praise. He literally beamed when he spoke of them. As [REDACTED] will tell you though, Vince had many families...his immediate and extended family, his family of friends, and the family found in the US Navy. Just last weekend, I told an ESPN correspondent that Vince's intense loyalty and spirit of devotion were equally felt by his friends, his family, his Navy, and his Nation. This is indeed a catastrophic loss to all of us.

What an honor it has been for me to get to know the Tolbert and [REDACTED] families these past two weeks. How I wish it would have been for a different reason under different circumstances. This is a loss that penetrates your very soul, as Vince was just as solid a family man as he was a Naval Officer.

A hero is a man that NEVER puts his own glory, his personal agenda, or his individual goals ahead of the family, the organizational mission, and/or the needs

of subordinates. Never is a powerful word. And in this case, a more accurate word can't be used. If you were a teammate, if you were his neighbor, if you were a sibling, if you were his wife, if you were his child, if you were a fellow Naval Officer, if you were the Central Command J2 or the Director of Naval Intelligence, you were thankful that this mountain of a man was on your team, on your side, checking your six without fail out of concern for YOUR interests, not his own.

Let there be no doubt though, that this unselfish approach was concurrent with unparalleled individual achievement. While recently assigned to US Central Command, Vince "hit for the cycle" you might say, and earned all three personal achievement medals to include the Joint Service Achievement Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal. Only the few have done so. I tell you this because this loss represents one from the inside track of Naval Intelligence and we will NEVER replace him.

While the community loss is enormous, I can't quantify the loss this means for his family. Vince was the consummate family man. His love of family was one of the traits I most admired about him. When we go to the reception today at the Fort Myer Officers Club, please take time to look at Vince's photographs with his wife and children, his parents, and his brothers. You will see the character of this man in his eyes. And his love of family will be obvious for all to observe.

What would Vince ask of us here today? For his peers in uniform, Vince would charge us to do the job we're trained to do in the pursuit of justice for the evildoers that caused this senseless destruction and most unnecessary tragic loss of life. In this case, I think Vince would call on us to "blitz". For his family and friends, Vince would find peace in knowing that he had touched your lives in a loving and meaningful way. Although he would understand your sadness, he would not want you to shed tears on his behalf, but rather rejoice in the special relationship you shared with him throughout his life, all too short though it was.

For [REDACTED].. you know Vince better than any of us. He would ask for your eternal strength, patient love, and inspired wisdom as you continue to develop the unbounded potential of [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. For all the children, your father would ask that you do your very best in all that you do, letting only your skills and capabilities define your qualifications, with grace and humility at all times. Believe me, your father was a role model without peer in this capacity, and he loved each of you with all his heart.

I ask all of you here to remember Vince as a hero, as I certainly will. Not because of the way he died, but because of the way he lived, all day, and every day. 24/7.

I will simply close with a reiteration:

LCDR Vince Tolbert is an American Hero.

We will miss you Vince. Every single one of us will miss you terribly and we are all proud to have called you friend. May God Bless Vince, May God be always with the Tolbert family, and on Vince's behalf, May God Bless the United States Navy, and the country it defends.

Thank you Vince.

17 November 2001, Lemoore, CA

*Remarks by CDR Todd Ross
at LCDR Vince Tolbert's
Memorial Service*

As we gather in this town rich in Naval Aviation tradition, I am aware that many of you here today knew LCDR Vince Tolbert long before I did. Indeed, some of you knew him better than I did. But today, I want to tell all of you how much Vince Tolbert meant to me personally, and how well he served the United States Navy, and the United States of America.

Because many of you helped shape the officer and gentleman that Vince ultimately became, be it in family or friendship, the nation owes all of you a debt of gratitude. As a fellow Naval Intelligence Officer, I never met a finer officer than Vince Tolbert, and a more loyal and trusting friend could never be found. Because of what Vince meant to me, I am truly honored that such a special family invited me to join them in what Vince would have wanted to be a celebration of a life "well done".

I regret that I knew Vince for only a little over six years. No doubt this tragic loss is compounded many times over for those of you fortunate enough to have known him longer. But in those six years, I knew that Vince could always be counted on.... To tell me the facts first; to tell me the truth always; to tell me when I was right; and also when I was wrong and why. Vince was straight up with everyone, every time, without fail. And when Vince was your friend, Vince's friendship had permanence.

To me, Vince Tolbert is an American Hero. I speak confidently for many in the Armed Services when I say that Vince Tolbert was a hero because of the way he entered the Pentagon on the 11th of September, not because of the way he left his post.

Since that tragic day now over two months past, we've been reintroduced to countless heroes that many of us had perhaps previously taken for granted. We now are reminded of the many heroes in the law enforcement agencies and organizations, we praise the heroism of the firefighters and rescue workers that rapidly respond to our regional crises, and we even acknowledge the heroes at the local post office. Yes, in the United States of America, heroes are easy to find in the midst of a national tragedy. But in my view, Vince Tolbert was a hero, before being a hero was cool. Vince showed us that he was a hero every single day, to [REDACTED] and his children, his parents, his brothers, his friends, and his professional peers.

It is no news to this crowd that some of Vince's heroism was surely inherited. His Mother [REDACTED] molded the young man we'll miss so dearly right here in this town while another American Hero, then Navy LCDR [REDACTED] Tolbert was airborne over Vietnam with other heroes of that age, many whom still call Lemoore their home town.

How fitting it is that while we mourn our mutual loss caused by a senseless act of evil, other residents of Lemoore are carrying out justice at this very minute over the skies of Afghanistan. Vince would be so proud of each and every one of the pilots in Air Wing 11 aboard the USS Carl Vinson. And oh how he would have liked to join them at sea and support them on their noble mission, with a manner of skill, competence and professionalism that no one could best.

No doubt Vince positively touched the lives of everyone here at some point. That was Vince's way. When you were around Vince, he made you feel good. He always made you feel respected. When you talked to Vince, he made you feel like the most important person in the world. Male and female. Young and old. Military and Civilian. Superior and Subordinate.

[REDACTED] will tell you about the presence Vince had when he entered the room. It's nice to hear the wife say the same things that all the men I knew were thinking when Vince entered the room: I guess that a conservative translation of what we used to say would be, "Wow, look at the presence of that guy!" Now when [REDACTED] says presence, I think of character, and a wise man once said that character was all about doing the right thing when no one was looking. I never knew a man with more character than Vince Tolbert.

I knew Vince was something special as soon as I met him. While he was assigned to USS Constellation, patrolling the Arabian Gulf in 1995, Vince welcomed me aboard with open arms as the new Air Wing Intelligence Officer, and quickly demonstrated that he could get things done on America's Flagship. He enjoyed the unanimous respect of the entire Wardroom and the Air Wing at large. Those of you who've been there know that this kind of credibility develops over sustained time, is not provided upon check-in, and can be lost in an instant. You might say that Vince gained this respect the old-fashioned way. He earned it. Through hard work, attention to detail, and unfailing service. Service to his CO. Service to the Ship's Intelligence Officer. And most of all, service to his shipmates; the officers and sailors of the Connie crew and her embarked Air Wing.

I still learn things about Vince when I talk to the many people that called him friend. He just simply refused to talk about his many accomplishments, be they athletic or professional. He never even told me about his father being a light attack war hero in Vietnam...I had to learn that from [REDACTED] himself.

After I had known Vince for a short time, I learned through word of mouth that he had earned black belt status in martial arts. When I confronted him with that rumor, he simply smiled and nodded and sheepishly acknowledged that very

fact. I recall looking at him and saying, "Vince, that is surely the most unnecessary physical qualification I could ever imagine."

The irony there is self-evident. Vince was one of the most humble, respectful, and most gentle men I've ever encountered. His impressive size and strength were simply means of deterrence, and were never used in anger to my knowledge, except against those on the other side of the line of scrimmage. I feel sorry for all those having had that geographic proximity in the past. Perhaps some of you are here today.

Vince never put his interests or his individual goals ahead of the family, the organizational mission, and/or the needs of subordinates. If you were a teammate, if you were a friend, if you were a sibling, if you were his wife, if you were his child, if you were a fellow Naval Officer, or if you were his boss, you were thankful that this mountain of a man was on your team, on your side, checking your six without fail out of concern for YOUR interests, not his own.

Let there be no doubt though, that this unselfish approach to life was concurrent with unparalleled individual achievement. While recently assigned to US Central Command, Vince "hit for the cycle" you might say, and earned all three personal achievement medals to include the Joint Service Achievement Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, and the Defense Meritorious Service Medal. Only the few have done so in a three-year period. I tell you this because I want you to know that this loss represents one from the inside track of Naval Intelligence and we will NEVER replace him.

While the loss to Naval Intelligence is enormous, I can't quantify the loss this means for his family. Vince was the consummate family man. His love of family was one of the traits I most admired about him. At today's reception, please take time to look at Vince's photographs with his wife and children, his parents, and his brothers. You will see the character of this man in his eyes. And his love of family will be obvious for all to observe.

And you'll notice something else about that photo album, now signed with memories by dozens upon dozens of those whose lives were touched by Vince. Take the time to read what people from all walks of life say about him. He impressed everyone in the same ways. Love of family. Loyalty to friends. Commitment to his Navy. Service to his country. I bet those impressions ring familiar to all of you here today when you think about Vince.

How would Vince want to be remembered? Would he want to be remembered as a football star here in the Central Valley, one who just had his jersey retired last night at Lemoore High School? Would he want to be remembered as a superlative Naval Officer? Or would he want to be remembered as a man who paid the ultimate sacrifice while performing a critical national security function in support of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of the Navy?

I say none of the above. While each of us will choose our own way of remembering Vince, I would ask that all of us reflect on what Vince would want as his memory. Todd's opinion...Vince would want to be remembered first as a man who loved ██████████ ██████████ ██████████ and ██████████ with all his heart, every

waking day of his life. A man who honored his father [REDACTED] and mother [REDACTED]. A man rich in friends, and void of enemies. And a man who served his country, because he wanted to, and because he knew it was the right thing to do. And if Vince could have his own way, he'd also want to be remembered as a better golfer than his brothers [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

I ask all of you here to remember Vince as a hero, as I certainly will. Not because of the way he died, but because of the way he lived, all day, and every day. 24/7.

I will miss Vince Tolbert. I learned a lot from him. He will certainly enjoy eternal life in my heart and elsewhere. I ask that all of you miss him and remember him for the reasons that he would wish. The next time you here a story of extraordinary heroism, think about Vince; not because HE performed extraordinary acts, but because of the extraordinary model that he provided for all of us...because he loved his family, because he put the needs of others before his own, and because he served his country for all the right reasons. There could be no greater blend of heroism.

May God Bless Vince, May God be always with the Tolbert family, and on Vince's behalf, May God Bless the United States Navy, and the country whose freedom it defends. Thank you Vince.