

Remarks at USS GONZALEZ Leadership Award Ceremony

November 2, 2022

On board Naval Station Norfolk

**Hon. John Scott Redd
Vice Admiral, U. S. Navy (Ret.)**

President, U. S. Naval Academy Class of 1966

Captain Reynolds (Congratulations on taking over as the best job in the Navy. 5 days in command!) . . . Classmates from the great Naval Academy class of 1966 . . . officers and crew of the USS Gonzalez:

Good morning! Thank you for allowing us to join you for this ceremony.

Lt. Stockdale and BM1 Monroe, congratulations again on receiving the latest in a long line of leadership awards sponsored by the Class of 1966. Well deserved! We are honored to share in your achievements. Bravo Zulu.

If you'll indulge me a few personal comments, let me begin by noting that it's great to be back on board a guided missile destroyer! My first command was also a DDG, USS KING, DDG-41. In fact, it was 41 years ago when I took command at these very piers.

KING was a very special tour for a number of reasons. If you think about it, one of the reasons is obvious. Every time I came aboard or departed, the 1MC would announce: "Ding, ding. Ding ding. KING . . . arriving" or "Ding ding. Ding ding. KING . . . departing." You might think that could go to your head but – trust me - there were always enough problems and challenges to keep me humble. . . DDG-41 was only 25 hull numbers behind DDG-66 but there was world of difference in capability and reliability.

It's also important to note that you have just returned from a long deployment which included significant operations in FIFTH Fleet. You may not realize it, but you and FIFTH Fleet were both commissioned within a few months of each other in 1995. I had the privilege of commissioning and commanding FIFTH Fleet, the Navy's first new fleet in almost half a century. I'm sorry we couldn't do better on liberty ports . . . but that's where the action has been since the end of the cold war.

You may not realize it, but this is a very special and emotional day for many of us in '66. Let me tell you why.

First, there's the obvious reason: your hull number. With Hue City's decommissioning you are the only ship left in commission with a hull number which matches our graduation year of '66. But our respect and dedication to you – and to this ship - goes much deeper than just a hull number

That's because you are also now the only ship in commission whose name is directly linked with the war in Vietnam. . . . As you may know, Viet Nam was “our war.” Our class, the class of 1966, lost more classmates killed in action in Viet Nam than any other Naval Academy class. Not only did we lose more classmates killed in action in Viet Nam, but we also lost more total KIA than any other Naval Academy class going all the way back to the World War II class of 1945.

In short, it was personal. Many of us fought in that war and all of us remember friends. . . classmates . . . roommates who didn't come back from that conflict in Southeast Asia.

More specifically to this event today, several of our classmates fought alongside Sergeant Gonzalez in the battle of Hue City. One of those, by the way, was our previous class president who went on to serve as a four-star Marine General. He has signed and presented several previous awards to your shipmates.

As you know, the other '66 hull number, USS Hue City, CG-66, was recently – and sadly - decommissioned. We are old enough that several of us were there for her commissioning ceremony in 1991. In fact, her first CO was a '66 classmate. And he reported for duty to another classmate serving as the cruiser destroyer group commander.

What you should know about that commissioning ceremony is that hundreds of marines who fought at the battle of Hue City were present for the ceremony in 1991. They came from all over the United States. The guest of honor, of course, was the mother of Sergeant Freddy Gonzalez for whom you are named. She was introduced by the (future) Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Boorda.

When Dolia Gonzalez stood up, she received one of the longest, heartfelt and tearful standing ovations I have ever witnessed!!

That ovation rightly recognized the sacrifice of her son, the namesake of your ship, Sergeant Gonzalez. As it should.

But it also was more than that. For those who had fought in Viet Nam and faithfully and courageously carried out their oath of office two decades earlier, it served also as the delayed - but very real - “welcome home” and “thank you for your service” that they’d never before received. And it was the first meaningful recognition by their country of what they collectively knew was a significant achievement. And now that achievement was finally being recognized as a true Marine Corps legacy.

Five years later, in 1996 you were commissioned.

So, to wrap it up, as I hope that you can see, we have a long, loving and emotional bond with this ship and the sailors and officers who have manned her over the years.

Thank you for allowing us to share this day and these memories with you.

May God bless you . . . and may God bless the United States of America.