

**REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
HONORABLE RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON
AT THE RETIREMENT CEREMONY IN
HONOR OF VICE ADMIRAL DIEGO E. HERNANDEZ**

FEBRUARY 1, 1991

PIER 1 WEST

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

It is an honor to accompany Vice Admiral Diego Hernandez in this ceremony that culminates a brilliant military career.

This occasion is in itself inherently historical as the best attempt to recognize the merits of Vice Admiral Hernandez, merits which transcend past deeds and are certainly not terminated by present circumstances.

Moreover, the war that rages so far away and yet constantly envelops our hearts, is in each of us a powerful inner scenario that sharpens our awareness and hones a new sensibility that is more clearly perceptive and more deeply appreciative of the extraordinary attributes of Diego Hernandez.

The stars on his epaulets, the gold wings on his breast, and myriad colors of the personal decorations that have been bestowed on Vice Admiral Hernandez --always impressive, ever symbolic-- today communicate in full measure the strength and the valor, the effort and the excellence, the extraordinary skills and sacrifices that, expressed in such symbols, are embodied in his mind and his

spirit.

To encompass in words the greatness of an extraordinary man is always inordinately difficult, because the essence of the extraordinary is, not having more of something commonly held, but rather uniqueness, and that defies formula, mold and measurement.

Vice Admiral Hernandez, solemnly and respectfully, I pay tribute to your unflagging dedication, to the perseverance of your will to go forward, to try harder, to fly higher, in search of the promising breakthrough or the advancement of a good cause.

There would be little point in attempting to chronologically recreate your amazing career, or attempting to rank your assignments and achievements in order or magnitude. Even selecting highlights is a difficult task, so today I follow my heart and recall a young Puerto Rican, fresh out of our University High School facing his first challenge alone in cold, cold Illinois during his naval ROTC training, earning his wings as a pilot,

and achieving excellence as a fighter pilot --the combat missions he flew during service in Vietnam, totalling 147 combat sorties. Twice shot down, he twice expertly wrestled his aircraft back to safety, on one occasion brilliantly devising what has been known ever since as the Hernandez maneuver, and on the second occasion fighting off enemy fire from the water while awaiting rescue.

I remember the pride we felt upon learning that a fellow Puerto Rican had been appointed Commander of the USS John F. Kennedy, the largest aircraft carrier in the US Navy.

I particularly recall our hopes upon learning that Diego Hernandez had been appointed Commander of the US Naval Forces in the Caribbean with headquarters in Puerto Rico. Vice Admiral Hernandez was the determinant figure in defusing the conflict that was dangerously brewing concerning the Vieques issue. Vice Admiral Hernandez left his desk and went to speak with the people of Vieques, the fishermen, he heard their complaints, he looked for solutions, he cleared the

way and established harmonic relations between Puerto Rico and the US Navy.

Moreover, he brought an enlightened approach viewing Vieques beyond its military purpose to the Navy. He took upon himself the mission of exploring and obtaining avenues for the economic development of Vieques, peace and progress that have endured after his departure.

Then, for Vice Admiral Hernandez, higher responsibilities and new stars: the Mediterranean, The Third Fleet in the Pacific, and Deputy Commander in Chief of the United States Space Command and, simultaneously, Vice Commander for the North American Aerospace Defense Command. His knowledge and initiatives in high technology helped lead the way to computerized fleet operations, exploiting the benefits of computers for command and control all over the ocean. In his last assignment Vice Admiral Hernandez duties went beyond a conventional command to encompass worldwide surveillance, communication, navigation,

missile warning and other functions vital to national security.

Vice Admiral Hernandez exemplifies the highest dedication to service and is the epitome of the Puerto Rican military men who have honorably served in the Navy and other United States Armed Forces, in peace and in war --in the muddy trenches of Europe during World War I; fighting Nazism and totalitarian forces in both the European and Pacific fronts; in the frozen mountains of Korea; in the rice paddies, skies and waters of Vietnam-- and today, once again, fully committed to the war effort in the Gulf.

The nature of the Gulf War brings to mind the thoughts of Saint Augustine expressed over fifteen centuries ago: "War and conquest are a sad necessity in the eyes of men of principle, yet it would be still more unfortunate if wrongdoers should dominate just men". In this war that no reasonable men wanted, that all reasonable men tried to avoid, that was forced upon us by the fanatical will of a ruthless despot, Puerto Ricans

stand side by side with the rest of the Nation sharing the toll of war.

In the midst of war, despite the darkness of combat, the nations of the world have pulled together in such a way that when the fighting is over and all the troops, men and women, are back home, a new more peaceful international order shall emerge. The United States of America, today standing proud in its sacrifice in the quest for peace, will soon stand proud in its transcendental achievement of worldwide adherence to the rule of law.

That new world order will come about in no small measure thanks to the lifetime performance of Vice Admiral Diego Hernandez, a brave warrior, a master strategist, an outstanding diplomat, a leader finely balanced in the attributes conducive to security and peace. We thank you and salute you.

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