**ARMED FORCES SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MIKE WINDOM**

Hello Everyone. It’s both an honor and a pleasure to be able to stand before you today on this very special occasion, to speak about one of the finest men I know, Master Chief Fredrick “Fred” Rogers. It’s a privilege to welcome all of Fred’s relatives, friends, and comrades in arms, associates, and fellow patriots. Thank you for being here today as we gather to show our appreciation for Fred’s long, distinguished, and dedicated service to our country. I promise I won’t take up too much of your time, but I want to use the few minutes that I have to say some heartfelt words about our retiree, Fred Rogers, both as a service member and as a family member.

Today, Master Chief is retiring with honor and pride from the U.S. Navy. He will be sorely missed by me and by so many others who have served with him during his career. I can say, with sincerity, that the U.S. Navy will feel a deep loss too. During Fred’s career, he served on five different continents, spanning the Presidential terms of Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Sr., Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and our current President, Donald Trump. Fred started in the Navy as a Radio Man (RM) back in 1988 and served on numerous ships during his illustrious Navy career. All of his deployments have been either to the Middle East or to various areas throughout the continent of Europe.  It is both a matter of record and a matter of fact that his work ethic has been nothing short of impeccable... a record that most of us would aspire to achieve.

There’s an expression that I’ve heard that teaches us, “I am part of all that I have met...” People we meet, know, work with, leave everlasting impressions on us, and if we’re lucky, and very blessed, they truly **DO** become a part of who we are. Sometimes this statement rings even truer... Most of you don’t know this, but Fred and I are cousins. As a matter of fact, we are more than just cousins, we’re more like brothers. Before Fred and I joined the Navy, we grew up just about a block from each other.  When I arrived in GA from Germany back in 76, I didn’t know anyone and I definitely didn’t know that there was a “**process**..” I had to get **accepted**! So, Fred, Tink (Fred’s brother), Scotty Passmore, William, and a few others in the neighborhood, were very curious about me, wondering, “Like, what is **HE** doing here and who **IS** he??” ...I did not speak English and I made them think I knew karate... just to keep them afraid of me, when all along **I was the one** who was afraid!  Fred and I began to develop a strong bond throughout the years, especially when I was allowed to come out and play!!! That’s another story for another time! (**Do you want to add**) I’m not so sure about keeping up the karate and the German, but clearly, the connection Fred and I share transcends time and circumstances.

Growing up in a small town with barely no jobs aside from the watermelon market and a couple of factories, and having parents who worked hard to be able to provide for us...giving us grandkids food stamps to buy candy, and cookies, (**Do you want to add**) I mean vegetables and healthy snacks (**and wait for the laugh**), makes me look back to acknowledge how far we’ve come. Fred has always strived to be the best since I knew him.  When there was football, basketball or any other games being organized and played, Fred always made sure he was on a winning team!  Wellll.... at least **sometimes**!  He clearly demonstrated, even at such a young age, that he has always had instinctive leadership skills!

Those early experiences served to act as Fred’s “calling card...” if we are to believe the adage, “Give me the child and I will show you the man,” we, who knew this fine man from the beginning, saw the planting and sprouting of the seeds that would one day be the man we honor today, which is why it did not surprise me when he was selected to the 1% Master Chief Club. His Naval career differs from that of the average Sailor. He served for eight years as an RM, got out and started his own business back home for a few years, decided he wanted to change course again, and rejoined our Navy as a full time Navy recruiter. At that time, he was an E-5. With every move and career shift, he built upon his experience... each step informing the next, providing perspective and a true understanding of the tasks and tests he faced.  Fred has never been afraid of a challenge; he takes them by the horn and does his best to master them.  He has been very successful in everything he has pursued, from his personal to his professional life.  His positive attitude is infectious and his patriotism and faithfulness is unwavering.

Fred’s patriotism is fully evident in the number of awards and medals he has received during his time in the service of his country. He aided in the fight against terrorism and bravely defended our freedoms in an admirable fashion. I believe in today’s society, there are too many Americans, particularly the young people in our country, who do not realize how fragile our freedom can be...how they must be defended at all times and throughout generations. This became evident as events of 911 awakened us all to the need to realize our vulnerabilities and protect all that we cherish..

It was Ronald Reagan, in one of his speeches, who points this out so clearly and so brilliantly. He said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free.”

In these controversial times, when there is much discussion and rhetoric about the validity of our presence in Iraq, Iran, and other troubled areas impacting our way of life, it is that much more difficult for men and women in uniform to deal with the psychological impact of these controversies, much less the stress of their own duties. I have felt these stresses along with many others and have seen how negativity can come into play on a day-to-day basis.

Fortunately, there are people like Fred Rogers... the kind of person and the kind of serviceman whose positive attitude and positive approach to his duties and responsibilities impact... in a constructive and meaningful way, the people around him... those he works **for** and **with**. This positivity is so important because of the role our attitudes play in life. What we do many times is not nearly as important as how we do it and how we approach it.

Knowing Fred as I do, there’s one more quote that reminds me of him and has so much to say about attitude. It is one man’s view, and an accurate one at that, about our perceptions and our impact on others as well.

 (**Quick Pause**)

 Charles Swindoll was an inspirational writer and thinker. He made the following observation from his own personal view and experience about truth and the manner of our conduct. He so brilliantly writes:

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.
Attitude, to me is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company ...a church ...a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past ...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way.
We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude ...I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you ...**we** **are** **in charge** of our attitudes.”

I wanted to stress the importance of attitude was because I felt it is necessary to say something additional about Fred as a man, and as a person, above and beyond his qualities as a loyal defender of freedom, long serving member of the U. S. Navy, devoted family man, and faithful cousin. As a person, Fred is a man of absolute integrity, honesty and purpose. His example has always been clearly felt no matter where he has gone, and no matter with whom he has been affiliated. My association with him has been a memorable one and has helped to transform me in so many ways. I hope to keep in touch with him going forward. If it’s true... as I said earlier, that we are indeed, part of all that we have met, I cannot imagine anyone finer to know and with whom to share such a special bond.

When I see someone act in such a helpful, confident, and reassuring way, I know that his effect on others, and in particular those who form the unit he works in, it leaves me with a lasting impression, as it does with so many others. It impacts me in a way that provides the confidence necessary to operate and function in a more efficient and fluid manner. Thats Fred’s impact on me and I thank him for it. It is a certainly a gratitude that I will carry forever.

Today, we bid farewell, but not goodbye, to a loyal and trusted friend to us all... a shining example of what it means to truly serve our country, be ready and willing to go into harm’s way, poised and able to perform in whatever fashion that is ordered or required, and that’s just about all that the Navy and his country could ever ask of him... or anyone. To Fred Rogers, we give our thanks and express our admiration on behalf of our country for the service we entrusted in him. His performance has been all that we could have ever hoped for and we wish him the most healthy, fulfilling, and productive retirement. To his family (**Do you want to name them individually?**), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and his friends, we thank you for your support of him and his efforts, and we wish you the same as you share in his new life. Having wonderful people around, especially those who appreciate his service as the esteemed veteran he will be, is something that will continue to enrich his life.

Best of luck Fred Rogers, cuz, friend, patriot, and loyal comrade, for your service has been wisely spent, greatly appreciated, and will never be forgotten. Thank you all!!