



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – USS Chafee Reception

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**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich  
Reception aboard the USS Chafee  
Commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Defense of Darwin  
Darwin, NT**

*(As prepared for delivery – February 19, 2012)*

Thank you Commander Kubu, Debbie Kubu, and the outstanding crew of the USS Chafee for hosting us aboard this magnificent vessel tonight. If case you can't already tell from the raucous crowd here, we're all very glad to see you. [Laughter] We're all grateful that you made the journey here, and we thank you all for your sacrifice and service.

On a festive night like tonight, it is hard to think that 70 years ago to the day, this harbor was under attack, and many of the 45 Allied warships and merchant vessels in the harbor that day were destroyed and the town in flames. We are able to enjoy a night like tonight in this calm harbor only because of those who fought through the smoke and fire and the wreckage that day and the days that followed to win our freedom. One of those people is with us tonight. Commander Herb Kriloff, who was the 'Officer of the Deck' on the USS William B. Preston in Darwin Harbor when it was attacked. It is an honor for all of us to recognize your brave and enduring service. [Applause]

As Commander Kubu mentioned, this destroyer was named to honor John Chafee. In 1942, John Chafee was in his third year of university when the Japanese bombed Darwin and Pearl Harbor. He left his studies to join the Marines and he spent his 20th birthday fighting in the battle for Guadalcanal.

Like so many others, he was inspired to defend his country. He continued to serve for the remainder of his career – as Governor of the state of Rhode Island, Secretary of the Navy and a U.S. Senator. So as we pay tribute to those who fought and perished 70 years ago, it is fitting that we do so on board a ship that bears his name. And with this fine crew that carries on his legacy.

After two years as Ambassador, I know better than to stand too long between a bunch of Americans and Territorians and an open bar. [Laughter]. So let me offer just one thought about this weekend.



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We are here to commemorate the sacrifices of the past, but we are also here to recognize the progress that we've made together since then. General George Marshall said that the measure of success in any battle is in the peace that follows.

Today Japan, once our bitter foe, is now our friend. Japan is a valuable ally to both the United States and Australia and one of our most valuable trading partners. Right here on this harbor, just about a month ago, Japan's INPEX announced its commitment on a project that could very well re-define the future of Darwin's economy, the \$34 billion Ichthys liquefied natural gas project.

Where once our servicemembers gathered together on these shores to fight and die against Japanese forces. Today we work together to defend and help Japan. Just last year, many of us recall our U.S. and Australian crews working through the night to load a Royal Australian Air Force C-17 bound for Tokyo. Its cargo was not a weapon of war; it was a U.S.-built water cannon to cool the Fukushima reactors and prevent a deadly meltdown.

Our fiercest foes are now our friends. That is progress. That is peace.

That is what we come here first and foremost to remember – the hard work of our men and women in uniform who are the keepers of the peace. On behalf of the President of the United States, thank you for all you do and for the sacrifices you and your families make for the good of our country. Because of you, we have calmed an ocean that was wracked with conflict, and turned it into a magnificent zone of peace. The great Pacific Ocean no longer divides us – it binds us together.

That has been our mission and it remains our mission. We cannot do this alone, and so each day we are grateful to our allies and partners. And there is no greater ally, partner, or friend, than Australia. [Applause] We have shared values, a shared history, shared beers, and shared dreams. We've also shared something else – I understand we have two American officers who are married to Australians. That's about as strong a relationship as you can get. Chief Petty Officer Thadeous Szynski whose wife Larisa is from Brisbane and Chief Petty Officer Kevin Wilkinson whose wife Symone is from Adelaide, thanks for helping form the ultimate U.S.-Australian partnership!

So here is a toast to all of us, and our great alliance. The U.S.-Australia alliance is more than just the sum of our strategic interests, or our forces, or our systems. It is the sum of our friendships. It is built on our shared values and the good will of generations of individual Americans and Australians. And so even on this somber day, this is something we celebrate. To the crew of the John Chafee and everyone on board tonight – we are grateful to have you here, and we hope to see you back soon. Thank you.