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A New Message to Garcia

Recently I purchased some rather old books on eBay — \$9.99 for the lot. The edges had been damaged by something furry nibbling on them, and they had the pungent smell of mildew. I most certainly overpaid for the paper, but the words printed on them were priceless. They were written by Elbert Hubbard*.

Hubbard was an artist and philosopher who founded the Roycrofters in 1895. A prolific writer and creator, he is probably most famous for his essay, “A Message to Garcia.” First published in 1899, it describes a man recommended to President McKinley during the Spanish-American War to carry a message into the depths of the Cuban jungle to the leader of the resistance. Without asking for directions or assistance, he sets off immediately to accomplish his assignment. Hubbard asks his readers questions just as valid today — can you find anyone who will immediately accept tasking without question, hesitation, complaint, or evasion?

Anyone who has struggled with bureaucracies knows what I mean. From time to time we encounter an exception; a person whose desire to help goes far beyond the requirements of the job. Last Winter I encountered such a Sailor upon my arrival in Millington for selection board duty. Snow and freezing rain that day kept most of the civilian staff at home. Having traveled overnight 14 hours from duty in Hawaii, I was faced with the prospect of no transportation (and no dinner). I finally reached IT2 Terrance L. Mayes, who had chosen to remain overnight to ensure he could be at work the next morning on time, regardless of the weather. He not only offered to get me the keys to one of the government sedans reserved for board members, but also drove over in his personal car to take me to the vehicle. In Hubbard's words, “By the Eternal! There is a man whose form should be cast in deathless bronze and the statue placed in every college of the land.”

The Navy issued copies of Hubbard's story to every Sailor that fought in World War I.

Can you carry a message to Garcia? Can you be relied upon, regardless of circumstances? Are you the type of person whose motto is, “Never give up”? Today we see homeowners, banks, businesses, and even elected officials who have chosen to give up. It is a national disease corroding away the greatness earned by Americans before us. It is exacerbated by the presence of the most dangerous and addictive substance ever created — “free money,” which robs a man's soul of his desire for achievement faster than any adversity or hardship.

Our Association provides a voice for the men and women who serve our nation and our Navy. At a time when many young people are free to choose self-indulgent behavior and focus on their personal or social life, every month new Sailors join the force — Sailors who believe in America, who understand that with freedom comes responsibility, and are willing to face the personal dangers of possible combat or attack. It is for Petty Officer Mayes, his wife and two children, and all of the Sailors and families that serve together that we choose to serve as volunteers for our Association.

G. Mark Hardy

* — Hubbard died onboard the Lusitania when she was sunk by a German U-20 on 7 May 1915.