



## ABRAHAM LINCOLN CARRIER STRIKE GROUP PENNY PRESS

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### Tokens of Thanks

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PHILIPPINE SEA — In an office aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72), a row of gleaming coins sit intensely on a desk. Miniatures of fighter jets, ships and anchors glisten gently, outlined in gold, and bear the weight of treasured memories.

To the observer, they might just be interesting desk décor. But, to the owner and those who gave them, they represent years of dedicated service, personal appreciation and commendable accomplishment. Every coin tells a story, each of them backed by decades of naval tradition and a common heritage. These are U.S. Navy challenge coins, one of the most unique and memorable tokens a service member can earn in their career.

Challenge coins are often given to Sailors by their leadership in recognition of a job well done. They inspire pride within a Sailor and their peers, as Command Senior Chief John Shubert, Leading Chief Petty Officer for combat system department's information branch, explained.

“There’s nothing like seeing a Sailor come back from meeting an admiral, captain or master chief with a coin in their hand,” said Shubert. “For that Sailor, it’s a tangible token of appreciation, something they can hold in their hand. They earned it, and everyone they meet can see it, and be proud on their behalf.”

Shubert earned quite a few coins during his career, one of which, surprisingly, came from one of his junior Sailors.

“On a previous deployment, I was working with many Sailors who were temporarily attached to my work center,” said Shubert. “At the end of the deployment, one of them approached me and said, ‘I’d like to give you this coin as a thanks for your mentorship.’ That coin means a lot to me, because she had to earn that coin from someone else.”

Shubert himself gives coins to outstanding Sailors, letting them know that their hard work has not gone unnoticed.

“We all work hard, but pretty frequently, someone goes above and beyond what is expected of them,” said Shubert. “When I see a Sailor working, and I can’t thank them enough through words and am unable write them an award, a coin is a perfect way to show my gratitude.”

While to some it may seem to be a simple gesture, receiving a coin has an enduring impact on a Sailor as a memento from a time they excelled in their duties.

“It’s a lasting symbol of hard work,” said Shubert. “It’s something that you can keep in your pocket as a reminder of a job well done.”

For some, a coin is a way to share a part of themselves with others and collectively cherish a memory.

“For someone’s personal coin, it tells a little bit about what you’ve done and where you’ve been,” said Shubert. “Each coin tells a story, and each one you hold in the palm of your hand has its own unique history.”

For every story told, there is a tradition associated. At first, naval heritage was passed down through spoken and written word, but, in the last century, challenge coins were added to

the traditions. Although their first use in the American military is believed to be in the Army Air Corps of World War I, they spread among the branches as a way to commemorate events and uphold organizational traditions. And, like many naval traditions, they are sustained with the stalwart support of the Chiefs Mess.

“They say that the Chiefs Mess is the keeper of tradition,” said Shubert. “Today, you can see us continue to uphold that tradition. If you go down there, you’ll see coins from every single command on the ship. Handing those coins out to exceptional Sailors plays a large role in keeping that heritage alive and well.”

Challenge coins can serve as a unique way to share a memory with fellow chiefs and officers who served in the same places, or with the same people.

“There are a lot of coins that are for sale, but the ones that people value the most are given to them,” said Lt. Bernardino Martinez, Fire Control Officer aboard Abraham Lincoln. “Those coins have memories attached to them, and they often come from someone that you look up to. They’re far more valuable than any coin you can buy.”

Bernardino values a very special coin in particular, a gift from his mentor that serves as a reminder of his commissioning as a mustang. A mustang is a Sailor who is selected to transition from enlisted to commissioned officer.

“I remember when I commissioned, my electronics maintenance officer gave me a coin,” said Bernardino. “He was my mentor, and a mustang as well, so when I commissioned as one, he gave me a coin. That one is pretty special, and I’m very attached to that one.”

Challenge coins, which come in all shapes, sizes and colors, serve as a reminder for a service member about a mission accomplished. In the Navy, their unique history across the decades tells the collective story of thousands of Sailors.

