

**All Academy Ball  
Orlando, FL  
December 29, 2018**

Good evening Cadets and Midshipmen, Parents, Family and Friends

Thank-you for allowing me to take about 10-15 minutes of your time in an exciting evening with family and friends. Some of you may wonder why you're here – maybe for the fellowship, or friendship. Maybe because your Mom or Dad made you come. But if you would ask me, I would say we're here in celebration. To celebrate finishing another semester. Or if you are a plebe or dualie, to celebrate that you made it through your first half year at your Academy. Congratulations.

I would offer one other reason to celebrate. And that is to celebrate your decision to serve your country. And although you had many options of what you would do or where you would go when you graduated from High School, contrary to the vast majority of your peers, you elected to stand in the gap between the evil that threatens our Nation and our way of life. And because of that, you have joined the generations who have gone before you. Those who stormed the beaches of Normandy, who fought in the jungles of Vietnam, who celebrated Christmas in the trenches in France during The Great War. But as someone who has stood in your ranks and served for 43 years, I could not be more proud of each and every one of you and what you have accomplished and what you stand for.

A couple of weeks ago was the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor leading to our involvement in World War II. The men and women who served during World War II are part of what has often been referred to as the "Greatest Generation."

That's a term that journalist Tom Brokaw coined, arguing that these men and women fought, not for fame and recognition, but because, in Brokaw's words, it was the right thing to do.

Some dignitaries have referred to your generation as the new "Greatest Generation" – although I consider you all the 9-11 generation – a generation that knew your country was attacked when you were a kid, and you recognized the fact that our very way of life was threatened, and as a result, you decided to do something about it.

When you reported to your Service Academy, our nation was at war. And when you came, each of you knew full well that you could join a Military at war. And yet, you came nonetheless. You came with the deep desire to serve, to stand for something much bigger than yourselves. You came because it was the right thing to do.

Each of you are special for many reasons, but the fact that you stood up and said "Send me" at a time of war speaks volumes about your character. Becoming a member of the United States military is always a big decision, but to do so in times when our national security is most at risk, is perhaps the noblest thing you could ever do. For you have already internalized the ethic of "Duty" and service to "Country" when you reported on your R-Day, because like 99.5 percent of your peer group, you could have easily opted for a safer existence. The fact you are where you are right now truly makes you the best and brightest we have in this nation.

I have had the honor to serve with some of the greatest leaders in our generation: The Ray Odiernos, Mark Milleys, David Goldfeins, John Richardsons, Karl Schultzes, Lloyd Austins, Scotty Millers, Joe Votels, Vince Brookses, Mike Scaparrotties, and many more. And while serving with them, I have learned so much.

I learned that the best and brightest are not necessarily on campuses or in the corporate boardrooms. Don't ever think for a minute that those running around on some college campus or in some corporate business have anything on you. They don't. You are privileged to have the one advantage that all of them covet – you will know many of life's truths, you'll know about the goings on in Iraq, Korea, Afghanistan, Israel, Qatar, Yemen, Iran, and many other places. You will know some of life's hard truths and some of its purest devotions. You will never have to guess.

I learned that leading our Service Members is not coddling them, but to hold them to the highest of standards. They are Americans, and more than anything, they want to be a winner and they want to be part of a winning team. High standards make them the best and that is what they want. I encourage you to lead with the highest of standards in everything you do. Don't baby them; develop them and build their pride and as a result of the high standards and tough, difficult training you will lead them through.

I learned that the greatest privilege our Nation can give you is to lead such magnificent men and women. They will challenge you and disappoint you, but when the chips are at their worse, they will never let you down. They will even give their life for you so that you can lead their brothers and sisters in arms another day.

I learned that our best leaders lead from the front. I watched GEN Odierno walking the streets in Mosul, or GEN Austin leading his entire Division from the berms of Kuwait to downtown Baghdad. Inspiring Service Members to move when common sense would tell them otherwise not to. But they followed their leaders who were leading from the front every time, and that is what made the difference. I've seen

Division commanders visiting Soldiers in the motor pools and weekend guard posts, and in the crapiest of places. A hello, or a nod makes a difference every time.

I learned that great leaders perform with excellence in everything they do. Excellence is performing to the upper level of one's potential, but it is also moving toward areas that are not common or comfortable. Great leaders are not afraid to move in that direction, knowing they will make mistakes, but they will learn and get stronger and better as a result. Great leaders also encourage their subordinates to stretch knowing they too will make mistakes, but great leaders underwrite their mistakes as an opportunity to grow and learn and become better as a result.

Great officers are risk takers, and the greatest risk is not necessarily making a mistake -- but failing to stand up for what is right. *Character* is the principle measure of one's worth, and great leaders will always, always choose the harder right despite the outcomes every time. You can be number 1 in your class, but if you fail in character, you fail in leadership. Subordinates and bosses no longer trust you. Be a leader of character. It is as simple as that.

I have learned that great leaders build inclusive teams where everyone feels valued, respected, that they contribute to their unit and its mission, and they are safe and secure both emotionally and physically, despite their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, faith or no faith, gender orientation, or even their political affiliation. Great leaders never accept indifference or injustice and judge only on standards and how well their people do their job.

I learned that whether you serve 5 years or 43, you will never regret your decision to serve your Country. And contrary to the vast majority of your peers, you

have elected to do what others would never dream of doing. And when 50 years from now, your grandchildren are studying this war in their classrooms, and when they sit on your lap asking you, “Grandma and Grandpa, what did you do in this war on terror?”, you can proudly say that when your country needed you the most, you answered the call of duty and served. Your only regret will be that you could not have served longer.

But what is the most important thing I learned? That there is no nobler calling in the world than to be a Soldier, or a Sailor, or an Airman, or a Coast Guardsman, or a Merchant Marine in service to the United States of America.

Yet, life as a member of our military is not easy. That is why it was the collective goal of those charged with your training to make sure you understand that. Your TACs, TAC NCOs, Phys Ed cadre, and your instructors, – they all know what awaits you when you assume leadership of your Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen or Coastguardsmen. Their sacred duty was to ensure that you are not surprised. The vast majority of your staff and faculty have been to the battlefield and I can’t overstate that fact. They have put into action much of what they are teaching you. They have moved under fire, seen the enemy up close, and they know that this endeavor is deadly serious.

This is why duty demanded that the training you receive at your Academy presents a challenge. It’s why you did all those pushups...and why you’ll do a thousand more. It’s why you ran all those miles...and will run many more. It’s why you fired hundreds of rounds, it’s why you marched and marched with no end in sight. It’s why you had to succeed on your PT test – or for you grey hogs – that you had to pass the IOCT. It’s why you competed on the fields of “friendly strife” in order to develop the

discipline to be part of a team and learn to play with pain, because your teammates counted on you.

It's why your parents can see the change, simply by the way you stand.

For you are the latest band of brothers and sisters making things happen in the very best way you can. The techno wannabees in the corporate world can't begin to imagine the vast responsibilities you have accepted. You will be scrutinized like no warriors before you. Expected to eradicate our enemies, pacify the critics and abide by rules of land warfare as we are committed to doing. You'll hold more responsibility and do more in the next few years than most people will do in a lifetime. High expectations to be sure...but you will succeed.

I think I've talked my allotted time, so let me leave with a couple final thoughts.

1. I will never apologize for being a member of the United States Military and don't ever feel that you have to either. This is the life I have chosen – the life I have lived for just over 43 years. It isn't risk free, and it isn't always easy. But in the humble opinion of this proud Grunt, it's always been a life worth living. There is no more noble profession than the one of which you are about to enter. It is a portion of your life spent in the cold, hot, snow or rain – facing danger during peace and war, while making the best friends you will ever have, men and women who will have your back no matter what life brings. As Americans, we aren't perfect – but I can think of no better place.
2. Draw your strength in the days ahead from your values, particularly the values of your Academy. Let them be the moral compass that guides you in the decisions

you will make and always, not matter what the cost -- do the harder right. It is not worth selling your honor for the sake of saving you from being embarrassed.

3. Recognize that the friends you are making among your classmates and your teammates are relationships that will last a lifetime. Through the shared hardships ..... of sitting in the field in nights of freezing rain next to your battle buddy, or walking off demerits with your beast roommate, or finding humor studying for your final exams at 0300 – realizing all the while that the pure comradery of shared hardships, you are forming bonds, that at moments such as these, they will last a lifetime. Right here in central Florida, there are about 30 of my classmates that to this day, 43 years after I graduated, we get together at least once a month at someone's house or some other place. I look forward to New Year's night at my classmate's house in Daytona Beach, and then celebrating New Year's Day at another classmates' house in Geneva. The brotherhood and sisterhood relations you'll make with your classmates will be deeper than your own blood brothers and sisters.
4. Lastly, don't ever forget those who got you here, who stood by you through the good and the bad, through thick and thin, who supported you even when no one else did – your Mom and Dad and your family. They've gone through an emotional roller coaster while you are at your Academy, and they will continue as they watch you succeed and fail and get up and do it all over again. They love you more than you can imagine, unconditionally, and will be there for you no matter what. Please don't forget to thank them and give them a hug often.

So, as I look out at you all right now, I am absolutely confident that our Nation is in very good hands. I couldn't be more proud of each and every one of you.

Thank-you to your parents and family members for your support and love of your cadet and midshipman. And thank-you all for taking one of your nights back home, to come here in fellowship celebrating your service to our Country.

Go Army!

Go Navy!

Go Airforce!

Go Coast Guard!

Go Merchant Marine!

Beat Everyone!