

Adm. Mike Mullen
Remarks as delivered
USNA Change of Command Ceremony
June 8, 2007

Good afternoon. What a great Navy day. There's nothing quite like a hot Annapolis summer day inside Alumni Hall.

It's an honor for Deborah and me to be here with all of you.

I am grateful for your friendship, your commitment to freedom and your unwavering support of the men and women in uniform; particularly those being molded here, on the banks of the Severn.

So many of you being here today says a lot about my good friend and mentor, Vice Admiral Rodney Rempt and after these last four years leading the Naval Academy through a period of incredible transformation there are a lot of Americans out there with a lot to say about Rod.

Recently, a graduate from the 50's wrote the following note to Rod:

“The country thanks you for taking on, in a positive way, the leveling of the playing field for women. Cultural changes of this magnitude require guts and determination.”

A faculty member wrote to Rod and his lovely wife Pam:

“You have both served the Naval Academy community with dignity and class over the past four years and we are all better for that.”

And a retired 4-star Admiral wrote:

“You have taken on the tough jobs and held firm to your convictions. Consistency of purpose is a tough road to follow, but you did it and the Navy benefited.”

Those are real comments from real people and I bet many more have been written to and about Rod as the superintendent.

And I am sure the bulk of these letters have been passionate notes about what Rod has accomplished while at the helm.

I haven't received any recent letters or e-mails about Rod, but if I had, this is what I imagine these letters would say:

Dear “Supe”

My father and grandfather both graduated from the Naval Academy. As a matter of fact, grandpa was also from the class of '66. “Good vintage”, he says.

Anyways, they both motivated me to come to Annapolis and inspired me to follow in their footsteps.

Sometimes I thought I wouldn't make it. But when I felt most frustrated you always managed to appear in your hopped up golf cart. You know the one with the spinners on the wheels and cheer me up.

Here's this three star admiral in the United States Navy traveling around in a tricked-out golf cart pumping his fists bellowing into his megaphone: "fire it up – fire it up!" How cool was that?

I know it's a big responsibility to transform us into respectable naval officers, and I know we sometimes make it hard.

But even though you deal with budgets, media, professors, a huge staff, the community, fundraising, critics, supporters, and yes, even the CNO you still make time to cheer us up. Though let me tell you sir, your singing; well, let's just say it's good we all sing as a group.

"Supe," if after forty-one years you still have the energy and enthusiasm you've shown us, then count me in. I want to wear this uniform for a long time.

We applaud the way you have raised the spirit of the brigade these past four years. Thank you for leading by example. We will miss you when you leave.

Very respectfully,

Midshipman from the Class of 2007

I was here two weeks ago for graduation and commissioning of the class of '07.

Before the Ceremony I saw a young Marine waiting to watch the graduation and commissioning ceremonies.

He was beaming with a bright smile.

I went to say hi to him. It was 2nd Lieutenant Andrew Kinard, a U.S. Naval Academy rugby player, men's glee club member, and member of the class of 2005.

Andrew was like any other Marine officer I have met; motivated, passionate, and, to take a line from Rod, fired up!

The only thing different about Andrew was that fact that he was a Marine confined to a wheel chair as a result of injuries sustained in Iraq.

While leading his Marines in combat, Andrew lost both his legs when an IED exploded near him.

It didn't de-motivate him. Andrew may have lost his legs but he didn't lose his spirit. He was still a Marine.

Andrew's positive attitude is representative of the contagious morale, sense of purpose, and enthusiasm of the midshipmen I met that day.

And of the quality and courage of our graduates, who indeed are the measure of success here.

But the Mids weren't the only ones excited that day. Parents were pretty enthusiastic too.

A letter from one of them could sound something like this:

Dear Mr. Superintendent:

Four years ago I drove through the gates of the Naval Academy for the first time in my life. I remember the day like it was yesterday. It was hot, it was crowded, and it was nerve wracking!

For months I had been dreading the day. How could I not? I had to fly in all the way from Montana; not much Navy in Montana, and drop off my oldest daughter for Plebe summer training.

I think I was more nervous than she was.

So many doubts raced through my mind.

Would she fit in? Would she be safe? Would she get a good education?

Could this Naval Academy place take my little girl barely out of high school and transform her into a woman of character ready to lead men and women in combat?

Would her human dignity be respected? Would she be encouraged, molded, and cared for?

The more I thought about it the more I wanted to turn around and take her home. Then it hit me. My daughter made a courageous choice to serve her Nation, and I would support her. I had to trust I did my best to raise her well. It was up to you now, Admiral, to extract her full potential and forge her into a leader. You've done that.

As a parent, I write to express my profound gratitude. By your leadership and the way you handled some tough issues even in the face of scrutiny and criticism you showed me your mettle.

My daughter tells me how committed you are to character development and to fair treatment. She described you as a strong leader not afraid to tackle hard problems. She said she's ready for the fleet.

Well Admiral, with this letter, I express my confidence in your leadership, in the Naval Academy, and in the United States Navy and Marine Corps in the best way I can, by letting you know that I will again drive across the Naval Academy gates this summer to drop off my youngest son, but this time, I'll have no doubts.

Sincerely,

Proud Parent of the Class of 2007 and 2011

The Naval Academy is an American Institution and we owe it to the American people to use their resources wisely and produce the leaders that will defend our Nation's freedom and our way of life.

This letter is from an American in danger abroad who welcomed the sight of a U.S. Navy ship coming to their aid:

Dear Admiral Mullen:

Last summer my family and I traveled to Beirut.

We were having a great time when all of a sudden, chaos. We were in the middle of war, a real shooting war and we were scared.

It didn't take long for one of your beautiful gray ships to appear on the horizon. I was glad to see her but somehow, I wasn't surprised. The Navy is everywhere.

We weren't out of danger yet, but somehow, I knew we would be.

I knew we could count on the Navy to get us out.

Well, as it turns out, it wasn't just the Navy out there. The Marines were there too. As a matter-of-fact, it was one of their helicopters that came in and picked us up.

I didn't get to know the Marines that rescued us nor did I get a chance to meet many of the Sailors. But I did know they were well led and I have no doubt at least some of those leaders came from the Naval Academy.

I am proud of our Navy and our Marine Corps, and I am proud of the men and women who serve.

I am glad Sailors and Marines are out there keeping us safe, and I am glad our Naval Academy is instilling young Americans with the ethics, the values, the ability to communicate intelligently, and ultimately, the ability to lead with credibility.

Thank you and please express my gratitude to all with whom you serve.

Sincerely,

A grateful American citizen.

There are thousands of Naval Academy Alumni who have served or are serving in our armed forces. Here's what one of them had to say. This is a real letter.

Dear Admiral Rempt:

Congratulation on your upcoming Change-of-Command!

As a Naval Academy graduate, I want to thank you for all you've done for my alma mater, for the naval services, and for the Nation.

You've done some great things while at the helm and served as a bridge between two eras.

Four years ago, you assumed the watch of a Cold War-focused Academy.

When the day comes, you'll turn over an Academy ready to deliver the warriors for an uncertain and dangerous future.

You've even changed the landscape of the yard with a little "help" from Mother Nature.

I am impressed with how you turned the damage that came in the wake of hurricane Isabel into an opportunity and have led the most significant improvement and expansion of Naval Academy facilities in over forty-years; 293 million dollars worth of construction projects.

I thought it was \$100 million? [laughter]

But you didn't just build structures of steel, brick, and mortar. You, your staff, and your talented faculty built naval officers from the ground up.

Rod, you leave a legacy of innovation, of transformation and excellence, and I appreciate how you led with passion in challenging times always taking care of this institution, and our national treasure -- the young men and women who serve our Nation.

You took on some tough problems and held fast to your beliefs.

I admire your courage in the face of controversy and criticism.

Throughout the turmoil of change you never lost sight of what the American people entrusted you to do. To morally, mentally, and physically develop young men and women who will lead, period. We are all in your debt.

Sincerely,
Mike Mullen, Class of 1968

I have another letter here. It reads:

Rod,

It's been what, 34 years since we met? If I remember right, it was 1973 in Mikonos, Greece.

You had command of the missile patrol gun boat Antelope and I had command of the gasoline tanker Noxubee.

I was pulling into Mikonos and my wife Deborah was supposed to meet the ship there. Turns out I was late ... three days late.

Well, Deborah, as is usually the case, was right on time. So, of course, she was alone but not for long.

All it took was for her to see an American flag on one of the patrol boats at the pier and she knew she would have all the help she would need.

As luck would have it, she went to Antelope. I am glad she did. For three days you and Pam too good care of her and in a way, you and Pam still take good care of both of us. Particularly Pam.

And Pam, we are not unique in that regard.

There are thousands of families that have been impacted by your care, your involvement, and your bond with them over the span of Rod's career.

Whether mentoring your officer and enlisted spouses on sea duty, counseling young midshipmen about to take their wedding vows, or serving as an ambassador of our Navy and our Nation, your service has made Rod's career possible and as a result, has made America stronger.

Since you and Rod arrived at the Naval Academy, you've helped lead and inspire about 8000 young men and women. No one has cared more or given more than you.

You leave a legacy of care, compassion, and support; and both Deborah and I are eternally grateful. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Your friends, Mike and Deborah Mullen

Now, this isn't a letter, but it could be.

For the last four years I have watched and supported Rod's efforts here at the Naval Academy.

He's led an incredible military and civilian staff, an amazing faculty, thousands of midshipmen.

Upon his shoulders he's carried the heavy burdens of authority, responsibility, and accountability that comes with command.

By any measure, Rod's commanded exceptionally well.

As superintendent, he's led profound change in academics, character development, leadership, ethics, naval science, seamanship, and athletics.

He's revamped the curriculum, boosted graduation rates, and delivered phenomenal results on the playing fields.

And he's delivered two significant firsts in Naval Academy history:

The First African-American Commandant. Bruce Grooms whose promotion to Rear Admiral I attended just last week, and the first female Commandant, Captain Peg Klein who leads midshipmen here today.

In all his actions Rod's been bold, fearless, and courageous.

But that's nothing new. I've focused on Rod's last four years, but there are forty-one years of bold, fearless, courageous leadership to keep in mind.

Rod's an icon of the surface warfare combat systems community, a real hero, an innovator, particularly in the field of missile defense.

His personal involvement in helping Japan work through various missile defense strategies heavily influenced the investments our Japanese counterparts made in missile defense technology.

And we owe the development of Naval Theater Ballistic Missile Defense (TBMD) to the work Rodney did while at the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization.

With vision, energy, and passion, Rod made the Surface fleet, the Navy, and the Nation better, stronger.

Clearly, he brought his innovative zeal to the Academy, and today our midshipmen are leaving here better prepared to face an uncertain future.

Rodney has served with distinction and for over four decades he's served, when he could have left.

But today, Rod, it really is time to go. [laughter]

In just a few minutes, with a few simple words he will transfer the burdens, the joys, the privileges, and the responsibility of this most important office to Admiral Jeff Fowler.

Jeff, now it's your turn.

Your background is impressive; and your career has been remarkable.

Fresh from the Fleet -- overseas - Italy.

All your achievements have led you here today.

You bring exactly the right mix of experience, energy, and leadership to this job.

I have no doubt you will raise this Naval Academy to an even higher plane.

You now bear the burden and enjoy the privilege of ensuring we provide our Navy and our Marine Corps with the leaders that will fight and win the Global War on Terror and shape not only the Navy, but the future.

I wish you, Katie, and Connor the best as you take on your new assignment.

Into your hands we entrust our most precious treasure, young Americans with a passion to serve.

Lead them well. It is your most important task.

For Rod, Pam; Deborah and I wish you all the best as you sail towards new horizons out in Big Sky, Montana.

Rod, as your time here comes to a close, go knowing you leave this place better than you found it four years or even forty-five years ago.

You cast a long shadow and leave a legacy of leadership, a legacy of passion, and yes, a legacy of transformation.

Your influence will endure with all of us to whom you've taught so much.

Fair winds and following seas, shipmate.

God Bless you, Pam, the Naval Academy, our Navy and our Nation.

Thank you.