

The Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
UVA Commissioning
Charlottesville, VA
17 May 2014

President Sullivan, friends, family, and most of all, to the people who have just been commissioned today to serve our country in the Class of 2014. It is wonderful to be here in Charlottesville to share this day with you. It is wonderful and I am honored to be allowed to speak at this great occasion.

To the Midshipmen and Cadets, now Ensigns and Second Lieutenants, congratulations! You have earned it. But it is important to remember, as President Sullivan pointed out, you're not sitting there alone. So many people have made today possible for you. Forty-five years ago I raised my right hand, standing where you do today, for the first time and swore that oath to defend our country, and became an Ensign.

Something that I quickly learned on the decks of the USS LITTLE ROCK was that in this journey, nobody succeeds alone. The people around us matter. Here, behind every single one of you, stands family and friends, teachers and coaches, military instructors, people who have made all the difference in the world. So when this ceremony is over, and I know you're going to do this anyway, take a minute to thank them, particularly for this and remember the ones who couldn't be here today.

These past four years have challenged you in a lot of ways, and they prepared you for what lies ahead. You are taking a degree from college, graduating like thousands of others across this

country this spring. Representing that graduation tomorrow will be your diploma. It is an acknowledgment of the very demanding education that you've mastered here at Virginia.

But you are receiving, unlike the rest of those graduates, a second document. And it's a document that is unique to those who have completed a very intense training program alongside getting that great education. It is the same document that started the careers of officers from Virginia throughout history, from age of sail Frigate Skippers like Captain James Barron to heroes of World War II and the Korean War like General Chesty Puller. It's your Commission as an officer in the United States Navy or Marine Corps, in the Army or Air Force.

That commission conveys a special trust and confidence directly from the President of the United States. With it comes the responsibility of leading our nation's young men and women in uniform – the best America has. This commission isn't about what you've done in the past. The commission is about your future and what is expected of you. And you'll have to be leaders because the American military is unique in the world. We push responsibility and accountability down farther and faster, to the most junior ranks, quicker than any other military in our world.

And I want to take a minute to thank you for making the conscious decision to commit the next part of your life, whether it is four years or forty, to this country.

During the time you have been here, during your four years at Virginia, our forces have conducted an astonishing range of missions. Sailors and Marines, Soldiers, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen have continued operations in Afghanistan during those four years. When many of

you were Freshmen, we delivered disaster relief to Haiti in the wake of a devastating earthquake. The next year, we conducted operations in Libya. Then it was responding within hours to the tsunami in Japan and this year, the islands of the Philippines after Super Typhoon Haiyan. The year before that, it was in this country, when members of all four services responded in New York and New Jersey after Hurricane Sandy. We have fought pirates off the Horn of Africa, and we have conducted daily partnership missions with just about every country in the world.

In most of those places, we work together, all services, to protect and defend this nation. So there's a pretty good chance that you'll see each other again, probably thousands and thousands of miles from Charlottesville.

And now it is your turn. It's your turn to be the next link in that unbroken chain of people willing to volunteer to defend this country. You are joining a great legacy, but you have to build that legacy for your time and your generation. You'll need absolutely everything you learned here, but you'll also need the spirit that brought you to the ROTC program in the first place.

For my two services, Sailors and Marines, you look to the sea. You look to the sea, to the far horizon, ready to deal with whatever comes over that horizon. To the Soldiers and Airmen, you defend this country and the people in it every single day. You are joining the military that has the trust and confidence of the American people.

I'm going to tell you a quick personal story. I finished Ole Miss in 1969 and I went through in three years, so I had to take my last two years of ROTC in one year, and I took my midshipman

cruise the summer after I graduated. I was on a ship in the Med, and I got orders to go back to New York and be commissioned at Columbia University. So I flew back and I called the head of the Naval ROTC unit to arrange for a time to be commissioned. And he said something very strange. He said, "You don't have to wear your uniform if you don't want to." I asked him why not. He said there had been riots against ROTC. This was at the height of Vietnam and the Cold War. He said that we have some concern about the safety of people in uniform. I decided that if I was going to join the Navy, I was going to join the Navy in a Navy uniform. I put on my uniform and I took the subway to Columbia and got commissioned.

But the point of that whole story is that the military and its relationship with the American people have changed dramatically. American people have separated the warrior from the war. You are now joining one of the most trusted institutions in America, by a long shot, the most trusted. But that trust, as all trust, is fragile. And it's going to depend on your leadership. You're willingness to make ethical decisions, and your willingness to lead in a courageous and confident way that's going to maintain that trust between the fewer than one percent of the people of America who wears the uniform of America and the other 99 percent who are the ones you will be protecting.

I have absolute faith and confidence that you can, and will, deal with whatever is over that horizon. The future of our country depends on it.

So from my two services, from the Navy: Semper Fortis - Forever Courageous.

From the Marine Corps: Semper Fidelis - Forever Faithful.