

As delivered

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Texas Tech University Commencement
Friday, 14 December 2012

Chancellor Kent Hance, thank you so much.

As he said, I'm an Ole Miss graduate and I have really appreciated the hospitality here. I would never think of mentioning the last time I was with a big group of Texas Tech people was the 2009 Cotton Bowl. I wouldn't think of mentioning that Texas Tech was 11-1 and Ole Miss was 8-4. I wouldn't think of even going near the fact that Texas Tech was favored by 10 points, that you were ranked #8 and we were ranked 20th. And of course, it's just as an afterthought, that we won 47 to 34.

I'm glad to be back here.

So, to the faculty and the staff, the families and friends, and most of all to the Class of 2012 – watch very carefully because you won't see this Ole Miss graduate do this very often. [Demonstrates Texas Tech “Guns Up.”]

This university, as it has been since the very first students arrived here, all 914 in 1925, is one of the finest in the United States. As Chancellor Hance said, your graduates are leaders in every field. And that's testament not only to the skill and the talent of your faculty and staff, but also the efforts of everybody sitting here today.

The Victory Bells ring for you. From your first days as a freshman finding your way around campus and getting kicked off the Double T Bench to today - you've done the work, you've put in the time, you've made the effort. The day is yours.

But in a very real sense, today belongs to a lot of other people too because you wouldn't be here without them.

Behind every one of you are the mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers, brothers and sisters, friends, coaches, teachers. Hundreds and hundreds of other people, a lot of them you probably don't even know, who made today possible.

Now after the ceremony – and I know you're going to do this anyway -- give those who have supported you every step of the way an extra hug. Thank them one more time for what they've done, for the sacrifices they made because today is their day as much as it is yours.

And parents sitting here today, I know exactly how you feel because in May I sat and watched my oldest daughter graduate and I felt that mix of pride and sadness and the only thing that confused me was in my mind's eye, Elizabeth Mabus was still three years old asking for one

more ride on my shoulders. And I could not understand why the university would be granting a three year old a degree.

It's also important to remember those who in a larger sense are to be thanked for a day like today. Those who have worn or are currently wearing the uniform of our country, those who stand the watch every day to keep us safe.

Most of you who are graduating today were in middle school or younger when 9/11 happened. This is the world you've grown up in. Earlier this spring, we marked the one-year anniversary of the joint operation led by Navy SEALs which brought the world's most notorious terrorist to justice finally. And while those actions of the team that conducted the Osama bin Laden raid were truly extraordinary, equally as extraordinary actions happen every day by those who serve and wear the cloth of our nation.

Every Sailor, every Marine, every Soldier, every Coastguardsman, and every Airmen is just as professional, just as dedicated, just as skilled as those who carried out that mission. We ought to be just as proud of every single one of them.

Your name is Texas Tech so you are comfortable in dealing with numbers and statistics and here is one and it is a statistic that ought to scare you.

Fewer than 25 percent of people 17 to 24 years old in America are qualified to serve in our military. One in four. That's because they don't have the education, because they don't have the health or it's because they have a criminal record. Now in our military, in our society and in our economy, there are no jobs and there is no room for strong backs and weak minds, anymore.

And there is one more number to keep in mind. Fewer than one percent – one percent – of America today serves in the armed forces of America. One percent keeps the other 99 percent safe; one percent has volunteered and given freely of themselves for year after year after year, sacrificed day after day enduring hardships, family separations, and an incredibly high operational tempo. We have been at war for more than a decade and thousands have paid the ultimate price. Tens of thousands more have come home with scars, both visible and invisible, that they will carry with them until their final day.

We are able to do what we do because of what they have done and are doing. We are able to pursue our lives because they have been willing to risk and sometimes lose theirs. As was said eloquently in World War II – they give their today for our tomorrow.

I am incredibly fortunate to lead the Navy and Marine Corps and to get to meet so many Sailors and Marines around the world doing amazing work on behalf of us all, and I want to tell you about one day in the Navy and Marine Corps and what it does for our country.

I'll pick one day – March 19th of last year. On that day, ships and submarines of the Navy launched cruise missiles over Libya to establish a no-fly zone. A big deck amphibious ship provided air support and rescued an Air Force pilot that had gone down.

On that same day, we had 20,000 Marines in combat in Afghanistan. On that same day, 20,000 Sailors were at sea and on the ground supporting that fight in Afghanistan. On that same day, we had ships fighting pirates off the Horn of Africa. On that same day, we had ships in the Caribbean interdicting drugs.

On that same day, we had a carrier strike group delivering aid to the Japanese after the terrible tsunami. On that same day, we had an amphibious ready group come from Okinawa in Japan, Marines and Sailors also giving aid. On that same day we had Sailors and Marines at countless places doing countless things all for the same purpose – protecting others.

That's one day – one day of what our Navy and Marine Corps do. One day that represents the skill, the talent, the devotion and the patriotism that we have in the Navy and Marine Corps and all across our military.

And graduates of this great university have served with distinction in every branch of the service.

Some sitting here today have already been a part of that proud heritage, and some are about to join. Five members of this class are being commissioned this weekend from ROTC in the Army and the Air Force, and there are 1,100 veterans and military service members, 400 faculty and staff with military backgrounds and over 1,000 military dependents that call Texas Tech home.

This has been the way at Texas Tech for a long time. After World War II, you got more than your fair share of returning veterans. Some of the 16 million that served in that war came back, went to school on the GI Bill, expanded their horizons, and expanded their lives.

A lot of your parents and grandparents and great-grandparents were a part of that generation. This so-called greatest generation literally saved our country.

They grew up during the Depression, won World War II, were tested in places like Iwo Jima and Anzio, Casablanca and Guadalcanal, Normandy and Midway. And during their early lives when they were no older than you, they saw more and experienced more than most of us can even imagine, and then they came back and changed America.

I want to tell you a quick story about one of them, a fellow Mississippian, Jack Lucas from Hattiesburg. He lied about his age and joined the Marines at 14.

He made it all the way through boot camp, and got to Hawaii with his unit. Then they found out how old he was and they separated him from his unit and told him they were going to send him home.

Jack Lucas decided to stow away on a ship to keep from being sent home, so he got on the first ship that was leaving. Didn't know where it was going. By the time that they found him, it was too late to send him back and that ship was going to Iwo Jima.

He went ashore with one of the first waves. He and his unit were in a fox hole when two grenades came in. Jack Lucas grabbed them both and fell on them.

Now, the sand of Iwo Jima is made up of black volcanic sand, very soft, very fine, and he shoved both the grenades as far into the sand as he could, and both those grenades went off and he was hurt pretty badly. His unit thought he was dead. But a corpsman came by and found out he was still alive and patched him up and got him back on one of those ships and sent him home.

He went to the White House where he was awarded the Medal of Honor. And then he went back home and started the ninth grade.

There are literally thousands of stories of heroism like Jack Lucas and you here today are the carriers of that legacy. You're the descendants of that greatest generation, and your generation has exactly the same potential to change America and to change the world that generation did.

But whether what you do is held up 50, 60, 70 years from now as an example to graduates is up to you, what you do over these next few decades. Because one thing is very certain as you go into an uncertain world – there is no end to things that need doing.

You sure don't have to join the military to serve, although we do need skilled, talented, dedicated people. There are so many ways to make things better. There are acts of quiet heroism that go on every day. It's the teacher staying after school to help a struggling student. It's the nurse who stays on after the shift has ended to be with a patient. It's the neighbor who mows the yard of the elderly neighbor.

It's the farmer who puts people through college anonymously and doesn't even tell anyone, not even his own family. It's the Saddle Tramps and other organizations working on this campus for a better Texas Tech during the precious little spare time you have.

To the graduates: do something bigger than yourselves, do something outside yourselves. Do something to give back to this unique country of ours. Do something to help people that you will probably never know and they won't know that you did it. Do something that's not just about you or your personal advancement.

Now, there is nothing, nothing wrong with making money, and there's nothing wrong with being a success in your chosen profession, and there's nothing wrong and a whole lot right about taking care of yourself and your family.

But at the end of it all, the most important things are not going to be the money or the stuff that you've accumulated. I for one have never seen a hearse with a U-Haul attached.

The important things are going to be the people you've loved, the lives you've improved, and the futures you've made brighter. It doesn't have to be in the Marine Corps, but maybe the Peace Corps. You don't have to run for office, vote.

Don't let the issues of your day pass you by. Get involved in your community, church, school. Get involved in your state, your country, the world. Be passionate about it. We need your heads, we need your hands, we need your hearts. Do something that will last. Do something that you won't see the results of the next day, the next year or maybe ever.

Wordsworth wrote: "that the best portion of a good man's life – his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love."

My father was an older member of the greatest generation. He died in 1986 when he was 85 years old. He owned a hardware store in Ackerman, Mississippi and he grew trees for a living. The last year of his life he did not cut a single tree, but he planted thousands. Now, he knew for an absolute fact that he would never ever get any benefit from those trees. He knew for an absolute fact he would never see them grow and mature. He knew for an absolute fact none of what he was doing would he ever see come to fruition, but he did it.

He did it as an act of hope. He did it as an act of faith. He did for me, he did it for his granddaughters that he never met, and he did it for their children and their children who I will never meet. He did it out of hope. He did it out of faith.

So I want you to cherish this day, this graduation, and when it's over, when you've turned in your caps and gowns, go out and do something that will be cherished while you are here and when you're gone. Commit an act of faith. Commit an act of hope. Decide what trees you're going to plant.

Congratulations.