

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
United States Naval Academy Graduation
Annapolis, MD
Tuesday 29 May 2012

To a great superintendent, but terrible actor. You know, they pick those parts based on looks and acting ability.

Thank you all so much. And to Secretary Panetta, your service as our defense secretary, your incredible commitment to every Sailor and Marine, soldier and airman has been gratefully noted and is deeply appreciated by all who serve. Thank you so much.

Governor, Congressman, CNO, Commandant, faculty, friends, family and most of all, United States Naval Academy Class of 2012, welcome to today. It is absolutely wonderful to be here at Navy-Marine Corps Stadium. I can't think of a more beautiful place – a more beautiful setting to graduate and to be commissioned than this city or this field, where so many memories of your class have been formed.

For the new ensigns and second lieutenants about to be commissioned, congratulations. Congratulations on reaching this day. You have earned it. As the saying goes, you've put in the time, one nickel at a time, and you've made the effort. This is your day.

But I hope you appreciate that you couldn't have gotten here by yourself. You're not sitting here today solely because of what you did in the classroom or what you did on summer cruise.

You couldn't have made it today without the help from a whole lot of other people. Behind every single one of you are parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, detailers, classmates, professors, company officers, coaches King Hall stewards and hundreds and hundreds of people you may not even know. Take time after today's ceremony to thank those you can. Take time to recognize and remember what they have done for you because, in a very real way, today is their day, too.

Last Thursday, I watched my oldest child graduate from college, and I can tell you from a very fresh and personal experience, it's a moving and emotional day for those who got you here. Thank you to everyone who made this class possible.

I also want to take a moment to recognize Midshipman Kevin Hillary, who has proven that the strength of the human spirit can overcome great challenge. A biking accident left Midshipman Hillary paralyzed from the ribcage down, but his remarkable perseverance and will have been an inspiration, and he is graduating today with a 3.66 GPA in economics.

All of you are marking a huge milestone on an incredible journey of service to our country today. That journey began when you told West Point you were understandably turning down their offer of admission. And whether that journey lasts five more years or 35 more, you're going to see and experience amazing things. I want to thank each of you for making the conscious decision to serve four years ago, making the conscious decision to commit yourselves to our country.

This Navy and Marine Corps you are about to enter is globally deployed and globally engaged. I want to give you a very small sense of where you'll be and what you'll be doing by describing one day in our Navy and Marine Corps.

On March 19th of last year, the Ronald Reagan Strike Group was off the coast of Japan participating in Operation Tomodachi in the wake of the March 11th tsunami and earthquake. The Reagan had been on her way to do air support over Afghanistan, but within hours of the tsunami, it pivoted, and using exactly the same people, using exactly the same techniques, using exactly the same equipment they would use in combat, they were on station providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The Essex amphibious group was also in Japan with its helicopters and Marines and Sailors providing the same aid and relief.

On that same day, service ships and submarines from the Mediterranean were launching Tomahawks into Libya, and Marine Harriers from Kearsarge were flying missions over Libya, supporting the establishment of the U.N.-mandated no-fly zone. That same day, over 20,000 Marines were in combat in Afghanistan, supported by more than 20,000 Sailors, both afloat and ashore, located throughout the Mideast.

That same day, our ships were fighting pirates off the coast of Somalia and conducting counternarcotics patrols in the Caribbean. That same day, ships were sailing around Africa, South America and in the Pacific building partnerships, training allies and conducting humanitarian assistance. That's just a small slice of one day in the Navy and Marine Corps.

A year later, we are still alongside our Japanese allies as their neighbors and their partners. We still have Marines and Sailors afloat and ashore supporting Afghanistan. We are still off the coast of Africa and South America and in the Pacific building partnerships and protecting the peace. We are still there, forward, because 100 percent of the time, we stand the watch as America's away team.

That is where you are going, and that is what you will lead. You will need all the training you've gotten here. You will need all the skill and courage that you possess. You will be held to a much higher standard than your peers who are not serving, yet you will be called on far more often to sacrifice. That is who you are. That is what you are made of. You are ready. The past four years have prepared you really well for what is to come – to do the missions I've talked about and the missions we cannot foresee today. And your participation is going to come very fast.

In under a year, those of you who have chosen the Marine Corps could be in Afghanistan training the Afghan military as they take charge of the security of their own country. In under a

year, those of you who have chosen surface warfare will be on your ships as an officer of the deck, navigating a destroyer or an amphib at night, off a faraway coast. The rest of you with longer training tracks – pilots and SEALs and EODs, submariners, Seabees – you won't be far behind. And four years from now – the same amount of time you have spent here at the academy – you will be pinning on lieutenant or captain. You will be seasoned professionals and leaders of our Sailors and Marines.

That leadership will not come automatically. This commission you receive today will not confer it. It has to be earned day by day.

So earn it. Earn the respect of your Sailors and Marines. Earn it by leading from the front. Earn it by the way you treat those you lead and their families. Earn it by listening and not just to those above you. Earn it, just as you have richly earned your place here today. I have absolute faith that you will. This nation's future depends on it.

From the Navy, Semper Fortis – "Forever Courageous;" from the Marines, Semper Fidelis – "Ever Faithful."