

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
USNA Commissioning and Introduction of the Secretary of Defense
The Honorable Robert Gates
Annapolis, MD
Friday, 27 May 2011

Admiral Miller, thank you for that introduction. Secretary Gates, please let me add my welcome to those of the Superintendent. Admiral Roughead, General Dunford, faculty, friends, family and most especially the Naval Academy Class of 2011, welcome to today. It is wonderful to be here at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium and I can't think of a more beautiful setting to graduate and to be commissioned than this city or this field, where so many memories of your class were formed.

For the new Ensigns and Second Lieutenants about to be commissioned, congratulations. Congratulations on reaching this day, you have earned it. You have put in the time, as the saying goes, one nickel at a time, and you have made the effort. This is your day.

But I hope that you appreciate that you could not have gotten here by yourself. You are not sitting here today solely because of what you did in the classroom and on your summer cruises. You could not have made it to today without help from others.

Behind every single one of you are parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, detailers, classmates and professors, company officers, coaches, King Hall stewards and hundreds and hundreds of people you probably don't even know. Take time after this ceremony to thank those you can. Take time today to remember and recognize what they have done for you. Because in a very real way, today is their day, too.

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

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

On March 19th of this year, the RONALD REAGAN Strike Group was off the coast of Japan, participating in Operation Tomodachi in the wake of the March 11th Sendai earthquake and tsunami.

The Reagan had been on her way to support combat operations in Afghanistan, but within hours of the tsunami, they pivoted, and, using the exact same people, the exact same equipment,

and the exact same techniques they would use to conduct combat, they were on station providing humanitarian assistance and relief. ESSEX Amphibious Ready Group was also in Japan with her helicopters providing the same aid and relief.

On that same day, surface ships and submarines in the Mediterranean were launching Tomahawks into Libya and Marine Harriers from KEARSARGE were flying missions, supporting the establishment of the UN mandated no-fly zone.

On that same day, over 20,000 Marines were in combat in Afghanistan. They were supported there by almost 20,000 Sailors both afloat and ashore, located throughout the Middle East.

On that same day, our ships were fighting pirates off the coast of Somalia and conducting counter-narcotics patrols in the waters of the Caribbean.

On that same day, ships were sailing around Africa, South America and in the Pacific, building new partnerships, training allies and conducting humanitarian assistance.

That's just one day in the Navy and Marine Corps. That is where you are going; that is what you will lead. You will need all the training you've received here. You will need all the skill and courage you possess. You will be held to a higher standard than your peers who are not serving, yet you will be called on far more often for sacrifice. That is who you are. That is what you are made of.

You are ready. The past four years have prepared you well for what is to come, to do those missions that I talked about. And your participation is going to come very fast. In under a year, many of you who have chosen the Marine Corps will be in Afghanistan, leading our Marines on patrol, or supporting stability and development operations in Helmand Province.

Likewise, in 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 far-away coast.

The rest of you with longer training tracks – pilots, SEALs, EOD, submariners and SEABEES – you won't be far behind your classmates, and four years from now, the same amount of time you were here at the Academy, you'll be pinning on Lieutenant or Captain, and will be seasoned professionals and appreciated leaders of our Sailors and Marines. That leadership will not come automatically. This degree, 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 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.

I've now come to a bittersweet moment because this will be the last commencement at a Service Academy that Robert Gates will deliver an address. In just over a month, Secretary Gates will retire from public office after a remarkable career.

Secretary Gates joined the CIA in June 1966 and rose through the ranks to become its Director in 1991, the only career officer to ever do so. He has also served as the Deputy National Security Advisor and as the President of Texas A&M University. All told, he has spent over 30 years as a public servant and has served eight Presidents. He has earned it. He has earned it through service, through sacrifice and through hard decisions.

Mr. Secretary, your service as Secretary, directing the conduct of two wars, and your incredible commitment to every Sailor, Marine Soldier and Airman have been an inspiration to so many. Thank you. You have earned it. Secretary Gates.