

Commencement Address at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland

May 25, 2001

Thank you very much. Thank you, all. Secretary England, thank you very much. For those of you who don't know this, he was sworn in at noon yesterday, just to be here as the Secretary of the Navy. I'm proud to have this good man serving our country.

Admiral Clark, thank you very much. General Jones, Admiral Ryan, members of the board of visitors, Members of the United States Congress, distinguished faculty, distinguished guests, family, and friends, and most of all, graduating midshipmen of the class of 2001.

It is a tremendous honor for me to stand before the future of the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps. You'll always remember this commencement day, a day of excitement, pomp, circumstance; tears of joy and relief when the speaker finally stops speaking. [Laughter] When I accepted the invitation to speak here, I asked Admiral Clark, fine man that he is, if he had any thoughts on what I should talk about. He said, "Mr. President, you should talk about 20 minutes." [Laughter] So we'll see how I do.

I bring with me a small graduation present. In keeping with long-standing tradition, I hereby absolve all midshipmen who are on restriction for minor conduct offenses. [Laughter] It seems a lot of you are cheering. [Laughter] I leave it to Admiral Ryan to define exactly what "minor" means. [Laughter]

Your class has so much to be proud of. You've endured the physical shakedown of your plebe summer and the academic shock of your plebe year. You've endured sea trials and the trial of the Herndon climb. You've slept in rooms adorned with brass plaques that remind you of predecessors whose chests were adorned with Medals of Honor. You've worshipped in a chapel

engraved with the words "*Non Sibi, Sed Patriae*"—not for self, but for country. You've studied in buildings named after giants: Nimitz, Sampson, Mahan, and Michelson. And just in case the studying wasn't enough, some of you gave the left-handed salute to Tecumseh, the "god of 2.0." [Laughter] They didn't have that statue where I went to school. [Laughter] I wish they had. [Laughter]

No one made you come here. No one made you stay, and no one made you to subject yourself to a code of honor and a life of discipline, but you did. And your President and your country are so very grateful and proud that you have chosen to serve.

We all know that you did not arrive at this day by yourselves. You had a lot of help. And at the top of this list must go your parents, and I'd like to congratulate them, as well. The class of 2001, you launch yourself into what we all hope will be fair winds and following seas. It's a good time to reflect for a moment on the things that change and the things that never change.

Today I'm going to talk about the changing world you're entering and the enduring values you'll bring to it. Presenting the "butter bars" to the class of 2001 will be four flag officers from the Naval Academy class of 1951, Admirals Burkhalter, Dunn, McKee, and Metcalf. We're so honored to have them here, as well as a true modern day hero, and your former Superintendent, Admiral Bill Lawrence.

The class of '51 and the class of '01 are separated by 50 years, but you have much in common. You exhibit the same patriotism, the same professionalism, and the same drive. And let's not forget, both classes beat Army.

Half a century ago, the class of '51 ventured into a world where the very existence of our Nation seemed to hang in the balance. Thanks in part to their service and sacrifice, the values of democratic freedom prevailed throughout some 40 winters of a cold war.

Today, you inherit a world that is safer and more peaceful, a world the class of '51 helped to make possible. You're the custodians of their legacy, the next link in the long, unbroken chain that is Annapolis past and present. The world you're entering today is different from the one they entered in five decades ago. But it's still dangerous. It still requires America to have a forward strategy for freedom. The Navy-Marine Corps team you're about to join as new officers will be an integral part of that strategy.

Today, nearly one-third of our naval forces are forward-deployed overseas. The U.S.S. *Constellation* carrier battle group and its 10,000 sailors are plying the waters of the Persian Gulf, enforcing the no-fly zone over southern Iraq. Another 3,800 sailors and marines stand guard nearby with the Boxer amphibious ready group, deterring any mischief Saddam might contemplate. The U.S.S. *Enterprise* is in the Mediterranean, along with the Kearsarge amphibious ready group. They're supporting NATO efforts to maintain peace in the Balkans and deterring those who would break the peace. And in the Pacific, the U.S.S. *Kitty Hawk* is on call, ready, if needed, to defend America's interests.

These forces are America's insurance policy in a world of change and challenge. They give comfort to our allies and pause to our enemies and adversaries. America today has the finest Navy and Marine Corps the world has ever seen. And with your help, I am committing to ensuring that we have the world's finest Navy and Marine Corps tomorrow and every day after.

To do so, we must build forces that draw upon the revolutionary advances in the

technology of war that will allow us to keep the peace by redefining war on our terms. I'm committed to building a future force that is defined less by size and more by mobility and swiftness, one that is easier to deploy and sustain, one that relies more heavily on stealth, precision weaponry, and information technologies.

Fifteen years from now, as many of you approach the point of command, a President may stand here and describe a far different range of deployments than the one I just gave. He—or she—may speak of Aegis destroyers protecting entire continents from the threat of ballistic missile attack; modified Trident submarines carrying hundreds of next-generation smart conventional cruise missiles; agile Marine task forces ready to deploy with far greater speed, operational reach, and precision than ever before; and global command and control systems providing near-total battlespace awareness in real time to on-the-scene commanders.

Building tomorrow's force is not going to be easy. Changing the direction of our military is like changing the course of a mighty ship—all the more reason for more research and development and all the more reason to get started right away. Yet, building a 21st century military will require more than new weapons. It will also require a renewed spirit of innovation in our officer corps. We cannot transform our military using old weapons and old plans. Nor can we do it with an old bureaucratic mindset that frustrates the creativity and entrepreneurship that a 21st century military will need.

The world around us is made smaller every day by the powers of science and technology. These forces of change are transforming every field, from business and communications to health and culture. As the newest officers in our military, your leadership challenge is to embrace those forces, so that you might shape them and harness them to build the security of our country. Only by accepting this challenge

will you be able to see over the horizon and to develop the new concepts and applications that our Navy will need in the decades to come.

It is this spirit of innovation that, in the late twenties, allowed a visionary like Admiral Marc Mitscher to truly understand the potential power of putting an airplane on a ship. He and other great pioneers perfected in less than 20 years the doctrine, technology, and tactics of naval aviation that would win the war in the Pacific.

That same decade, the spirit of innovation allowed a smart marine major named Pete Ellis to understand that such a war would require the ability to land men and heavy equipment from a ship. So he spent the better part of his career developing the doctrine of amphibious warfare. The marines at Iwo Jima and Inchon were thankful he did.

The same spirit led Admiral Hyman Rickover, in the fifties, to the insight that the nuclear genie could be bottled to allow our submarines to stay underwater for months at a time. It led Admiral "Red" Raborn to understand how to put a nuclear missile on a submarine. And it led Arleigh Burke, the father of the modern Navy, to have the foresight to put these two men and their ideas together to create the third and most invulnerable leg of our cold war nuclear triad.

Creativity and imaginative thinking are the great competitive advantages of America and America's military. Today I call upon you to seize and to join this tradition of creativity and innovation. Our national and military leaders owe you a culture that supports innovation and a system that rewards it.

Officers willing to think big thoughts and look at problems with a fresh eye are sometimes wrong. New ideas don't always work. If you pick up this mantle, some of your ideas may fail. But we need to give you this freedom, and we will. It is from your failures that we will learn and acquire the knowledge that will make successful innova-

tion possible. As President, I am committed to fostering a military culture where intelligent risktaking and forward thinking are rewarded, not dreaded. And I'm committed to ensuring that visionary leaders who take risks are recognized and promoted.

The Navy of the future will require innovation and entrepreneurial leadership. It will require safeguarding naval traditions of accountability and responsibility. And as it always has, it will require men and women who live and breathe the values that have made America and her military great.

You know by now that life in the Navy and Marine Corps is not glamorous. You will endure long hours of routine, punctuated—at times without warning—by moments of danger, where the stakes for your crew and your country could not be higher. Annapolis has prepared you well for this life. It has strengthened your bodies and sharpened your minds. Most importantly, it has fortified your character with timeless values, honor, courage, and commitment. Through 4 years, your class has sat through many a lecture about the meaning of these values. You don't need another lecture today. But I do urge you to reflect upon their importance. Reminders of their relevance surround us.

Last month when our EP-3 crew came home from Hainan Island in China, millions of Americans had the opportunity to hear their story on television. From officers and crew, including Lieutenant John Comerford, Annapolis class of 1997, America learned firsthand about the skill and courage it took to land their wounded plane. We also saw a glimpse of the fortitude that allowed the crew to maintain its unity and spirit.

What Americans couldn't know from those television appearances was that these men and women of uncommon valor are, in fact, quite common in today's Navy. What looked extraordinary to America is nothing out of the ordinary among those who wear the uniform. And our Navy and Marine Corps is filled with people, both

officers and enlisted, who have the courage, maturity, and judgment they displayed. I'm sure the admirals from the class of 1951 who joined us today could tell you quite explicitly how the Navy's core values have served them throughout their illustrious careers.

But there are many others from the class of '51 whose stories are lesser known, such as retired Lieutenant Colonel Bill Holmberg. One year and a handful of days after graduation, Second Lieutenant Bill Holmberg found himself on the Korean Peninsula, faced with the daunting task: to infiltrate his platoon deep behind enemy lines in an area swarming with patrol, to rout a tenacious enemy, to seize and hold their position. And that's what he did, and that's what his platoon did. Along the way they came under heavy fire and engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat. Despite severe wounds, Lieutenant Holmberg refused to be evacuated and continued to deliver orders and direct the offensive until the mission was accomplished. And that's why he wears the Navy Cross. And today, his deeds and the deeds of other heroes from that class echo down through the ages to you.

You can't dictate the values that make a hero. You can't buy them, but you can foster them. And you can give a class like yours a sense of confidence and teamwork that will carry you through the toughest moments in a life of service to a cause greater than all of us.

Today you leave here knowing in your heart a great truth that some in life never discover, that values are important. You understand that life cannot be lived with casual commitments and shallow creeds. You understand that no one can be neutral between right and wrong, tyranny and freedom, cynicism and honor. And you know that the greatest victories are sometimes won on the private battlefields of conscience. Over time, your weapons and methods must change, but your values will not. And because of this, you contribute

not just to the military might of our country but to its meaning and conscience and soul. You will not only be the defenders of America but an example to America, and we're deeply grateful.

Finally, as you go about your great work, remember that you're not only officers but ambassadors from the land of freedom. Your work will take you far from our shores. And for many people, you will be, literally, the face of America, the first and, perhaps, only American they will ever meet.

Remember that your very diversity of regional, racial, and religious heritage is, itself, a rebuke to those who hate the ideals you have pledged to defend. Remember that America has always been committed to enlarging the circle of human freedom, not reaching for the crown of empire. And as you wear your Nation's uniform, remember also to wear the humility of true greatness. As your class helps America chart its new course in this new century, these values—honor, courage, commitment, and humility—must be both your anchor and your compass.

You are part of the long blue line of service and sacrifice committed to defending the highest aspirations of the human heart. The best days of our Navy and our Nation are yet to come, and you, by the grace of God, will help us reach the next shore.

Thank you, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Vern Clark, USN, Chief of Naval Operations, and Vice Adm. John R. Ryan, USN, Superintendent, U.S. Naval Academy; Gen. James L. Jones, USMC, Commandant, Marine Corps; Vice Adm. Edward A. Burkhalter, Jr., USN (Ret.); Vice Adm. Robert F. Dunn, USN (Ret.); Adm. Kinnaird R. McKee, USN (Ret.); Vice Adm. Joseph Metcalf III, USN (Ret.); and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.