

As I look out across the field this morning I see the future. Future leaders of tomorrow, I applaud each and every one of you on the field you look outstanding and I'm honored to have the opportunity to address you today.

JROTC provides you with valuable skills that will serve you well, whether you pursue a career in the military, government and politics or the corporate business world. JROTC is a great place to become ingrained with the qualities that lead to success; teamwork, discipline, and service.

At this time I would like to take this opportunity to read to you the Code of an Officer. "I am an officer of the Army of the United States and I am proud of this fact. I recognize the rich heritage behind the corps of officers, of which I am a part that has been built up by those who have marched before me at Saratoga, at Chapaltpec, at Gettysburg, at the Meuse-Argonne, at St. Lo and on the Naktong. (Today we could also add Iraq and Afghanistan) This rich heritage has been built on a code--the code of an officer. This code is simple and easy to remember...Duty...Honor... Country. But it is not so simple to execute and requires a lifetime devoted to work, self discipline, and courage."

Duty, Honor, and Country are a few of the terms you have come to understand and are the bedrock of the United States Military. The military of today is an all volunteer force that continues to distinguish itself through selfless service to our nation and her citizens, all in the name of freedom, and all while at war for the past eight years.

Those who choose to answer the call, to go into harm's way and provide freedom and defense for the rest; those are a very select and prestigious group. Less than one-half of one percent of our population serves in the military, and year after year the military continues to be recognized as the most respected institution in our nation.

This is due in part to the military is a culture is of selfless service, sacrifice and professionalism. The military is made up of the finest men and women that America has to offer, and as an institution we understand what it means to serve, not just America, but those to our right and those to our left.

We stand here today not for our parents or the citizens of our great nation, but for our brothers and sisters next to us, behind us and in front of us. We stand here today because of them, because they understand as well, and they depend on us, just as we depend on them. Together we share an intrinsic understanding of right and wrong and we share a bond few will ever know. We also share the knowledge that if we few do not stand up and fight for what is right today, then we cannot depend on others to do so, and the freedoms we cherish may not be there for future generations.

Many can succeed, but it takes a special person to serve their country and fellow citizens. It takes a special person who is willing to give their life in a distant country so that others may enjoy success. When all is said and done, and we have come to the end of the journey there are two things we will look back on and use to evaluate our existence; our sense of fulfillment and our family.

If you are one of the few who choose to serve our nation through military service then you can be assured that you will gain fulfillment through your sacrifices and accomplishments, and the fact that your country considers you a hero. You will forever be remembered as a warrior, one who did what others would not do. The respect that you will achieve will be unmatched and you will be able to look back and carry with you an immense amount of pride in all that you have accomplished.

As you serve you will also honor your family. Take a look in the audience, go ahead and look around. Do you see all of the smiling faces out there? Those are your family members, proud of what you have accomplished, and proud of where you are going. Now, look at those next to you, those who surround you in formation, they are your family as well. By serving you know that you will forever have brothers and sisters all over the world that you can depend on and they can depend on you at a moments notice, so do not let them down.

If you do choose a career in the military not only will it provide personal fulfillment and family satisfaction, it also provides immeasurable experience and opportunities that few, if any, other professions can replicate. After just a few years of service you will have seen and done more things, interacted with more cultures and have traveled to more nations than most Americans will their entire life. You will mature and grow, enriching your life in such a manner that you will have no choice but to walk head and shoulders above everyone else, carrying a broad perspective on life that not everyone will enjoy.

I know I have spent quite a bit of time talking about the military and service, but should you decide not to enter the military there are many other ways you can serve your country. Whatever you decide, your experience in JROTC will serve you well.

It would be impossible to talk about JROTC and not mention its close ties with education and our academic institutions. Education is the cornerstone of the foundation for your future. I encourage each of you to excel in your studies, pay attention to your teachers and appreciate the knowledge and understanding you are gaining everyday.

I would like to thank the educators, mentors and parents whose support of these cadets has enabled their success. Please join me in a round of applause.

Mark Twain once said, “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” That is my personal challenge to each of you; explore, dream and discover everything that life has to offer.

You are the future of America, and I applaud your hard work and dedication to your schools, communities and the JROTC program. Thank you for your commitment and pursuit of excellence.