

**All Academies Ball
LTG Robert L. Caslen, Jr.
St. Louis, MO
26 December 2010**

Representative Shimkus and Karen (wife), Ambassador Wagner, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and especially to the cadets and midshipmen...past and present...in attendance here tonight, thank you for that warm reception and thanks for extending me the kind invitation to be here with you as we celebrate the vital role our service academies play in defense of our Nation. The food was great...this is exactly what I needed after I stuffed myself yesterday. Thanks for cementing what my New Year's resolution will be. I also want to thank Frank Janoski for that warm introduction. You know Frank, since we're from Fort Leavenworth and the Kansas City area, it's too bad that we did not time this to coincide with the Chiefs game with the Rams a couple weeks ago. I would certainly have loved to have seen that!

Speaking of football, I would be remiss if I did not congratulate the Air Force for winning the Commander-in-

Chief's Trophy this year, and begrudgingly congratulate the Navy for beating my Army team for the 9th straight year. To tell you the truth, I may just have to break out my pads and suit up again next year to make sure we break that streak! On second thought maybe not, I'm not sure an old three-star center would make **that** much of a difference. Honestly though, I am thrilled to be here with you tonight.

The father of America, General George Washington once said, "***War must be carried on systematically, and to do it you must have (leaders) of character activated by principles of honor***".

Washington's call for men and women of character to defend this Nation is the core mission of our service academies...and their success in this endeavor has been unrivaled on the stage of American history.

This is due largely to the fact that our service academies represent much more than the mortar and brick of academic institutions...***they symbolize a way of life...a way of life***

steeped in an honored tradition of duty, bravery and sacrifice. For the past 208 years our service academies have produced the skilled warrior leaders needed to preserve our Nation and protect its way of life...leaders representative of the values of America... leaders of the highest intellect, honor and military skill... leaders of tolerance, inclusion and compassion... leaders that have made a decisive difference in the course of American history...***leaders that embody the noblest traditions of our service academies.... and leaders befitting Washington's call for warrior leaders of character.***

These ***chosen few*** have served as America's vanguard for the past two centuries...diligently and faithfully defending the ideals and values that distinguish our Nation as unique in the history of man.

The battlefield successes and societal contributions of our graduates have been fundamental ingredients that have helped fuel the success of American democracy itself. Our graduates can be proud...for their legacy manifests itself today

in a strong, free and prosperous America...an America that stands for the values and ideals of our forefathers... an America that still stands as a beckon of freedom, hope and opportunity for the rest of the world...and an America that stands ready in leadership, to confront the challenges of the future.

For those of you in uniform – whether as a cadet or midshipmen, or as an officer in our armed services – for you are the current and the future leaders of our Armed Forces, leaders that are tasked, and who will be tasked, to uphold this vital tradition in an increasingly challenging and uncertain future.

As we enter our 10th year of continuous combat our Nation faces a strategic crossroads...where the myriad of threats confronting America will increasingly challenge the ½ of 1% of Americans who wear this uniform today and who have answered our Nation's call to duty. While the rest of America is enjoying life...***fat, dumb and happy***... these honored few,

much like their warrior forefathers, continue every day to stand in the gap between the evil of this world and our very way of life. These honored few can count themselves among the generations that have gone before them...quietly, bravely and resolutely defending the principles and values of our Republic against the multitude of threats confronting the United States.

As we embark into the second decade of the 21st Century, a decade that will most likely be distinguished by persistent conflict, we as a Nation must be fully aware of the rapidly changing nature of the world. We face a future that will be severely impacted by the emergence of several significant global trends such as overpopulation, climate change and increased competition for resources.

These trends will progressively challenge government's ability to provide basic services to their citizenry, which will in turn increase the likelihood of failed nation states. These failed nation states will serve as sanctuaries for extremist and radicalized thought and action. As nation states strain to ward

off this possibility through their increased competition for ever scarcer resources, the prospects of conflict between nation states becomes even more pronounced.

As the world rapidly evolves around us, so too will the character of conflict. The conflicts of the 21st Century will likely be waged by a diverse combination of state and non-state actors. Our adversaries in the 21st Century will pursue a dynamic combination of means, shifting their employment in rapid and surprising ways. Future adversaries will likely use a tailorable mix of sophisticated conventional and unconventional tactics and weaponry to mitigate our advantages and accentuate their own strengths.

Future conflict will increasingly be waged amongst the people, rather than around them. As our enemies draw closer to the people to blunt our advantages, gaining and maintaining the support of the indigenous populations will be a primary focus of our combatant commanders. Our Nation's ability to build partner capacity and partnerships to mitigate these threats will be of vital importance – and we must have leaders

that possess the right balance of skills to successfully bridge the cultural divides that separate different peoples.

It is within this context of time, circumstance and conflict that our Nation asks and is frankly counting on our young leaders to lead. The dynamic, complex and uncertain operating environments of the 21st Century will test the mental agility, adaptability and moral consciousness of our officers as never before.

For the men and women who have graduated from our Service Academies and who have served in this War on Terror for these past nine plus years have met these challenges and succeeded by every standard of measure or metric. They have served with honor and dignity and under great stress but with equally great success. Many of them are in this room today and I just want to say thank-you on behalf of our Nation and our Armed Services for your commitment to duty, example, sacrifice, leadership and service to Country. America is so tremendously proud of what you have done and will continue to do. Thank-you so very much.

You cadets and midshipmen in the audience tonight will soon enter the ranks of this generation of warrior leaders. As it has always been the case, when the policy-makers finish talking, when the debate ceases, when the negotiations break down and the orders are given...it will become your mission to lead the young men and women assigned to your care, to execute national policy for the last 300-500 meters to a given objective. You will be the substance behind any policy undertaken by this country deemed important enough to send our National Treasure into harm's way...absolute proof positive that the United States of America means business when your boots hit the ground.

Our Nation has every bit of confidence that you are up to the task. Each of you came into the military while our Nation was at war knowing full well that you would be joining a unit deploying to war. You do not complain, or argue, or moan; you quietly count yourself among the generations who have gone before you standing in the gap between the evil that is out there and our very way of life. Contrary to the vast majority of

your peers, you elected to look at this evil in the eye and decided to do something about it. Each of you are special for many reasons, but the fact that you and many others in this room tonight stood up and said “Send Me” at a time of war speaks volumes about your character.

Becoming a member of the United States military is always a big decision, but to do so in a time when our national security is perhaps most at risk, is one of the noblest things you could have ever done. For you are all members of this 9/11 generation – a generation that has already internalized the ethic of “Duty” when you first raised your hand and made the decision to serve – because you could have easily opted for a safer existence. You are indeed a special breed.

For you are also members of the Profession of Arms, who as professionals, are bonded with your comrades in a shared identity and culture of sacrifice and service to the Nation and the Constitution...professionals who adhere to the highest ethical standards...professionals imbued with the characteristics of duty, honor and country...professionals befitting the honored traditions of our service academies... and

professionals worthy of our Nation's most sacred of duties...
***protecting the American people and defending our
Nation's Constitution.***

The day that each member of our military – to include each of you here tonight – takes that Oath of Office, you join the brotherhood and sisterhood of those who secured our independence at Yorktown, stormed the beaches at Normandy, routed the enemy at Midway, beat incredible odds in the streets of Mogadishu in Somalia, and currently subdue our enemies in both Iraq and Afghanistan, all the while compassionately rebuilding those nations.

This is precisely why the training and education you all receive at our service academies is as rigorous and challenging as possible – both mentally and physically.

It's why you Cadets and Midshipmen must execute all those push-ups and that you will do a thousand more. It's why you are inundated with homework. It's why you run all of those miles and will run many more! It's why you fire hundreds of rounds – it's why you march and march with no end in sight.

It's why you must succeed on your physical fitness tests. It is this rigorous training – training that is conducted to the highest of standards – training that is embedded with all the hardships and challenges required to build the character, education and perseverance required of you to be a leader of a team – a team depending on you to **never** quit and to **never** accept defeat.

Your future teammates will rely on you to do all within your mortal power to lead them in the accomplishment of their mission - regardless of the setting - whether it is on an oil platform in the Persian Gulf, 20,000 feet above the mountains of Afghanistan or in the alleys of Baghdad, or flying at 25,000 feet to deliver the right ordinance at precisely the right time and the right place. You will be counted on to successfully lead others and trust me, you will succeed.

It is also why when you go home, your parents can see the noticeable change – simply by the way you stand.

It's why you have begun to appreciate the brotherhood and sisterhood and pure camaraderie that are gleaned through nights in the freezing rain next to your battle buddy, finding

humor cramming for their next exam until 0300 hours in the morning, or sharing the pains of endless hours of physical training with your classmates.

It is why you have come to appreciate the midnight talks you have with your buddies, the *fond* memories of your plebe or doolie year, the outstanding instruction you receive, and all the sores, blisters and mosquito bites that will just not heal in the heat of the summer – realizing all the while that you are forming the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood that will last a lifetime.

The significance of these bonds cannot be overstated – for you must forever have each other’s backs. Our junior leaders of today are confronting the most complicated battlefield in the history of warfare - an asymmetric “3 block war” if you will. And many of you will be there in short order.

You will engage in vicious close combat on one block...protect children as they attend school on the next block...and restore water and power on the third...and all of this simultaneously. You will, on a daily basis, make life or

death decisions with only the time it takes to blink an eye – to process, decide and take action.

It is within this complex, uncertain and unrelenting operating environment that you will find yourselves making decisions and holding responsibilities normally associated with more senior leaders. You must rely on your wits, your common sense and your values to successfully negotiate this minefield.

You will find yourselves as part mayor, part district chief, police chief, and arbitrator of disagreements amongst ethnicities and tribes *as varied as the taxi drivers in New York City*. You will come to personify the United States of America in the eyes of the people you encounter.

You will become the embodiment of what many have come to call the “Strategic Corporal” – where the decisions that you make under duress, with little time for reflection or thought may quite literally impact the actions of policy custodians in our Nation’s capital.

To be successful in this context, you and those that you lead must have an appreciation and respect for the operating environment in which you find yourselves. You must strive to understand the people whom you protect – you must endeavor to understand the languages, the customs, and the cultures of those that you encounter. You must understand the potential consequences of your actions – for an inadvertent slight can have immense repercussions that transcend your tactical perspective.

You must strive to understand the societal hierarchy of the area in which you find yourselves. To develop the ability to analyze who and what is truly important, what leaders must be engaged, and what leaders must be marginalized – and when this must be done and to what degree. You must have the humility to give deference and respect to our indigenous partners – all the while remembering that purely American solutions to problems at hand will most likely not be the right solution. Your role will be to mentor, assist and enable our partners to make the best decisions possible for their Nation as well as ours.

You will develop humility as you check arrogance and myopic viewpoints at the door – all the while remembering that partnerships are defined by value, and by mutual benefit, and are only realized through the interpersonal skills that seek to develop trust and mutual understanding and respect.

Many in this country do not yet fully realize the incredible value and impact that this 9/11 generation is having, and will continue to have, on our society, but that is OK – for they would want it no other way...for they are a humble, resilient and focused generation.

But I have no doubts that when future historians reflect on this period of American history they will hold the brave men and women of this generation in reverence as the next “greatest generation” ...for their service and sacrifice have protected the free world from tyranny and evil...they have restored freedom and inspired hope where it was absent...and they have confronted and repulsed extremism, violence, and exclusion in all corners of the world. Much like past

generations, they seek moderation, tolerance, and inclusion for all of humanity.

They have protected, defended, and advocated for the downtrodden and defenseless. They, like their warrior forefathers, continue to represent the thin margin of difference needed to keep liberty's torch burning brightly.

Tonight serves as a fitting reminder to us older warriors of the tremendous responsibility we have to this generation. We must do all that we can to enable their success in the future. We must lend our experience and efforts to the task of cultivating, developing and ultimately producing those leaders of character and substance that Washington called for. We must impart upon this generation of leaders the hard lessons learned from our failures and triumphs. We must arm this generation of warrior leaders with the right balance of skill sets to successfully confront the operational challenges and moral ambiguities of the 21st Century.

The stakes confronting our Nation are too high to leave this important mission to chance...we must do all that we can to ensure that the young men and women that we send into harm's way will be armed with all the knowledge, tools and support needed to guarantee their success on the battlefields of tomorrow.

I'd like to conclude with a passage from GEN Douglas MacArthur's 1964 farewell address to the Corps of Cadets at West Point. This passage captures the essence of all our Service Academies and the immense impact they have on the lives of those honored few that are privileged enough to grace their hallowed and sacred grounds.

"...in the evening of my memory, always I come back to West Point. Always there echoes and reechoes in my ears....Duty...Honor...Country".

MacArthur's words of Duty...Honor...and Country, symbolize ***what it means to be a volunteer warrior in the service of the people of the United States...of the sacred***

heritage of selfless service that future graduates must uphold...and finally to the noble ideals...that we as graduates must always remain true to.

I'll leave you with a brief thought, one that sums up the reason why all of us are here tonight. That simple thought is our shared belief that America is the greatest country in the world. The reason for this belief is simple; it is because of brave men and women, including many of you here today, that have stood up to be counted when freedom was threatened – sacrificing so much in the process. May God bless each and every one of you.

I ask that we all remember those graduates and the other brave service members who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our Nation. We are forever indebted to them for their service and sacrifice.

May we also remember those that are, at this very moment, standing watch for us around the globe in the name of freedom and democracy.

And may God continue to bless the United States of America!

2873 words = ~22 minutes