**14298, John Caskey – Graduation**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to celebrate this joint graduation of the US Coast Guard and the NOAA. This is the third joint graduation since the NOAA Corps moved their officer accession program to the US Coast Guard Academy. I want to welcome our graduates who have worked so hard to reach this day as well as all their families. I also want to welcome VADM Manson Brown, USCG (ret), the Assistant Secretary for Observations and Prediction, who will be our Keynote speaker for today.

We have a total of 76 Ensigns who will walk the stage together today. There are 60 USCG Officers, 2 Internationals from St. Kitts and Barbados, and 14 NOAA Corps Officers. They are a diverse group who have come from a variety of backgrounds to join together and meet the demands of this training. These officers have worked together for 17 weeks of rigorous training that tested their academic and physical limitations.

During that time they have learned to work with, and sometimes in spite of, their differences to develop partnerships. They have molded themselves into a team that knows how to work together to accomplish a common goal, in this case for all of them to graduate today. This skill will serve them well as they move forward in their military career, learning to work with different groups of people at each place they are assigned to serve. They have learned how to get to know the intricacies of others temperaments and how to know the strengths and weaknesses of their fellow officers so they can each work together and make sure that all the work is done and everyone carries their weight.

The memories these officers have built over the last 17 weeks will follow them all through their careers. They will never forget the friendships they’ve forged, the experiences they’ve shared and the lessons they’ve learned during this training. Although they will build other friendships and professional relationships over their careers, nothing will compare to those they have made right here during this training where they first became officers.

It's been an honor for me to play a role in seeing these officers not only survive, but flourish through the 17 weeks of training. The blood, sweat, and tears that they shared together are only the beginning of the sacrifices they will make for their family and country. However, I know that they are ready for the future. I have watched them as they approached new training, sometimes with trepidation over whether they could overcome new challenges. But, each time they set their sights on the goal before them and stayed the course until they met and conquered the challenge.

Some of those challenges were physical, straining and stretching them to their limits and beyond, because we know that in a time of crisis we all must be willing and able to go beyond our limits if we are to survive. They understand that as officers there will be enlisted members looking to them for leadership, trusting them to set the example and lead the way. I am proud of these officers for not holding back in their offering of themselves as they gave their all in this training to graduate and make their home units and their families and friends proud of them.

Some of the challenges were emotional and mental, causing them to think and reason and find solutions to new challenges. After all, the textbooks can’t possibly teach about every possible scenario they might face when they are on active duty. We gave them as much practical training as possible but we also had to give them some experiences that were not laid out in a textbook so they could learn to use those mental capabilities that leadership requires.

Each of the lessons they learned will carry them well throughout their careers. Then, as they move forward the new lessons they learn will build upon what they take with them from here. One of the most valuable lessons they have learned is to keep their eyes, minds and hearts open to learning throughout life so that they are always on top of their game. This group will never sit idle with what they learn today; they will continue to stay on top of new methods and procedures and ways of doing things so that they will always be the best they can be.

Theodore Roosevelt said, “The boy who is going to make a great man must not make up his mind merely to overcome a thousand obstacles, but to win in spite of a thousand repulses and defeats.” (<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/theodorero147883.html#KCX2VZ3UjkVMyOPq.99>)

Every one of us will face uncounted obstacles in our lives. Some we will overcome but life teaches that some of them we will not overcome for a variety of reasons. The important lessons Roosevelt taught us here is that we can’t give up when we face and obstacle and are unsuccessful. In those circumstances it is important for us to discover the lesson to be learned from the experiences and apply it to our lives for the next challenge.

Christopher Reeve said, “A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.”

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/c/christophe141891.html#GbRXIq6LjT6EyYfc.99>

Christopher Reeve first became famous through his portrayal of the comic book hero Superman in movies. He was also a director, producer, screenwriter and activist. Then, on May 27, 1995, Reeve became a [quadriplegic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetraplegia) after being thrown from a horse during an [equestrian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equestrianism) competition in [Culpeper, Virginia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culpeper%2C_Virginia). He required a wheelchair and a portable ventilator for the rest of his life. Many people would have seen their lives as over when faced with such overwhelming circumstances. But, Reeve chose a different path for his life. He decided to use what happened to him to help other people who had similar injuries. He lobbied on behalf of people with [spinal-cord injuries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spinal-cord_injury) and for human embryonic [stem cell research](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stem_cell_research), founding the [Christopher Reeve Foundation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Reeve_Foundation) and co-founding the Reeve-Irvine Research Center. During all this he continued his directing and producing pursuits. In October 2004, Reeve died suddenly of cardiac arrest while co-directing [*Everyone's Hero*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everyone%27s_Hero)*.* But, through it all he didn’t just give up and quit. He continued to face life to the fullest with whatever tools were at his disposal, learning from each attempt and then reaching to try to help others from what he learned.

Each of our officers graduating today has every right to have a huge sense of accomplishment for their achievements. I have great admiration for these new officers. All of the families of our officers should be very proud of their sons and daughters today.

Thank you