**14865, John Caskey**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank all the family and friends joining the graduates and senior staff members for this term’s graduation ceremony. This program is a joint officer exchange program between the U.S. Coast Guard and the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association). This is still a relatively new program, with the first joint class graduating in 2014. I am thrilled to say that we have 85 officers graduating today who have spent the last 17 weeks living, eating and training together. Being in such close contact for that length of time creates some close bonds. You will all carry strong memories of this time with you. I encourage you to keep those strong friendships that have developed. The memories, as well as the friendships, will be strength to you over your lives.

Some of you will stay in contact over a lifetime while others may never see one another again. But, remember that you have been changed by your friendships in one way or another. You have learned from one another in so many ways. Remember and value these lessons, along with the lessons you have learned in training. All of them will be a help to you as you travel through life. Just remember, life is a marathon, not a sprint. Take one day at a time and learn from each new experience. Each lesson will build upon the previous lessons and as long as you live you will continue to learn new things. But, no matter what you experience in life, this time and this experience will be part of your foundation, part of the person you become.

The past 17 weeks of training have been intense. Much has been asked of you as you learn new skills and new methods. You were already leaders before you began this training. That’s why you were chosen and accepted into this training. We took the natural leadership skills you possessed and added to them proven leadership techniques and tactics to make you into the best officers possible. Now, when you go to your assignments you will add real life experience to that training to build another layer to your foundation of leadership.

Each of you has worked hard every day of this training. You have proven your dedication to your goal. “Nothing ever comes to one that is worth having, except as a result of hard work.”-[Booker T. Washington](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/b/booker_t_washington.html). Hard work is the bedrock of a leader, one who knows that anything worth having is worth working for. Each of you already had that quality within you or you wouldn’t have been approved for this training. You can’t be careless or lazy and be a leader. Leaders usually work harder than all the people under their command because they have to know the bigger picture, not just their particular task in that bigger picture. They are also committed to that bigger picture and dedicated to helping those around them reach that goal as a unit. You can be very proud of what you have learned here and the new skills and talents you will take with you into the next steps in your career.

This is called a Commencement event for a reason. Graduation says you are completing one season of your life. Commencement means to begin something. Previously you were Coast Guard and NOAA service members. As you graduate and complete Officer Training, you commence a new season in your life. When you leave here you will receive your first assignments as junior officers.

Officers, I want to thank you first and foremost, for your service up to this point. From the quality of your reputation before you came here and the quality of the work you did while in this training, I know that we can only expect to see more from you as you progress in your military careers. I encourage each of you, as you report to your first assignments, to have faith in your past experiences as well as your training and accomplishments while here. I encourage you to be inspired to step out and reach for the sky. You have great potential in you and with that potential, coupled with your natural skills and talents, along with your training, you can achieve great things. As you report to your first assignments, I encourage each of you to have faith in your past experiences as well as your training and accomplishments while here. I encourage you to be inspired to accomplish all that you can. Believe in yourself. Believe in your abilities. Believe in your potential.

The timing of this graduation is opportune in that it is just before Thanksgiving. This time of year is typically spent remembering all the things we have to be thankful for during the year. This year each of you has something extra and something special to be thankful for, your graduation from this training and the opportunity to move on to bigger and better things in your military career.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you can be very proud of your friends or family member graduating today. Not only did they meet the expectations of this training, in many ways they exceeded them. As an old saying goes, they have done you proud. I’m certain they will continue to perform excellently as they move forward in their careers.

Some of these fine officers will make the military their career. Some of them will eventually choose other paths. But, regardless of their long-term choices they will always be a proud representative of the Coast Guard and NOAA for their training and leadership will always shine through to those around them.

Officers, your family and friends, along with the US Coast Guard and NOAA are very proud of your accomplishments and we look forward to your future accomplishments. As you accept your commissions and your new assignments move forward with positive attitudes. You have the tools you need to have a successful future. How that future unfolds will depend upon how you use the tools at your disposal.

Good luck to all of you.