**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**WENDA THROCKMORTON**

Good afternoon! I'd like to thank MAJ Cobbs for the opportunity to speak with all of you at this wonderful event today. To all of the parents, family members, and friends here, it's great that you show your support and encouragement to our graduates. To the staff and teachers who have taken the time to share your knowledge and wisdom and tips, thank you for doing your essential part to inspire these young people, the future of our great country, and to the graduates here today, we are all so proud of you! Thank you for expressing your interest and for putting in the time and effort needed… you **ACTED** on a dream… a thought… a “**what if.**” That is the first step to inheriting your place in the adult world and in the future of this country. You've taken responsibility to explore a possible career in the military through your participation in the JROTC course and for that, you deserve a great deal of recognition and acknowledgement. You've set yourself apart from others that may not have chosen the same path…. And when you began this exploration, you didn't necessarily know what was in store for you. You may have **THOUGHT** you knew, but as is the case with life itself, thinking about something and actually **DOING** something are two different things. You now have the advantage of knowing that learning through experience is very valuable. That **one** realization will continue to serve you through life… in all phases of life.

It's not very often that I get the chance to speak in front of high school students, so this is as special for me as it is for you. Seeing your faces filled with pride and hope… and a little wonder… brings me back to the start of my own military career. I joined the Army Reserves (part time) when I was a little older than you. (**Tell one or two sentences about what inspired you to join the Reserves**). At the time I remember thinking \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I was curious about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and thought for one drill weekend each month and two weeks of Army training each year, it was worth it for me to see if a military career was something to which I would be able to commit. Apparently it was…. And is…. And now some twenty-five years later, I realize that the experiences through which I've lived and the knowledge I've gained are priceless… plus, it has been an honor to serve my country.

I began my military career as an enlisted soldier in 1993. As we’ve seen and learned, basic training provides us with a foundation. It literally “shows us the ropes.” From there, I learned to work hard, attend to my duties, complete my tasks, and conquer every assignment with integrity, determination, and the knowledge that I was learning the importance… the **backbone** of every future decision I would make, and that is **accountability** and **responsibility**. I also learned the incredible value of teamwork. It was gratifying to experience the bonding and camaraderie while serving in the reserves prior to enlisting, and that carried through to my enlisted career. That sense of teamwork and of partnership had a strong impact on my choice to join the Army full time as an active duty soldier. That was a decision I didn't and don't regret. Those life lessons took me far within my military career and I know, as you sit here, whether you personally choose a career in the military, the pursuit of continued education, or the chance to enter the civilian work force… whatever you have learned up until now in your JROTC training will serve you well.

We all face challenges in our lives, and every challenge is relative to where we are personally and professionally, but I also want to say that maintaining a positive attitude is something that has served me well…both in working with others and taking instruction and direction from superiors, or guiding and leading those who have relied on **me** for strength and direction. It was General Colin Powell who said, “ The most important thing I learned is that soldiers watch what their leaders do. You can give them classes and lecture them forever, but it's is your personal example they will follow.” Guess what? I have news for all of you that are in this graduating class. You are all leaders already! You have self-identified. You have separated yourselves from the “pack” because of your curiosity and determination. You have shown your family, your friends, your teachers, and your JROTC instructors and coordinators that you have what it takes to explore the possibility of a future in the military. I know that does not mean you will do it…. It means you are aware enough and involved enough to provide yourself with options. You're already ahead of the game!

After high school, you’ll find that “fork in the road” you've heard so much about. There will be options placed before you and there will be choices to make. Some of you may choose to go to college while others will receive ROTC scholarships. Others of you may choose to work for a few years and then go back to college. Whatever decision you make, keep an open mind, trust your inner voice, and be confident in knowing that you are capable of handling whatever comes your way. As you continue to experience new phases of your life and as you grow and learn more of what’s ahead as you inherit your “adulthood,” you will have more options to choose from…. Your circle of friends and associates will widen… your knowledge base will expand… and your sphere of understanding will intensify. All of these actions and events will teach you more accountability and more responsibility. More exposure and more experience also means that you have to be more observant and aware in order to be able to continue to distinguish right from wrong. As you meet and interact with more and more people, remember to pay attention to a person’s character and that goes beyond the superficial. Just as you are learning to choose your path as you go forward in life, remember to choose your comrades and community with an open mind and a clear perspective.

Also as you go on to these “brave new worlds,” you will be on your own… you will have freedom of choice…and with that comes… you guessed it!!! **RESPONSIBILITY**. I cannot tell you how important it is to “exercise” that “muscle.” You are leaving the period of your life in which your actions have little or o consequence… you are beginning to learn that you have a voice. Soon you’ll have a vote, and as you take a stand to defend your principles, you will learn that the lessons you have learned provide the power that is essential in order to protect and defend your principles and place in this world.

This all sounds great, doesn't it? Well, keep in mind, some days you may to wake up and think that what you've agreed to is more than you can handle. There may appear to be too much responsibility, too many interruptions, too much expectation from others, and not enough time, but you know what? Welcome to the world. You will survive. With practice, determination, and perseverance, you will be able to figure it all out. And when push comes to shove, tackle one point at a time. Learn to prioritize. Learn to work smarter. Try to step back and observe your actions…. Is there some way you're working or studying that can be adjusted to yield more efficient results? Is there a way to reach people with more direct actions in order to save precious time? Learn to step back from whatever it is you're doing to see how you might be able to improve. If you can do that, it will work to support you in every facet of your lives, no matter what you choose to do… no matter where you find yourself.

Other actions and suggestions I have found that support whatever success I've had are simple, logical, and worth the effort.

* Be a team player. Learn to say “**WE**” and not “**I**.” No one accomplishes anything alone. You are part of a team. Imagine if you worked with a group of people, everyone was equally involved, and one of your teammates gave a report and spoke in the first person. Saying “I” negates the power of collaboration. There is no “I” in “teamwork.” That's important to remember.
* It’s important to approach your responsibilities and tasks with energy and enthusiasm. There is a word I want you to remember, and that word is “alacrity.” It means “a cheerful willingness.” Remember that it provides more potential to appear capable and willing and as you choose to advance In life, in your education, in your career, or if you choose to be in the military, a healthy, positive attitude, will distinguish you and inspire your managers and superiors to consider you for more interesting or larger assignments. It is also okay to acknowledge that you like what you do!
* Mistakes will happen. Expect them…. And learn to be responsible for them. Acknowledge if you've made one, do what is necessary to rectify and resolve the issue, and move on…. And LEARN from what you did. Many of the greatest of life’s lessons come as a result of the mistakes we've made. Also consider that if you weren't doing something…. If you weren't attempting to achieve a result, you would not have made a mistake. So keep in mind that they are a result of productivity, but know those errors must be accounted for and cleaned up.
* Don't procrastinate. This is a hard one…. Start thinking about assignments as you get them. Don't leave important work until the last minute. Finish projects before the deadline and then you have the luxury to to refine, improve, and correct the material as you learn.
* Learn to sharpen your communication skills. You can **NEVER** read enough or write enough. It is so important to be able to express yourself clearly, completely, and correctly in written documents. Remember that a written communication is sometimes the recipient’s only experience of who you are and what your message is. Make sure you represent yourself clearly. Before you save a file or hit the “send” button, be very careful to check your work to insure it represents your intended message. **ONE HUNDRED PERCENT** of effective communication is delivering the message you intend to be gotten. Don't leave interpretation up to chance. The more you continue on the road to completion and success, the more clarity will be required. Please don't take that for granted.

It is now time to acknowledge that you've completed this course. I am very impressed with all of you and I wish each one of you all the best in whatever paths and fields you choose. You now have the advantage of your JROTC training to guide you and I wish all of you success in all that you strive for. Thank you all!