**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**JAMES STRAIT**

Ladies and gentlemen, parents, family, and friends, administration, faculty, distinguished guests, Ms. White, Ms. Clark, General Bowers, General Clardy, Ms. Mizell, Ms. Wooton, and, of course, graduates, welcome to the Kubasaki High School commencement exercises for the graduating class of 2021! Given the year we have experienced as a group and individually, I am particularly happy to be with all of you today. The nature of military service is to be prepared to face the unknown with courage, resilience, strength, and common sense. I want to acknowledge all of you, especially our graduating seniors, for displaying those innate qualities and for persevering through the unprecedented events of the past year. Every single one of us had challenges to shoulder, and I am so proud of you for getting through the obstacles placed before you. It is only when we emerge from a crisis, and hopefully, we are, that we can look back and reflect over what we have endured, triumphed.... and **learned**.

Several years ago, a friend of mine had to have heart surgery. She had to have a stent placed into an artery- it was clogged and the flow of blood was blocked. One really important observation she made soon after she got home, was that once the stent was placed in position and opened the artery, a great pain under her left shoulder blade went away.... this was a pain she didn’t even know she had until it was gone. She just endured it and carried on with her life, until she couldn’t. Like our family members in the military, we carry adversity, sometimes unknown, with us.... especially during a global pandemic. By making it through to today, you’ve demonstrated your determination to work through the unexpected challenges and stress of unforeseen circumstances, and you **MADE IT!!! BRAVO!!!**

We have learned so much in this past year. As students, naturally, you learned your lessons, but there was so much more that you absorbed. You learned to adapt. You learned to “go with the flow,” to find alternate routes to accomplish goals, and you learned that attaining quality, essential education doesn’t stop because life gets tough. You learned to meet the challenge with toughness and determination. While the pandemic has taken an enormous toll on our world, if we are really, **REALLY** smart, the unexpected lessons we had to learn will serve us for the rest of our lives. You had authentic, in the moment, opportunities to overcome adversity, no matter the circumstances, and you did it!!

There are other challenges inherent in being students of military families. You met those challenges as well, and you did it with enthusiasm and purpose. Everyone sitting here knows it is not easy to be in a military family. The frequency with which you have to change schools because military parents have to move every three years, the way you have to leave in-person friendships, the fact that you face the pressures of having parents that go off to fight in wars.... none of it is easy and I am sure your parents are thankful for your support and understanding. I want you to know something you already probably know.... the travel, the exposure to other cultures and lifestyles, the practical education you receive just by being in foreign surroundings.... all of it helps to allow you to have a truly global point of view... one that understands and demonstrates compassion for diversity.... this kind of exposure teaches all of us to not take anything for granted.

Through it all, you, as a class, and we, as a school, achieved some truly noteworthy milestones. I’m sure you really appreciated and enjoyed relaxing and gathering in the new lounge and outdoor areas.... those outdoor areas were especially helpful during Covid with the need to maintain social distancing outdoors!!! I know I speak for the staff when I say that we were particularly impressed as this senior class managed to respectfully organize COVID safe activities.... you really set an admirable example for the younger classes following in your footsteps!!! This senior class also had some of the highest scores in the DoDeA, and that’s a huge accomplishment.... especially in such a challenging year!!

I am also very proud to acknowledge that a lot of students have been accepted to important military academies while others are continuing their education at some of the best colleges in the United States!!!

President James Garfield said, “Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained.” I believe that statement rings true for all of us. The value of a substantial educational foundation cannot be overstated. The necessity to continue that education, whether in school, the military, or in life, is critical to the make up of a whole, compassionate, aware individual. I want to thank all of you for the work you’ve done and the goals you’ve achieved while here at Kubasaki, and I want you to know that as we have contributed to your education, you have contributed to ours. You’ve strengthened our legacy and your dedication to your studies has raised and set the bar for those that follow you. On behalf of the faculty and staff, congratulations, may you all have substantial and meaningful futures, and thank you all!!