

**Delivering a Message of Service and Opportunity to All of
America**
October 2009

Thirty-five years ago in Annapolis, Maryland, I raised my right hand, took an oath to support and defend our nation's Constitution and four years later, received a diploma from the Naval Academy and a commission as an Ensign in the United States Navy. In 2007, the Chief of Naval Operations asked me to return to our alma mater as the Superintendent. I reported to the Academy from an overseas operational command where I led Sailors and Marines engaged across the full spectrum of military operations. During my career I commanded one of the Navy's most sophisticated submarines and led the Navy's recruiting effort, an endeavor that searched all of America to find a select group of individuals to fill our ranks. As I assumed the mantle of leadership at the Academy, I knew my career path as both a war fighter and recruiter had prepared me well to establish a sense of urgency as we tackled mission # 1 at the Academy—preparing the next generation of naval officers to lead Fleet Sailors and Marines who volunteered to sail in harm's way. This is the story of achieving the Naval Academy's mission by discovering, recruiting, admitting, and developing some of America's finest young men and women.

In the late afternoon, on the first of July 2009, the Naval Academy Class of 2013 assembled in Tecumseh Court. This class of "Plebes" was seated in white folding chairs facing Bancroft Hall. From that entranceway, I looked out to the Court . . . to the rows and rows of chairs, perfectly aligned from the first row to the last. I looked into the faces of this Class of 2013, and saw young men and women who were eager, serious, determined and yes, a little uncertain. I reminded myself that each one had volunteered to serve our country during a time of war, committing to a life of service and sacrifice. I reflected on the fact that the Naval

Academy had discovered the best of America from the rural towns of the Midwest and the inner cities that anchor our coasts . . . from schools large and small, public and private. . . from families with a rich military tradition and those who had never seen an officer in uniform except on a movie screen. I thought about the serious nature of our business . . . the “management of violence” . . . as Samuel Huntington once described it in his seminal work *The Soldier and the State*. Our choices for this class had to be right . . . we couldn’t settle for second best . . . the stakes were too high.

The Class of 2013 was in Tecumseh Court that afternoon to take the Oath of Office . . . the same oath I had taken in July of 1974 as I entered the Academy as a Plebe from North Dakota. This is an oath not to the Superintendent of the Naval Academy or the Chief of Naval Operations, or even to the President of the United States. No . . . this is an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. It is a solemn oath and one that binds this Naval Academy class to every preceding one. With this oath, taken in this historic court, these Plebes were acknowledging the truth expressed by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides that “The ones who come out on top are the ones who have been trained in the hardest schools.” These midshipmen, of every hue and background wanted to be here . . . they wanted to be trained in one of America’s toughest schools . . . and they wanted to serve their country with honor.

So how did we find and admit 1233 of America’s best? The starting point for our effort was a firm commitment to the Academy’s mission to graduate leaders to serve in our Navy and Marine Corps. This mission is non-negotiable and those who enter the Academy must have the promise and aptitude to fulfill this mission after completing an intense 47-month program. But the strategy for developing a well-rounded incoming freshman class came primarily from my experiences as the Navy’s Chief Recruiter, a job I held from 2003-2006. While serving as the Chief

Recruiter, we realized we had not tapped the fullest potential offered by our nation. There were too many areas of America that did not know about the opportunities afforded by service in the U.S. Navy. So we “pounded the pavement,” communicating in new and creative ways to reach those who had the capacity and vision to serve in the greatest Navy in the world. We let more young people and their families know what it meant to be a Sailor in today’s Navy. The results were remarkable. By every measure, we accomplished our objectives of building the Navy’s enlisted corps . . . a corps that today executes humanitarian missions, serves as America’s strategic ambassadors around the world, keeps the commercial sea lanes open and free, and fights a war against Al Qaeda and its allies.

In the same manner we have made the conscious decision at the Naval Academy to reach out to every corner of America, a legal requirement to find midshipmen from every state and congressional district in the nation. With that common vision of outreach to all areas of America we engaged members of Congress to find top-notch candidates in every state and district; encouraged our alumni and friends to identify talented prospects; and forged relationships with prominent professional and academic organizations. We communicated a message of service and opportunity . . . service to our country and an opportunity for a four-year scholarship, participation in an academic, athletic, and leadership program second to none, and a place in the Navy and Marine Corps upon graduation with an opportunity to thrive and excel. And of course, when you present a clear message to smart and motivated people, many will respond to this message with commitment and enthusiasm.

Beyond sending the message, we brought young people and their parents and mentors to the Academy to see first hand what we do and how we do it. One of our most successful programs has been *Summer Seminar*, where in three one-week periods, we expose

2250 top-notch high school seniors to the Naval Academy. But *Summer Seminar* is not just a campus tour. It is a hands-on, fast-paced, realistic opportunity to see what the Naval Academy is all about and how we combine mental, physical, and moral development into an integrated whole. The reaction of many who attend is, “I want to be a part of that!” Additionally, we made a concerted effort to bring to Annapolis those who assist young people to make their decisions . . . guidance counselors, principals, and school superintendents. As these individuals began to grasp our message of service and opportunity, they enthusiastically returned to their schools and communities and became eloquent spokesmen for the Academy.

What resulted from these efforts was our discovery of a deep talent pool across America. We received 15,300 applications and from these applicants, we were able to place quality first and enter a class that more closely mirrors the changing demographics of our country . . . a class that is the most geographically, racially, and ethnically diverse class in the Academy’s history. Each member of the new class has a unique story . . . stories of academic excellence, athletic prowess, selfless community service, and rising above seemingly insurmountable obstacles. But each member of the Class of 2013 has something in common . . . they are highly motivated and have volunteered to serve their country in a time of war. I must be clear . . . what occurred this year and to a lesser degree last year is not an anomaly . . . this is the future. We will press forward with the same strategy. . . keep the Naval Academy mission front and center, communicate a message of service and opportunity, facilitate young men and women visiting the Academy during their high school years, energize a support structure to help us spread the word, and carefully choose the right people from a vast pool of potential candidates.

But just like in the Fleet, successful recruiting is a means to an end, not the end itself. The next step here at the Academy is to help

these young men and women, who we have brought aboard, to succeed over the next four years and as leaders in the Navy and Marine Corps. This is where the operational and war fighting experience of the Naval Academy's Senior Leadership is vital. We know what it takes to make a split second decision at sea that makes the difference between life and death . . . we know the importance of adaptability and creativity in a very uncertain and dynamic world . . . we know how selfless leadership inspires people to accomplish the extraordinary . . . we know the importance of cross-cultural understanding in a world that is interdependent . . . and we know that leaders must make courageous ethical decisions in the face of ambiguity, fatigue and stress. So now that these superb young men and women are here, we must challenge them, stretch them, and shape them. We do this through an intense, purposeful, integrated, and continuous development program. The end state of this four-year program is clear . . . provide the Navy and Marine Corps outstanding leaders who are ready to take charge on their first day of commissioned service.

In May of 2013, this class will once again raise their right hands to take the same oath to the Constitution that they did on 1 July 2009. But this time, the oath will be in preparation of receiving their commissions as Marine Corps Second Lieutenants or Navy Ensigns. Most likely, these young men and women who volunteered to serve their country will face strategic and tactical challenges we cannot imagine today. For those challenges, we will need leaders of uncommon valor and unwavering integrity . . . leaders who bring to the seas, ports, and battlefields a diversity of thought, experience, and perspectives. They will join the ranks of those who have graduated from Annapolis and taken that same oath through the years . . . Caucasian graduates, African-American graduates, Hispanic graduates, Asian graduates, Native American graduates . . . men and women who grasped the vision of service and opportunity and many who went on to make the ultimate

sacrifice for their country. And this process will continue with the Classes of 2014 and 2015 and 2016 and every subsequent class. And I can say with absolute confidence that I would be proud to serve with each and every one of them as they fill the ranks of the Navy and Marine Corps . . . and I think America should be very proud of them as well and deeply grateful they have accepted the mantle of selfless and sacrificial leadership with the intent to protect the very freedoms we hold dear.

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