

As delivered

Admiral Thomas H. Collins
USCG Academy Commencement
Introductory Remarks
May 21, 2003

Good morning! I'm very pleased to be here today to celebrate the Commencement of the Academy Class of 2003.

It is truly an honor to welcome President Bush as our commencement speaker, and we look forward to hearing what our Commander-in-Chief has to say to us this morning. Thank you, Mr. President, for honoring us with your presence here today.

It is also a great privilege to have our new Service Secretary with us. Secretary Ridge, I'm delighted to welcome you, as well.

I'd also like to acknowledge our other distinguished guests.

And to the family and friends of our graduates, I'd like to offer a special welcome. The men and women that you see assembled here before us would not be here today without your support and encouragement. The road to a commission in the Coast Guard is a very, very challenging one, and nobody can endure it alone. Thank you for being there for these fine graduates especially through the past four years.

In a few short moments, you, the members of the Class of 2003 will embark on an unforgettable adventure. Your preparations have been long and difficult, that's for certain...but your rewards will be great.

You will stand the watch to ensure our ports and coastlines are safe from terrorists and if called upon, defend our nation and the rights we value so dearly. You will have the opportunity to save a father, brother, mother or daughter from a sinking vessel. You will help protect America's youth by keeping drugs off our streets. You will help protect America's youth by keeping drugs off our streets. You will help keep our waters and coastlines free of pollution and protect our natural resources. Most importantly, you will serve as leaders and role models for the enlisted men and women in the Coast Guard. I can think of nothing more rewarding than being able to make such a positive impact on the lives of so many people in so many different ways.

When you receive your commissions today, you will become part of a new generation of leadership in a service with a proud heritage and an incredibly bright future.

You will be the first Coast Guard Academy graduating class to receive commissions under the Department of Homeland Security.

That's quite a distinction that is all your own, and you should be very proud.

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We have all experienced a great deal of pride in becoming members of the Department of Homeland Security. Our mission to provide maritime security and safety for the American people has never been more clear, and our purpose has never been more sure.

Under the leadership of President Bush and Secretary Ridge, our capacity and capability to provide security and safety to America is growing. We have used that increasing capacity to remain strong and responsive to our full range of missions.

And there is a lot more hard work to be done. So I am very pleased to welcome you, the Academy Class of 2003, to join our ranks and help us get the job done.

We are very fortunate to be led by a Secretary who knows quite a bit about the challenges and opportunities of public service. He has served his country with distinction as an Army Infantryman in Vietnam, as a District Attorney, as a member of the United States Congress, and as Governor of Pennsylvania.

In October of 2001, following the tragic events of September 11th, he was sworn in as the first Director of the Office of Homeland Security, charged with developing and coordinating a comprehensive national strategy to strengthen the United States against terrorist threats or attacks.

On January 24th 2003, after receiving the nomination of President George W. Bush, he became the first Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege to introduce the Honorable Tom Ridge, Secretary of Homeland Security...and Secretary of the Coast Guard.

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