



Admiral James M. Loy
"Somewhere Else to Go"
OCS Class 1-99 Graduation
New London, CT
December 18, 1998

-

Amenities:

Thank you, Admiral Teeson

Ambassador [Spencer] Lopez [Cape Verde Ambassador to the United States].

Assistant Secretary [of Defense for Legislative Affairs Sandra K.] Stuart [the aunt of OC Patrick Murray who is scheduled to present his commission].

Other distinguished guests; family and friends; and the graduating members of Officer Candidate School Class 1-99.

Good morning.

-

Introduction: Significance of first OCS graduation since returning to CT.

All commissioning ceremonies are significant because they mark the bestowal of solemn trust, authority and responsibility. Commissioning is such a significant rite of passage that I've never met an officer of any grade, service, or status who couldn't name the exact date and place of his or her commissioning.

Today's ceremony carries additional significance because of its importance to the Coast Guard.

It has been almost 40 years since the last OCS class graduated in New London and the school moved to Yorktown, Virginia. One member of that last New London class, OCS Class 2-59, remains in public service today and asked me to convey his greetings.

Accordingly, I am pleased to extend congratulations to you from the Honorable Mortimer Downey, who as the Deputy Secretary of Transportation is the second ranking official in DOT.

I will not describe OCS's time in Yorktown as forty years in the wilderness—because the school was certainly not "wandering." During those wonderfully productive years, OCS commissioned almost three thousand officers in Yorktown, and its leadership and professional programs matured impressively at the Reserve Training Center.

Today's graduation of OCS Class 1-99 marks the fulfillment of the return home, and it marks an important milestone of the progress of our Leadership Development Center.

Some people have wondered at the desirability of training Academy cadets and officer candidates at the same facility. I think it's a great idea.

In the nineteenth century, we called this idea pluralism. Today we would call it diversity. But the common idea behind these terms—and behind the motto, "E Pluribus Unum"—is the notion that when people from different backgrounds form a "community," that is, when they come together with a common purpose, they can achieve a strength and an eminence that would be otherwise unattainable.

The notion of community is essential to the usefulness of diversity. Left alone, differences can cause chaos, confusion, and conflict. Effectively channeled into the pursuit of common goals, however, they increase our potential effectiveness.

The Coast Guard is a community, a community united by our commonly held values, traditions, and the purposes behind our national security, humanitarian, and environmental protection missions. The Leadership Development Center gives us the opportunity to introduce all of our enlisted and commissioned leaders to the same community so that the shared values can leaven the varied abilities and make diversity a constructive force.

That's why it is personally important for me to be here today. I'm delighted by the progress of the LDC, and I eagerly anticipate the great things that will result from the leadership community we are building.

-

An Officer and A Gentleman:

Not long after I finished my stint as School Chief at OCS in Yorktown, there was a Hollywood feature film set against the backdrop of the Navy's Aviation Officer Candidate School. How many of you recall the 1982 movie, *An Officer and a Gentleman*?

Richard Gere played the son of a hard drinking and rough living retired NCO. He grew up rootless and restless before somehow being accepted to OCS and finding himself placed under the unyielding authority of Louis Gossett, Jr., who won an Oscar for playing the tough drill sergeant.

They didn't get along.

Their relationship reminds me of a "Far Side" cartoon a few years back that showed two pitchfork-wielding devils overseeing hordes of lost souls condemned to slave labor in some hellish mine. As they looked down upon one particular victim who was cheerfully whistling as he went about his toil, one devil said to the other, "You know, we're just not getting through to that guy."

Richard Gere was that guy to Louis Gossett. The DI just couldn't get through to that guy. He wouldn't be intimidated by the Drill Instructor intensity. He couldn't completely conceal his smirks at Gossett's Drill Instructor banter. He was always looking to cut corners and find back doors. He simply refused to participate except on his own terms.

It drove Gossett's character absolutely nuts. Because Gere refused to allow himself to be changed, Louis Gossett decided that he was not officer material and resolved to drive him from the program. He kept him back from liberty one weekend just to put him through his own private crucible.

It's a memorable scene. Louis Gossett and Richard Gere are up on the concrete foundation of an old harbor defense battery commanding a bay on which Richard Gere's classmates can be seen water-skiing and otherwise enjoying a great liberty weekend.

Up on the hill things aren't so pleasant. Richard Gere is cranking out hundreds of pushups under a constant verbal assault from Louis Gossett, who tells him that he is not worthy of a commission and demands that he resign. Finally, under intense physical and emotional duress, Richard Gere breaks down and cries out, "I got nowhere else to go! I got nowhere else to go!"

At that moment, Louis Gossett's animosity softened. He accepted that admission as an indication of a new willingness to change and left off his efforts to drive Richard Gere from the program.

It's a tremendously moving moment, but something about it troubles me—and should trouble you as well.

I'm bothered by this concept of an officer candidate with nowhere else to go. Frankly, the idea alarms me—so much so that I wish it were practical to require all officers coming up for promotion to write letters to their selection panels proving that they had the capacity to undertake some other worthwhile enterprise if they were not permitted to remain commissioned officers.

It would hardly matter what other course they would choose—business, non-profit work, engineering, farming, scholarship, ministry, fine arts—anything constructive and honorable would be fine so long as it reminded them that they chose public service in the Coast Guard over some other viable option.

You can't stay unless you have somewhere else to go. If you've got nowhere else to go, then you must go. Sounds crazy, doesn't it?

Why do you suppose that I would deliberately encourage competent, honorable, competitive officers to think about other career options—especially at a time when a robust national economy is the chief obstacle to our recruiting and retention goals?

When you receive your commissions this morning, you do so with the clear understanding that you are accepting appointments into the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

As I speak, it is just about sunset in Baghdad. Missiles may be in the air this very moment. Receiving your commissions under these circumstances, you know very well that you may be called upon to place the good of your country or the safety of your shipmates ahead of your own life. With many of you in receipt of orders to cutters and one of you assigned to the Port Safety Unit Training Detachment, it is conceivable that some of you will be in hostile waters very soon.

The Coast Guard has always undertaken dangerous work in support of our national security. And I am confident that each of you will uphold our traditions of physical courage and selflessness if called upon to do so.

Combat is not the reason I want officers to have somewhere else to go. Even officers with nowhere else to go can understand that element of the oath.

No, it is the peacetime duties—the work undertaken by the overwhelming majority of Coast Guard officers for the overwhelming majority of their careers. It is possible that you will be called upon to lay down your life for the sake of your country, but it is more probable that you will be called upon to lay down your career for the sake of your character.

My subject is moral courage. What will an officer with nowhere else to go do in ambiguous circumstances?

An officer with nowhere else to go won't risk an unfavorable evaluation by giving the boss bad news or by admitting mistakes.

An officer with nowhere else to go doesn't understand the importance of teamwork and recognizing the contributions of others.

An officer with nowhere else to go can't muster the resolve to resist group think.

An officer with nowhere else to go cannot have the moral courage to elevate principle above personal advantage.

In the play *Mister Roberts*, the title character wins the affection of the crew with an easy-going, laid back approach to supervising his sailors. Their performance is predictably dreadful, but he becomes enormously popular. I am here to tell you that there is no virtue in being a laid-back leader. Anyone with poor posture can accomplish that feat.

Only an officer with somewhere else to go will spurn popularity and enforce the standards of vigilance that must be upheld in order to protect their ships and accomplish their missions.

Only an officer with somewhere else to go will have the moral courage to ignore the counsel of one's peers or the counsel of one's ease when duty stakes a contrary claim.

Only an officer with somewhere else to go can say, "I know this job is hard, but it's worth doing, and I'm going to do it as well as I can, and I'm going to keep getting better at it whether anybody recognizes my effort or not!"

Only an officer with somewhere else to go can say, "I'm going to stand for this principle even if it causes friction and jeopardizes my chances for promotion."

-

Conclusion:

This morning, all of you have somewhere else to go. You have all distinguished yourselves somewhere along the line in your enlisted service, your academic excellence, your leadership in community service, your athletic accomplishments, your reputation for integrity.

There's a booming job market out there. Employers are begging for intelligent, reliable people like you. You don't have to stay in the Coast Guard to make a living. Nevertheless, here you are, eager to accept commissions in the United States Coast Guard and the United States Coast Guard Reserve.

I know you all have somewhere else to go. And because that's so, I'm glad you chose to serve in our community of officers. You're not choosing an easy life. But you are choosing one that is worth pursuing. You've chosen well.

Welcome to the officer corps of the United States Coast Guard!

