
From the Chairman

I recently spoke at the graduation for the West Point Class of 2011, and while my remarks were mostly directed to the next generation of Army leadership, there is a broader message for all of us. What follows is the crux of those remarks:

Over the last 4 years, one of the greatest privileges of this position has been getting to know the men and women of the United States Army. Days like today remind us why our Army has played such a singular and essential role in our nation's history. In many ways, the story of the United States Army is the story of America—from our founding through the Civil War, a tumultuous 20th century, and right up until today.

I was thinking about a figure so prominent in that story, someone with whom I can in many ways relate: George Armstrong Custer. His story as a Cadet isn't too far from my own as a Midshipman, and, no, Custer and I did not know each other personally. I went to school in the '60s, but not the 1860s.

Just as my performance at that "other" Academy was, shall we say, less than ideal, Custer's record at West Point left something to be desired as well. A review of conduct records at the time—and they do keep track of those things—suggests he had marginal study habits and a proclivity for petty offenses, scoring demerits for "being late

to formation," "hair out of regs," and my personal favorite, "throwing snowballs," for which he logged three demerits.

I have to admit, I beat Custer in this department, having racked up 115 demerits in a single day during my last year. What happened back then remains highly classified, but let's just say that my offense was a little bit more serious than throwing snowballs. So, yes, I have "walked the Area" a few times. There were times when I owned the Area. I could have built condos.

Custer graduated last in his class, known as "the goat," which I note is the same name as Navy's mascot. I also finished near the bottom. I just hope our stories end differently.

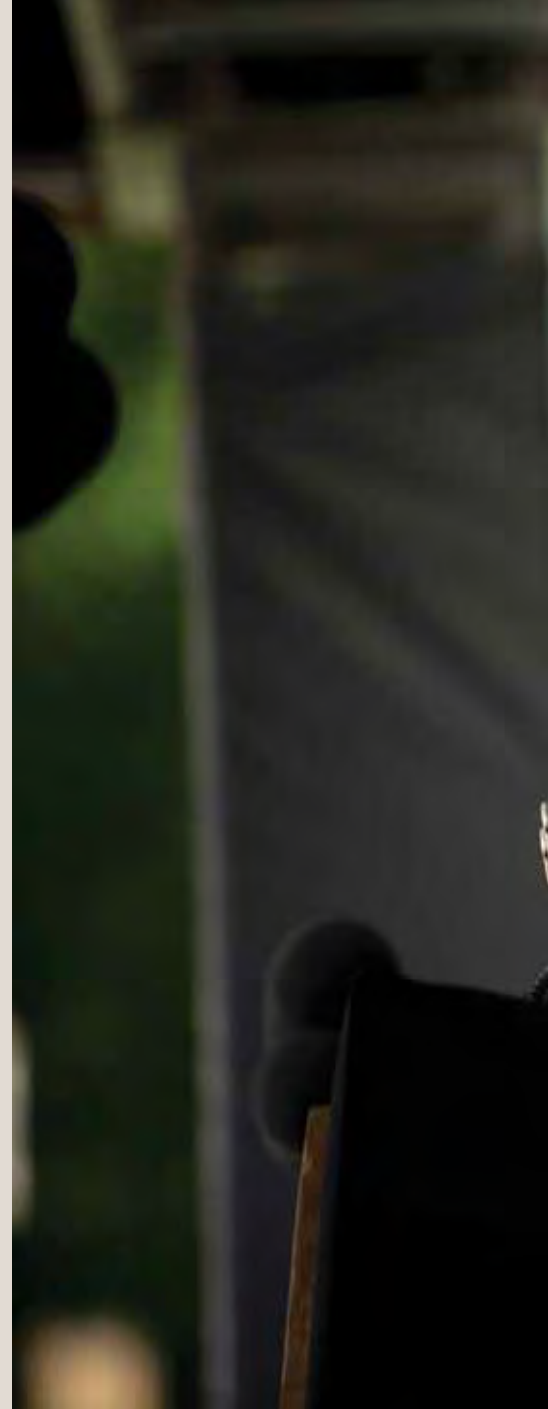
If my record in school said anything, it was, "Mullen, you are really going to have to work hard in the Navy"—and I did, and the opportunities this life of service has provided far exceeded anything I ever expected. I've quite simply had the chance to work with some of the best people in the world, gaining friends and mentors who have supported and enriched me.

Indeed, none of us get to where we are on our own. There's always someone

who helped make it happen. So you ought to remember those who got you here: your moms, dads, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other family members.

Families, thank you for raising these fine women and men in small towns and large cities all over this country, indeed, all over the world. You instilled in your kids a desire to serve, a willingness to sacrifice and to suffer—and I'm not just talking about mechanical engineering class.

Four years ago, you drove them through the Stony Lonesome Gate, and you handed them over. You said, "Here, take my child in this time of war, teach them how to lead and





Chairman delivers commencement address at United States Military Academy, May 2011

how to fight, teach them how to be good public stewards and good leaders to good Soldiers.”

It was a brave thing you did, and difficult. But it was probably more difficult driving away. As the parents of two Naval Academy graduates, my wife, Deborah, and I know that feeling all too well—the pride, the fear, the incredible elation of returning home and knowing you won’t have to pick up dirty socks off the bathroom floor anymore or scrape pizza cheese off the inside of the microwave or jump in the family car only to find the gas on “E.”

Today, of course, is really all about the Class of 2011. When this country was attacked on 9/11, most of you were just 11

or 12 years old, getting your braces off and getting yelled at for leaving dirty socks on the bathroom floor.

We have been at war nearly half your young lives. Yet all of you made a choice freely to serve your country, to come here to West Point. Your choice, your commitment, speaks well not only of your character, but also of your courage. For that, I deeply respect and thank each of you.

Today, you become a commissioned officer in the ranks of the most respected military on Earth, the vast majority of you heading into the Army, the very center of gravity of our force.

It’s an Army tempered by 10 years of combat, an expeditionary force that has literally rewritten just about every rule and every scrap of doctrine it follows to adapt to the reality it now faces.

It’s an Army not much bigger than it was on September 11 that is now organized around Brigade Combat Teams instead of divisions, that deploys more modular and more flexible capabilities than ever before, that can kill the enemy swiftly and silently one day and then help build a school or dig a well the next.

It’s an Army that understands the power of ballots as well as bullets and culture as well as conflict, an Army that has surged



Soldiers take cover behind hill while receiving enemy fire near village of Mereget, Logar Province, Afghanistan, May 2011

U.S. Army (Sean P. Casey)

to the fore of our national consciousness, not by being a bulwark but rather by being an agent of change.

It's an Army of flesh and blood, an Army of young men and women like yourselves who signed up willingly to face danger and to risk their lives for something greater than those lives.

Your job is to lead them and lead them well. That is what they expect of you. Actually, it isn't a job at all; it's a duty. For those of you who have no prior service, you are going to be awestruck at the manner in which these young Soldiers do their duty every single day.

A couple of years ago, I visited a unit high atop a hill in the Korengal Valley in Afghanistan. You stand up there and you look at the utter desolation of the place and the spartan conditions these young people are living in and you cannot help but get a little thick in the throat.

I awarded the Silver Star to a young officer at that outpost, Captain Greg Ambrosia, Class of 2005. He earned that medal for actions the year prior when he was a first lieutenant, just 2 years after graduating from West Point.

Leading his Soldiers in a nighttime air assault into enemy territory, Lieutenant Ambrosia established key high ground

observation posts. By morning, they encountered an enemy force that not only outnumbered them, but also surrounded their position, closing into within hand grenade range. Greg fiercely led his Soldiers to safety, placing himself in the line of fire. Under his lead, they repelled the opposing force long enough for support to arrive, denying the enemy key terrain.

When asked what inspired him to lead like that, he looked down at his boots and said simply, "My Soldiers."

I spent more time with the Army in my two terms as Chairman than I have any other Service, and I know what he means.

Those troops had been out there 14 months. They had seen a lot of tough fighting and lost a lot of good Soldiers, good buddies. They knew they were going home soon, but they wanted to point out to me all the places nearby where they could venture because they had learned about the culture and had figured out how to work with the tribal leaders.

When they yelled "hooah" after the ceremony, it wasn't because they were proud of their new medals. It was because they were proud of the difference they knew they were making together as a team. It's that team that has made possible the success we've seen in Iraq, the progress we are now making in

Afghanistan, the support we are providing over the skies of Libya, and the security we ensure around the globe.

You're going to be a member of that team. You're going to be expected to support and to have courage and to lead that team almost from day one, and that is a tall order, hard enough all by itself.

But today I'm going to give you another assignment. I'm going to ask you to take on yet another duty, an obligation far more complex and yet just as important as small-unit leadership. I'm going to ask you to be a Statesman as well as a Soldier. I'm going to ask you to remember that you are citizens first and foremost.

This great republic of ours was founded on simple ideas—simple but enduring. One of these is that the people, through their elected representatives, will, as the Constitution stipulates, raise an army and maintain a navy.

The people will determine the course that the military steers, the skills we perfect, the wars we fight. The people reign supreme. We answer to *them*.

We are therefore—and must remain—a neutral instrument of the state, accountable to our civilian leaders, no matter which political party holds sway.

But we can never forget that we, too, are the people. We, too, are voters and little league coaches and scout leaders and crossing guards—or at least we should be. We, too, have an obligation to preserve the very institutions that preserve us as a fighting force.

As George Washington so eloquently put it, "When we assumed the soldier, we did not lay aside the citizen."

So it is not enough today that we deploy. It is not enough today that we fight. It is not enough today that we serve, unless we serve also the greater cause of American self-government and everything that underpins it.

Self-government is not some sweet dish upon which a people may indulge themselves. It requires work and effort, sacrifice and strain. It may at times leave a bitter taste, and because it does, self-government burdens us equally with obligation, as well as privilege.

Now, please don't misunderstand me. I do not understate the importance of military service, and I am not suggesting that one who serves in uniform has not wholly or without honor rendered the Nation its due. Quite the contrary. I have been to the field hospitals. I have been to Dover. I've seen good men and women laid to rest at

Arlington. I know well the full measure of devotion that so many have paid.

Some of them have come from the Long Gray Line, like First Lieutenants Chris Goeke, Sal Corma, and Robert Collins from the Class of 2008, and most recently, First Lieutenant Daren Hidalgo, Class of 2009.

Daren was hit by shrapnel in early February but declined surgery to his left leg, opting instead for antibiotics and pain meds so he wouldn't be sidelined from his Soldiers. He joked with his dad on the phone about setting off metal detectors. Sixteen days later, Daren was killed by an antitank mine, the 81st graduate in these wars to be added to the somber role in Cullum Hall.

Daren came from a proud military family, his dad a 1981 West Point grad; his oldest brother, Class of 2006, currently serving his fourth tour in Afghanistan; and another brother, a Marine who served twice in Iraq.

Yes, you all understand quite well the sacrifices demanded by military service.

What I am suggesting is that we in uniform do not have the luxury anymore of assuming that our fellow citizens understand it the same way.

Our work is appreciated. Of that, I am certain. There isn't a town or a city I visit where people do not convey to me their great pride in what we do. Even those who do not support the wars support the troops. But I fear they do not know us. I fear they do not comprehend the full weight of the burden we carry or the price we pay when we return from battle. This is important because a people uninformed about what they are asking the military to endure is a people inevitably unable to fully grasp the scope of the responsibilities our Constitution levies upon them.

Were we more representative of the population, were more American families touched by military service, like that of the Hidalgo family, perhaps a more advantageous familiarity would ensue. But we are a small force, rightly volunteers, and less than 1 percent of the population, scattered about the country due to base closings, and frequent and lengthy deployments. We are also fairly insular, speaking our own language of sorts, living within our own unique culture, isolating ourselves either out of fear or from, perhaps, even our own pride.

The American people can therefore be forgiven for not possessing an intimate knowledge of our needs or of our deeds. We haven't exactly made it easy for them. And we have

been a little busy. But that doesn't excuse us from making the effort. That doesn't excuse us from our own constitutional responsibilities as citizens and Soldiers to promote the general welfare, in addition to providing for the common defense. We must help them understand, our fellow citizens, who so desperately want to help us.

The first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, once said, "Battles are won by the infantry, the armor, the artillery and air teams, by soldiers living in the rains and huddling in the snow. But wars are won by the great strength of a nation, the soldier and the civilian working together."

It's not enough that you learn your skill and lead your troops. You must also help lead your nation, even as second lieutenants. You must win these wars, yes, by working alongside civilians and with other departments of our government, with international forces, contractors, and non-governmental agencies.

But you also must win them at home by staying in touch with those of your troops who leave the Service; by making sure the families of the fallen are cared for and thought of and supported; by communicating often and much with the American people to the degree you can.

Today's operating environment is a dynamic landscape that grows more interconnected and interdependent every day. Yet we still struggle to make the most basic of connections, the relationships that matter so much. As you go from here, please seek also to go beyond the technical knowledge you've gained and broaden your views. Try to see things through others' eyes and leverage every opportunity to better understand and to be better understood.

Know that our trust and confidence go with you. The American people go with you. We are grateful for who you are and all that you will do for the Army, and shoulder-to-shoulder with your fellow citizens, for the Nation and for the world.

Thank you for your service. May God bless each and every one of you and your families, and may God bless America. **JFQ**

MICHAEL G. MULLEN

Admiral, U.S. Navy
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff



Chairman arrives at Forward Operating Base Jackson, Afghanistan, April 2011

U.S. Navy (Chad J. McNeeley)