

Col. Douglas Thomas Graduation Speech, Wootton High School 2009

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I am honored and humbled to have been asked, and feel honored to share the stage with the other speakers, distinguished graduates of Wootton high school and proud Patriots.

I will tell you that I feel too young to be speaking at a high school graduation. I always remembered the speakers being much older.

Thank you Wootton faculty and parents for your efforts in helping the graduates reach this important day.

Thank you for the kind words of introduction.

A fact that you won't find in my bio or the bios of my brothers is that I was the fourth of five brothers to attend Wootton. Notable for me in that prior to my arrival, my three older brothers had a combined 16 semesters at the high school, yet it wasn't until I received my first report card that my parents realized that the Wootton had an honor role. A minor, fleeting accomplishment, but in a family like mine, you have to take 'em when you can get 'em.

Graduates, you have reached a great milestone today and as you have already heard and will continue you to hear, today is all about the "Commencement" of the rest of your life. While you can be rightfully proud of all you have accomplished, some will tell you not to look back, the past is behind you, focus on the future, set short-term and long-term goals and charge headlong into the rest of your life. All good and reasonable advice. But I will tell you that you do need to take the opportunity to look back every once and awhile.

An upright piano used to sit in my parent's family room. Like many in other homes, it was covered with family pictures from throughout the years. Probably unique to ours were the four pictures that showed a young man in uniform shaking hands with a senior government official or military officer as he received his Naval Academy diploma. In three of the four pictures, the young man receiving his diploma is easily recognizable as one of my three brothers that I serve with in the military to this day. In the fourth one, mine, there is a great shot of Casper Weinberger and the back of my head. Despite being warned ahead of time to look straight ahead so that the picture would be perfect, I felt compelled to look into the audience towards my family and friends, and share the moment with them. I looked back to acknowledge what they meant to me and in recognition of the support they had given me throughout my four years at the Naval Academy knowing full well that I would not have reached that point without them. While the picture was not perfect, the moment was.

While the picture has often been used within the family as a lead in for a big dumb Marine joke, I have used that image throughout my adult life to remind me that with out the support of family, friends and the great people I have worked with, I would not be where I am today and had such a rich a fulfilling career without them.

So my advice Class of 2009, is to take the time to look back. Not to relish in your accomplishments, or to see who is chasing you, or if someone has your back, but to recognize those who support you in life. Today, be sure to thank your teachers, administrators, family and friends. They played a big role in getting you here. In the future, as you to continue to do great things with your life, be sure to recognize those who support and help you move forward in life. And when the time comes and you get a promotion or achieve some other significant milestone, not only look back, but reach back and help others move forward as well.

Thank you again. Semper Fi.