

**GEORGIA MILITARY COLLEGE  
COMMENCEMENT REMARKS**

**DR. TIM COLLINS**

MILLEDGEVILLE GEORGIA  
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THANK YOU, PRESIDENT CALDWELL, FOR THE KINDNESS OF YOUR HOSPITALITY AND THE OPPORTUNITY TODAY TO OFFER A THOUGHT OR TWO TO THESE AMAZING MEN AND WOMEN.

WHAT A JOY AND PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO BE HERE WITH DRENDA, MY BRIDE NOW OF 40 YEARS.

WE MET HERE ON THIS CAMPUS IN THE FALL OF 1976 ...

“START HERE – GO ANYWHERE” IS YOUR MOTTO? ABSOLUTELY!

I ALSO WANT TO THANK .... (LIST PROVIDED)

AS AN INSTITUTION THAT IS 142 YEARS OLD ... WOULD ANY ALUMNI WHO HAVE RETURNED HOME FOR THE WEEKEND PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF ALUMNI ... OUR LEGACY STUDENTS, SOON-TO-BE-ALUMNI ... PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.

FIRST RESPONDERS, MILITARY (ACTIVE, GUARD, RESERVE, RETIRED, OR VETS) ... PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.

HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS WHO TAKE CARE OF US IN AND OUT OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC ... PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.

A SHOUT OUT TO OUR CAMPUS POLICE ...

A SHOUT OUT TO ALL THOSE WHO MADE THIS WEEKEND POSSIBLE... FACULTY, STAFF, COACHES, COMMERCIAL PARTNERS ... THAT HAVE MADE THE CAMPUS SO BEAUTIFUL AND PREPARED ALL THE FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO US TODAY ...

WE ARE GATHERED TODAY TO REFLECT UPON COUNTLESS HOURS OF STUDY, SEEMINGLY HUNDREDS OF TESTS TAKEN, HOURS AND HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR OTHERS, AND INTENSE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC PREPARATION AND COMPETITION ... ALL LEADING TO THE COMPLETION OF A COLLEGE EXPERIENCE FOR AMERICA'S MOST RECENT HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES.

CONGRATULATIONS! ... TO EACH NEWLY MINTED GRADUATE ... TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUPPORTED YOU ALONG THE WAY ... AND TO THE FACULTY AND STAFF OF THIS AMAZING INSTITUTION WHO HAVE MOLDED THESE GRADUATES BEFORE US INTELLECTUALLY AND MORALLY TO BE CITIZENS WHO WILL CONTRIBUTE IN COUNTLESS WAYS AS YOU EACH SERVE YOUR COMMUNITIES.

TODAY MARKS THE FORMAL CEREMONY THAT SIGNIFIES TO THE ENTIRE PLANET THAT YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE REQUIREMENTS NECESSARY AND HAVE EARNED – EARNED! – YOUR DEGREES.

ONLY 7 PEOPLE OUT OF EVERY 100 IN THE WORLD HAVE EARNED A COLLEGE DEGREE ... WE ARE PROUD OF YOU AND ALSO HOPE YOU FEEL A SENSE OF GRATITUDE TOWARDS THOSE WHO HELPED YOU TO THIS POINT IN YOUR LIFE.

YOU KNOW IT ... WE KNOW IT ... I KNOW IT ... NO ONE GAVE YOU ANYTHING ... YOU *EARNED* IT!

AND I HAVE A NEWSFLASH FOR YOU: WHEN YOU WALK OUT TODAY WITH YOUR DEGREE IN YOUR HAND – THE WORLD IS READY, WILLING, AND ABLE TO **KNOCK YOU DOWN!**

YES ... YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS ARE GOING TO PAT YOU ON THE BACK TODAY, BUT THE WORLD IS NOT GOING TO LET THOSE FEELINGS OF ACCOMPLISHMENT LINGER FOR TOO LONG.

BUT KNOW THIS: GMC HAS PREPARED YOU WELL ... YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT TO DO.

THIS GIFT YOUR FAMILIES ... YOUR FACULTY ... YOUR INSTITUTION ... HAVE GIVEN TO YOU ... THE GIFT OF A HIGHER LEVEL OF EDUCATION THAT HAS PREPARED YOU

WELL BECAUSE WHEN THE WORLD IS ATTEMPTING TO SET YOU BACK ON YOUR HEELS IN AN EFFORT TO KNOCK YOU DOWN, YOU WILL INSTINCTIVELY KNOW...

- TO GET BACK UP.

IT HAS PREPARED YOU TO HELP OTHERS ... SOME WHO CANNOT HELP THEMSELVES ...MANY WHO CANNOT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

- TO GET BACK UP.

YOUR EXPERIENCES HERE HAVE TAUGHT YOU ABOUT SERVICE; WITH A DEEP SENSE OF GRATITUDE ... THINK OF ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED YOU REACH THIS COMMENCEMENT.

THINK OF THE SETBACKS YOU HAD DURING YOUR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY ... AND THAT, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF OTHERS, YOU WERE ABLE...

- TO GET BACK UP.

YOU KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

YOU COULD HAVE QUIT ... YOU DIDN'T.

YOU COULD HAVE WALKED AWAY ... YOU DIDN'T.

YOU COULD HAVE COMPLAINED IT WAS TOO TOUGH ... YOU DIDN'T.

YOU COULD HAVE FOUND A MILLION EXCUSES TO STOP ... YOU DIDN'T.

YOU LIKELY HAD DIFFICULT ASSIGNMENTS ... DIFFICULT FACULTY ... DIFFICULT PERSONAL CHALLENGES ... AND EACH TIME YOU WERE KNOCKED DOWN ... YOU CHOSE

- TO GET BACK UP.

WHAT DID GMC TEACH ME WHEN I GRADUATED IN 1978?

- TO BELIEVE IN MYSELF, SURE
- TO BE CONFIDENT, SURE
- TO BE RESILIENT, SURE
- TO BE BETTER PREPARED FOR FUTURE ACADEMIC ENDEAVORS, SURE

BUT WHAT STARTED HERE ... IN THIS VERY PLACE ... AND GOT ME READY TO “GO ANYWHERE” ... WAS NOT THE OUTCOME – BUT THE PATH FORWARD ... THE WAY FORWARD.

HEADS UP: THE ACTUAL SECRET INGREDIENT TO MAKING A DIFFERENCE AND HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD AROUND ME IS WHAT *WE* HAVE LEARNED AS GRADUATES OF GMC:

- *WAIT FOR IT ... TO **GET BACK UP.***

LET ME SHARE ONE OF A 1000 EXAMPLES.

IN 1996, I FOUND MYSELF PRIVILEGED TO COMMAND AN AIR FORCE FIGHTER SQUADRON ... THE 79<sup>TH</sup> FIGHTER SQUADRON OUT OF SHAW AFB, SC ... 28 F-16S, 300+ PILOTS, MAINTAINERS, AND STAFF, AND THE MISSION TO PROTECT ALLIED FORCES AS WE PENETRATED IRAQI AIRSPACE EVERY DAY AND EVERY NIGHT.

FOR YOU SEE ... OUR JETS WERE EQUIPPED WITH SPECIAL RADAR-KILLING MISSILES ... OUR JOB WAS TO SUPPRESS ENEMY AIR DEFENSE CAPABILITIES ... SO WE WERE THE “FIRST IN” AND THE “LAST OUT” OF HOSTILE AIRSPACE FOR EVERY SINGLE MISSION, EVERY SINGLE DAY, EVERY SINGLE MONTH, ALL YEAR LONG, FOR YEARS AND YEARS.

NO ONE ENTERED ENEMY AIRSPACE UNLESS WE WERE IN FRONT OF THEM .... AND AFTER EVERYONE WAS “OUT” ... THEN WE WOULD DEPART COVERING THEIR BACKS.

ON JUNE 25, 1996, WE WERE DEPLOYED TO SAUDI ARABIA, LIVING IN A SPRAWLING APARTMENT COMPOUND WITH THOUSANDS OF FRENCH, BRITISH, AND AMERICAN FORCES.

THIS WAS OUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME.

ON THIS PARTICULAR MONDAY, WE HAD TAKEN A RARE “DAY OFF” FOR THE ENTIRE FORCE.

I’M SURE THE IRAQI’S WERE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT ALL DAY LONG WHY WE WERE NOT FLYING.

SHORTLY BEFORE HEADING TO BED, WALKING DOWN THE HALLWAY OF MY APARTMENT AT 10 PM ...

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING I NEEDED TO DO IN THAT MOMENT ... AND IN THE MINUTES, HOURS, AND DAYS THAT FOLLOWED ... WAS TO DO WHAT GMC TAUGHT ME ... WHAT GMC HAS TAUGHT YOU:

- TO **GET BACK UP**.

THIS LESSON ... TO GET BACK UP ... IS IMPORTANT NOT FOR ME ... NOT EVEN FOR YOU ... BUT FOR OTHERS: FOR THOSE YOU WILL SERVE AND LEAD.

MAKE NO MISTAKE ... A COLLEGE GRADUATE IS “BY DEFINITION” A LEADER.

99% OF EVERY ORGANIZATION IN AMERICA – FOR-PROFIT, NON-PROFIT, EDUCATIONAL, MILITARY – HAS A COLLEGE GRADUATE LEADING THAT ORGANIZATION AT NEARLY EVERY LEVEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

YOUR EMPLOYER WILL HAVE A DIFFERENT SET OF EXPECTATIONS FOR YOU TOMORROW MORNING THAN THEY WOULD HAVE HAD FOR YOU YESTERDAY AFTERNOON.

AT THE TOP OF THAT LIST OF EXPECTATIONS IS THIS:

*SERVE OTHERS* – CO-WORKERS, CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS, THE ORGANIZATION

GMC HAS PREPARED YOU FOR NOT JUST A CAREER OR FOR FUTURE ADVANCED EDUCATION; SHE HAS PREPARED YOU FOR LIFE.

NOTHING WILL MAKE THIS INSTITUTION PROUDER THAN IF EACH ONE OF YOU GOES FORTH TO LEAD AND SERVE OTHERS WITH HUMILITY AND RESPECT AND DIGNITY.

BUT WHAT MUST YOU DO?

WHEN THINGS DON'T GO RIGHT AS YOU LEAD OTHERS ...

- GET BACK UP

WHEN OTHERS DEMONSTRATE CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR AS YOU SEEK TO SERVE OTHERS ...

- GET BACK UP

WHEN YOU CONFRONT DISAPPOINTMENT AND FAILURE ...

- GET BACK UP

LADIES AND GENTLEMAN ... I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TOMORROW WILL BRING EACH ONE OF YOU ... EXCEPT ONE THING FOR CERTAIN

- YOU WILL FAIL ...

YOU WILL FAIL TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

TODAY, WE ACTUALLY ARE CELEBRATING YOUR ABILITY TO OVERCOME FAILURE AND CONTINUE ON UNTIL YOU HAVE ACHIEVED SUCCESS ...

- YOU ARE NOT DEFEATED WHEN YOU FAIL,
- YOU ARE DEFEATED WHEN YOU QUIT!

THIS SKILL ... TO GET BACK UP ... TAUGHT TO YOU IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM IN ALL OF YOUR GMC-RELATED ACTIVITIES IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER ... WILL SERVE YOU WELL ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE.

BUT YOU ALSO LEARNED OTHER THINGS THAT I DON'T MEAN TO MINIMIZE.

SUCH AS ...

- YOU LEARNED THE LESSONS OF COMMUNITY AND SPORTSMANSHIP AND HONOR AND INTEGRITY.
- YOU LEARNED HOW TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR AND A GOOD FRIEND, AND YOU LEARNED WHAT IT IS TO BE “MY BROTHER’S KEEPER.”
- YOU LEARNED THAT YOU CAN BE SUCCESSFUL WITH SOMETHING ... AND NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL AS SOMEBODY.

AND WHEN COVID-19 CAME INTO YOUR LIVES YOU LEARNED THE INVALUABLE LESSON OF HOW TO ADJUST AND HANDLE LIFE’S CURVE BALLS, A LESSON THAT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY MAKE YOU MORE RESILIENT THROUGHOUT THE REST OF YOUR LIVES.

YOUR TIME AND EXPERIENCES IN THIS DISCIPLINED ENVIRONMENT OFFERED YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS FAITH AND VALUES IN ACTION – FROM STAFF, COACHES, FACULTY, OTHER STUDENTS, AND EACH OTHER.

YOU LEARNED NOT ONLY HOW TO BE A LEADER IN SERVICE TO OTHERS ... YOU BECAME A LEADER IN SERVICE TO OTHERS.

AND WHILE THERE MAY HAVE BEEN TIMES WHERE YOU WERE DISHEARTENED, WE MUST REMEMBER THAT WE HAVE MADE IT THROUGH TO THIS MOMENT ... THIS TIME TO CELEBRATE AND HONOR YOUR ACHIEVEMENT.

WE HAVE FACED THE CHALLENGES, AND WE HAVE PERSEVERED.

WE HAVE SEEN SADNESS YET RENEWED OUR HOPE.

IN EVERY INSTANCE ... IN ORDER TO BE HERE TODAY ... YOU GOT BACK UP.

AND WE HAVE RECOGNIZED THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER AND LEARNED THAT ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE – AND A COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING.

IF THERE IS A SINGLE LESSON THAT SUMS UP ALL OF THIS – IT IS THIS:

- LIFE IS DIFFICULT AND *REQUIRES* SACRIFICE.

YOU HAVE HAD THIS OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS LIFE LESSON THAN ANY GENERATION OF STUDENTS IN THREE DECADES!

AND I AM PROUD OF YOU FOR YOUR RESILIENCE, LEADERSHIP WITH AND FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND THE CHARITY YOU EXTENDED TO OTHERS THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC.

SO HERE WE ARE ... THE MOMENT YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING TOWARDS.

YOUR TIME IN THIS COMMUNITY AS A STUDENT CONCLUDES TODAY, IN THIS MOMENT.

BUT LET THIS NOT BE THE END TO EITHER YOUR EDUCATION OR YOUR LEARNING ... OR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS STORIED INSTITUTION .... YOUR INSTITUTION.

I ENCOURAGE YOU... NO, I CHALLENGE YOU ... TO CONTINUE YOUR SELF-IMPROVEMENT... EVERY DAY ... FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIVES.

- SUCCESS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IS NEVER FINAL.

TODAY IS NOT AN END POINT BUT A JUMP OFF POINT ... THE MARK OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN ANEW ... MAKE A COMMITMENT TO BEING A LONG-LIFE LEARNER!

I URGE YOU TO EMBRACE OPPORTUNITIES THAT COME BEFORE YOU AS YOU TAKE YOUR PLACE IN THE WORLD WITH CONFIDENCE, WITH GRACE, WITH HUMILITY ... ALWAYS MEETING OTHERS WITH CHARITY AND KINDNESS –

- SPEAKING THAT LANGUAGE THAT THE DEAF CAN HEAR
- AND THE BLIND CAN SEE.

AS YOU STEP OUT OF THIS BULLDOG EXPERIENCE ... THE MOMENT HAS ARRIVED WHEN YOU MUST NOW STEP UP TO A LIFE OF SERVING OTHERS.

IN CLOSING, I RETURN TO THE CADET PRAYER THAT WE RECITED DURING MY TIME AS A STUDENT HERE:

CADET PRAYER

- ALMIGHTY GOD, GENERAL OF ALL LIFE'S FORCES, COMMANDER OF NATURE, WE PRAISE THY HOLY NAME.
- VISIT THY PRESENCE UPON US AND ALL FORMER GMC CADETS. REINFORCE US IN OUR QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE, INTEGRITY, AND LEADERSHIP. INSTILL IN US HUMANITARIANISM AND BLESS OUR ENEMY WHOEVER HE MIGHT BE.
- EXTINGUISH FROM OUR DAILY LIVES GREED AND ENVY, AND MAKE US CHAMPIONS OF RIGHT AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF HONOR.
- MAY WE GLORIFY THY NAME IN VICTORY AND BE COURAGEOUS IN DEFEAT. HELP US EVER TO THINK FIRST OF OUR COMRADES, AND SECONDLY OF OURSELVES, AND ALWAYS OF THEE.
- GUIDE OUR FOOTSTEPS AND CLEANSE OUR MINDS.
- MAY WE BE FIRST IN THE SERVICE OF OUR COUNTRY AND FIRST IN THY SERVICE.
- LEAD US, O LORD, THAT WE MIGHT LEAD.
- AMEN

GOD BLESS YOU

GOD BLESS GEORGIA MILITARY COLLEGE

GOD BLESS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.