

Maine Maritime Academy Commencement
Dr. William J. Brennan
Castine, Maine
May 7, 2016

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to Maine Maritime Academy on this, our 75th Anniversary, to help us celebrate the Class of 2016. Congratulations. You are the 73rd class to graduate from this wonderful institution. You have worked hard to earn your degrees and all of us here today are proud of your accomplishments. I want to thank you for helping with my ongoing education as president and I want to join you in acknowledging and thanking those who have helped you reach this milestone in your lives: your parents, families, friends, teachers and professors, and others who have supported you along this journey. It is a great day for all of us.

Joining us on this memorable occasion is another proud individual who will see his niece graduate today as well as honoring us by being our Commencement speaker, General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. I will have more to say later in our program about his many accomplishments.

I would like to recognize some of the other people here behind me who are important partners with the Academy. It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge David Tubman, Chief Counsel of the Maritime Administration. MARAD is significant in the maritime education and training partnership that we and the other state maritime academies enjoy and I am very pleased that Mr. Tubman is here to celebrate with us today. Also joining me on the stage is Captain Michael Baroody of the U.S. Coast Guard, and Captain Timothy Cooper of the United States Navy, thank you for being here to administer the oaths to our graduates. There is another individual here who I know many of you recognize. Commandant of Midshipmen Captain Nate Gandy, I thank you for conducting the Regimental Change of Command. There are others up here with me who will be introduced as our program proceeds.

In 1941, the legislature of the State of Maine established the Maine Maritime Academy on the site of what had previously been a teacher's college here in Castine, Maine. This decision was largely in response to the war effort and the desperate need for trained mariners to supply our troops and defend our shores. World War II required a rapid build-up of the US Merchant Marine with a critical need for trained deck and engineering officers. Maine Maritime Academy ramped up to meet that challenge, producing close to 300 officers in its first commencement year, many of whom went on to serve at sea during the war. I am pleased to introduce to you two individuals who came to Castine the year the doors of the new Maine Maritime Academy opened 75 years ago and who were among the first graduates of the Academy in 1943. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my honor to introduce Captain Richard Spear and my Dad, Captain William Brennan. Gentlemen, please stand and receive the admiration of all of us.

Our success as an institution over the years has been due to people like Captain Spear and my Dad, and thousands of other graduates of the Academy whose reputation for dedication and service has reflected upon all of us. Those of you in the Class of 2016 have heard me say that the credentials you receive from the Academy, your diploma and licenses, have value because of those who came before you – namely our alumni, and it is now your turn to continue the tradition and to help maintain the stellar reputation that is Maine Maritime Academy. Some of those who

have contributed to that reputation include Rear Admiral Thomas Shannon, MMA Class of 1982, and presently the Commander of the Military Sealift Command. He is with us today along with several other distinguished alumni who have been keepers of our heritage. Some of our alumni with us, I am also proud to tell you, are the fathers and mothers of young men and women graduating today; graduates who follow in their parents' footsteps to maintain the honor and reputation of the Maine Maritime Academy.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our founding, our mission remains the same: to provide a quality education, focused on marine and related programs, to encourage rigorous self-discipline, promote curiosity, and to provide graduates with the skills, ethics and knowledge needed to succeed in a global economy.

Again this year we saw our rankings climb steadily to unexpected heights, thanks to the efforts of our faculty, staff and student body. For the second year in a row, Money magazine released its annual list of the best colleges and Maine Maritime Academy was again ranked as the top public college in America. This is not purely a question of pride, but has a demonstrable effect on our enrollment and placement numbers and ensures that our name is becoming ever more well-known throughout the US and beyond.

Whether you take your degree in transportation, engineering, sciences or business, you should realize the value of the training and leadership skills you have developed here. Even the respected Brookings Institute addressed the value of a Maine Maritime Academy education when it ranked us and 14 other colleges including Harvard University, the top colleges in the country for adding value to the earning potential of their alumni. These are shared accomplishments; many people over the years have made these rankings possible, and they are points of pride for us all.

Yes, this has been a year of much success; success I see arrayed before me and I have a great sense of pride in your accomplishments. To be sure, along with the extreme highs of success this past year, we have also experienced the depths of sorrow that touched all of us who are part of this Maine Maritime Academy family. We grieved together the sudden loss of five of our alumni in the tragic incident involving the *El Faro* and we have struggled with the loss of one of our immediate family, a sorrow that was just brought to closure this past week. Indeed, this past year has been marked by moments that served to show how close a community we are, how dedicated our alumni are to this institution, and in what high regard we are held by others throughout Maine and beyond.

Your training here has given you all the confidence needed to lead and to follow, and to know that while the sea is to be respected, it is not to be feared. In fact, it was this class that heroically rescued a shipwrecked sailor 520 miles off the coast of Nova Scotia; a poignant reminder that in amongst the things we dealt with this past year, our words and our actions are testament to who we are – we are MARINERS and we are all responsible for each other, in good times and in bad. You demonstrated that at sea, just as in life, we look out for each other and help one another.

All of our graduates are known for their hands-on experience, their can-do attitude, their superior work ethic and the ability to think on their feet. That is why our placement rate for new graduates

employed in their career field within 90 days is consistently over 90% and most of you graduating here today already have a job waiting for you. As I said at the outset, you owe a debt of thanks for this to all those alumni who came before you and helped to cement our reputation. The MMA family of graduates reaches far and wide across the United States and across the globe. Don't hesitate to use the network that is available to you as you advance in your careers and don't forget to pay it forward by lending a hand to those who follow in your footsteps.

We wish you every success as you begin your lives beyond college. Remember that your future will always be a work in progress so that you can learn and grow with each new experience.

As you've heard me say often, we are a family, one community, and these ties will bind you to us all of your lives. We look out for each other and support one another. Our bonds are strong and over time, they will become even stronger.

Wherever your career path takes you around the world, remember that you now are keepers of our heritage; a heritage that began 75 years ago. You have made me proud, now go out into the world and make yourselves prouder than you are today – make the community proud – make us all proud of the Maine Maritime Academy.

Congratulations.