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There is, in the book of Common Prayer, a thanksgiving to God for having "brought us safely to the beginning of this day." Now, I don't know how many of you had doubts about this day arriving, but I am sure that at least some of you, as you faced the examination period, had at least some serious reservations that you would make it. But you did!

And today is your day. It is the day of graduation. It is your commencement. Some of you have—and will—receive honors — some of you will end today that long process of formal education which began when you were still a child. For others of you, this commencement simply means that you will soon begin further studies for your chosen profession. In any case, a commencement is a beginning.

And especially in your case, it is a beginning of the duties and responsibilities of adults. No longer can you think of yourselves as youngsters. Nor can we, who have already passed this landmark, let you shirk the duties of citizenship which you must now assume.

Today you are happy that one of your goals in life has been fulfilled. Today your parents are proud that you have reached this point with honor. And if your teachers are not quite as proud, knowing perhaps as they do the faults which you have managed to conceal from your parents, they are nevertheless glad —maybe because they will not have to put up with you again — but nevertheless glad that they have had a part in helping you become what you are this day.

Traditionally on this day, speakers such as I, have come before graduating classes to praise them; to inspire them; to challenge them to the opportunities of the future. But I am not yet so old that I am willing to become a part of tradition. Yes, I praise you for your success; I sincerely hope that what I have to say may in some way inspire you; I indeed challenge you to accept and conquer the challenges which lie in your future. But, if I may depart from the past traditions, I would like for us to examine another facet of what is today.

Memorial Day is really after all, only a brief instant in the recorded history of mankind. It was begun on a national basis in 1868 and it first sought to honor the Northern dead in the War between the States. It was started, we are told, because a wife of a Union general saw the women of the south placing flowers on the graves of both the Union and Confederate dead. Although we in North Carolina do not celebrate this as a holiday, preferring still our earlier celebration this month, it now stands for honoring the dead of all the wars which have been fought since Appomattox.

But I think of it not solely as a day to memorialize those fallen in battle but as a day to praise all those who have gone before us and who have had a part, no matter how small or how insignificant, in building this great land of ours.

Actually, you stand before us today as a memorial. You are a memorial first of all to your own talents and energy. For had you not tried to make the best of what you have, you would not be here today. Yet, you are more than a memorial to yourselves. You are a memorial to your parents who gave you life, who nurtured and sustained you, who sheltered and protected you. And behind your parents you are a memorial to your forefathers, for you bear within yourself the seed of all mankind, the successes and failures of the human race.

Family aside, you are also a memorial to our society. For our society has provided you with the blessings of freedom and liberty, the institutions which have been set up to help you grow and develop to the fullest extent of your capacities, and the nation which is the envy of men everywhere.

You are a memorial to those nameless teachers in church and school who have helped to increase your knowledge and mold your character. For them you are the living embodiment of the American dream. The privileges we enjoy we cannot accept as our just due. We can only thank those who have gone before us, military men and civilian alike, for making it possible for us to live in the land of the free. Yours is indeed a great heritage. It is not your right, just because you exist. It is your right because others have worked to give it to you. It is your right because more than a million American young men have died on a thousand battlefields from one end of the world to the other to preserve for you and me these blessings of liberty and freedom which are ours to enjoy.

God provided us with a land blessed in natural resources. He gave us a land broad enough to absorb the peoples of many nations. He gave us a government which provides us with privileges no people elsewhere on the earth are privileged to enjoy.

And, assuredly, he gave us our faults, faults all too common to man. Ours is not the perfect society. But despite its faults, if we reckon the history of man, it gives each of us benefits to enjoy which have never before been in the possession of man.

And so, I would hope, on this Memorial Day, this graduation day, this commencement day, that you would voice with me a fervent dedication, a solemn prayer, that simply says as a memorial to all that have gone before us, a heartfelt loyal and simple declaration of sincere dedication to MY COUNTRY, mine and yours.

On this Memorial Day more than one-half million American men are on the other side of the globe, in the filth of dirty fox holes, and in the stench of ghostly trenches and in the slime of dripping dugouts, in the boiling suns of relentless heat, in the torrential rains of devastating storms, and the loneliness and utter desolation of jungle trails, the bitterness of long separation of those they love and cherish. There they seek to preserve liberty for free men everywhere and as they do so let us rededicate ourselves that their efforts shall not be in vain. For this you must remember — that so long as tyranny exists in South Viet Nam or anywhere in the world, free men everywhere are threatened.

There are those who question the correctness of our nation's actions — there are those who doubt — but so long as there is an American boy on any battlefield I shall always subscribe to the sentiment expressed by Commdore Stephen Decatur, during the war of 1812, "MY COUNTRY," he said, IN HER AFFAIRS WITH HER NATIONS MAY SHE ALWAYS BE RIGHT * BUT RIGHT OR WRONG MY COUNTRY."

Yes, we have faults, yes we enjoy the benefits our heritage has given us. Yes, as our forefathers before us have dreamed, we too can, we too must dream.

North Carolina's own Thomas Wolfe expressed it in words I can never hope to excell. Let me share with you on your commencement his dream. He said:

"I think the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come. I think the true discovery of our own democracy is still before us. And I think that all these things are certain as the morning, as inevitable as noon. I think I speak for most men living when I say that our America is Here, is Now, and beckons on before us, and that this glorious assurance is not only our living hope, but our dream to be accomplished."

Today is Memorial Day. Today is Graduation Day.
Today is the commencement day that you can begin to
make the tomorrow mornings of our national life the
inevitability of noon.