

FOR RELEASE UPON DELIVERY

ADDRESS

By

TOM C. CLARK

Attorney General of the United States

Prepared for Delivery

at

Graduation Exercises

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

LEXINGTON, VA.

Wednesday, June 11, 1947

11:00 AM EST

It is good to be back on the Post. Tender memories recall happy incidents of my "rat" days here. "Tender" - the word - brings to mind my condition at finals - but that is a different type of "tenderness" from that I have now.

Never did I dream then that I would return in 29 years and take part in the exercises at "Finals". Much has happened since - in fact, all of you cadets have come into the world.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has built here a great institution of brick and mortar. The Cadets of VMI have built here a great spirit that has molded the character of many great Americans. But it was not always so. For upon this beautiful hill near Lexington, many years ago, a little brick house was constructed in which were placed arms and ammunition for the use of the scattered people of this mountain region. A Captain, with a small number of unformidable-looking soldiers, and the usual accompaniment of military music, were sent here to guard it. But, unpretentious as it appeared, it stood here, accepted as a matter of course, for many a long year, awakening no attention, and creating no interest.

However, after a while a young lawyer of Lexington, John T. L. Preston, conceived the idea that this ammunition depot was capable of more honorable and efficient service. Gradually he formed a plan of using the Arsenal as the foundation of a State Military School. Thus the State would spend her money, not only to protect her military stores, but to train civilian soldiers, who, scattered throughout her entire domain, would take into all the peaceful avocations of life an experimental knowledge of military tactics. And, should peril come, the State, in her "citizen soldiers", had a corps of officers and men on call, who, from the pulpit and the platform;

(OVER)

from the plough and the shop; from the student's cell and the teacher's desk; from the merchant's counter and the lawyer's office, in a moment, became drill-masters to her undisciplined troops, and captains to lead them into action. It was a brilliant conception; and subsequent events bear full testimony to its value.

Mr. Preston matured his plan and secured the assistance of James McDowell - my great Uncle - who was a member of the Virginia Assembly. On November 11, 1839 a small company of 17 cadets, in full uniform, answered the first roll call and kept step to the first drum beat of the Virginia Military Institute.

As you who graduate today walk out of barracks into life you take with you something that only death itself can take away - that is the indomitable spirit of VMI. The fight for that spirit began back there with those 17 cadets and it has continued for 108 years since. It was present at New Market, at Manila, at Chateau Thiery, at Anzio and on the seven seas. The spirit that never says die! When I think of the magnificent contribution that the "boys of the Institute" have made to the life of the Nation - and of the world - I am not only proud, but thrilled! We are the men of Jackson - of Lejeune - of Marshall. The sons of VMI have written world history, a story of devotion, loyalty and military genius. The latest is our General George Marshall - the Secretary of State - who guided the over-all plan of victory in World War II. A great American - General Marshall - typifies the "Spirit of VMI".

This heritage did not come to us in a cellophane package - tied with bows of silk. No, this glorious heritage came to us preserved by the valor, the sacrifice, the blood, the toil and the achievements of generations. It must be fought for day by day by each succeeding corps of cadets.

It was this spirit that gave to our Nation so many fighting men in World War II.

Now that the shooting war is over many are forgetting this spirit - this ideal - that we call American. But we cannot cease our struggle for those freedoms that we cherish. Tyranny and denial of liberty to the individual, dangerously present in certain parts of the world today, are as old as recorded history.

"Nazism", "Fascism", "Communism", and other similar "isms" that threaten our future are not new forms of government. They are as old as time itself.

Destructive philosophy is not dead. Dictators and despots still arise in many places. They follow the same old pattern-attacking the ideals of humanity, and trying to undermine the integrity of democratic institutions.

When this situation is recognized, we will clearly understand that a conflict is now going on whether freedom or despotism shall shape the world's future - whether liberty and justice and the brotherhood of free men shall prevail.

The defense of our great legacy of freedom must never lag. Those who guard our watch tower of liberty must not sleep. Vigilance must not take a holiday.

In this conflict we have a democratic ideal to defend, with many weapons and upon many fronts. For the defense of liberty we must be strong in many different ways. Recent developments that cloud our national and world horizons impel me to speak to you of military strength.

Some critics raise the cry of military dictatorship every time an honest and open effort is made to strengthen our national defense. It is

(OVER)

only an echo of the false cry that was raised against George Washington in the dark days of the Revolution when he pointed out the folly of short term recruiting and asked for enlistments for the duration of the war. It was lifted against the proposal of James McDowell and others to create a civilian training school here.

It was lifted against Andrew Jackson when he advocated an effective system of peacetime training.

It was raised against Theodore Roosevelt when he urged, as a citizen, the enlargement of our army after World War I had broken out in Europe.

The cry of the past was used once more against our Nation's leaders when they planned for preparedness as World War II was being forced upon us. The voices of well-meaning Americans - mingled with those of sinister groups - hampered our war efforts, causing additional loss of life and money, because we were "too late with too little".

All of us are, of course, hopeful there will be no more wars. Certainly there can be no "victor" in atomic warfare. We must continue our efforts - now being made by the President, the Secretary of State and our delegate to the United Nations - to attain a trustworthy program of world-wide scope to outlaw war and place over the world a protective security. Certainly we must eliminate the use of atomic weapons; otherwise there will be no civilization. We must channel atomic energy into a powerful implement of world peace and not of destruction. But we must be realistic. So long as there is no world system of control of the use of such energy, there is no guaranty of non-use in war or of security in peace. Without such control, we must not only retain the bomb but we must proceed actively with its improvement.

In this age of atomic warfare we must be prepared to meet the onslaught of any force. I am told that the damage we inflicted on Germany in three and a half years of saturation bombing might be accomplished overnight with the atomic bomb. If you will but visualize with me the manifold problems that accompany an atomic-shattered city, you will quickly understand the complexity and urgency of the task before us. I am sure you will agree that it would be beyond the ability of a volunteer organization, set up after such an emergency, to cope with such a situation.

A strong nation - physically, mentally and spiritually - is our necessity. It is the bedrock of our security. America must continue to stand as the inspiration to all people who believe in freedom and respect for the individual. These basic principles are superior to any security based on dictatorship or other ideology of domination by the state.

We must not take our democracy for granted. We must keep it vibrant and alive to expanding needs, both domestically and in the foreign field. To do this we need a healthy economy with full production, full employment, and industrial peace. We must avoid the recurring inflationary crises. Depression is a constant source of fear to our people and encouragement to our enemies.

We need a program of education, including advanced work, available to all who can qualify on their own merits and without regard to race. This is necessary to give us an informed public opinion fully cognizant of their duties as citizens. Such a program would bring to every citizen the realization of his responsibilities to the community and the nation - it would teach the benefits of democracy, the American way of life.

We need an improved program of physical and mental health. We must not squander our most precious asset - a healthy, mentally alert citizenry. It is

(OVER)

amazingly unbelievable that one-fourth of all young men examined for service in World War II were rejected for physical reasons.

We need a deeper respect for democracy and what it stands for - an increased sense of the personal responsibility of each of us to see that democracy works. We have our "C's" mixed - instead of "conflict" we must have "co-operation" in all human relations. The good neighbor policy must be practiced in every American community.

Our failure to meet these needs is little less than treason to America, for these deficiencies are as deadly enemies of ours - yes, truly as vicious - as Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo. Nor can we be concerned only with such diseases within our own borders. We cannot be secure in a world of conflict and despair. When our democracy functions well we may proceed with higher hopes that freedom will not vanish, but on the contrary will gain strength throughout the world. To achieve this is not just the job of the civilian agencies of the Federal, State and local governments -- it is the job too of our churches, our industries, our labor unions, our educational institutions, our parents - in short, each of our 140 million people have an important contribution to make.

To further provide for our security we must have strong armed forces - not for aggression, but to safeguard ourselves from attack. Uncle Sam has no chip on his shoulder, but he will not be satisfied with a two-tank, two-plane, two-ship, two-gun Army and Navy. There must be unity of command, and the most up-to-date scientific machines and weapons.

Claims of military dictatorship as an argument against strong peacetime defense are absurd, if not tragic. We Americans are not ready to abandon our ideal of a democratic way of life.

Throughout our history the Army and Navy have been ever faithful to the Republic and to the ideals for which it stands.

Always they have stood for the principle of subordination of the military to the civil power.

Their personnel - drawn from the everyday citizenry of our country - returns from whence they came, when their service to the colors is finished.

Some say such a policy discounts the worth of the United Nations as an organization for world peace.

The United Nations, we know, is the most promising effort so far made in the direction of lasting peace. It deserves and will continue to receive our whole-hearted support. It is young - and it must grow - and it will grow. As President Truman so well said:

"In supporting the United Nations, we must always sustain the principle on which world peace must rest. That principle is that all people should have the right to live free from fear of aggression under institutions of their own free choice. * * * * *

"We can fulfill our obligation of service in the cause of peace only by maintaining our strength. The will for peace without the strength for peace is of no avail."

We who hope for justice among all people and for a time when wars will be no more, look to the day when the safety of this Nation, and that of all other nations, can be entrusted to the collective security provided by the United Nations.

May that day dawn soon. But meanwhile we must be realistic or we may be dead.

To aid in the achievement of these objectives we also need a program of universal training for all young men of the Nation. That was envisaged in the

(OVER)

establishment of V.M.I. by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The same idea with a course of six months to a year's training would be invaluable to our country and its people. We cannot underline this too strongly. This does not mean war mongering - no, it means just the opposite, an antidote for war, And it means also a fuller and better life for all our young men as a result of training. Each of you know the great benefits you have received from training here at V.M.I. In addition to the physical and mental benefits, such civilian training would contribute much to the development of national unity - and this is the very keystone of our security. The necessity of fulfilling this common obligation to their country would be of lasting benefit to our program of making democracy work.

Cost? - Of course it will cost. Democracy and freedom are always costly, both in blood and in dollars. Each generation has had to fight to retain it - and each future generation shall be obliged to do likewise. Freedom cannot be once won and retained permanently.

We spent billions in World War II in a fight for our existence - our way of life. Shall we spend a small percentage to retain it? To do less is but to gamble - with the dice loaded with atomic weapons. World War III shall, indeed, be the last - for after it there will be no world. We must prevent this incalculable horror.

I welcome you into this advanced stage of your American citizenship. Yours is a great estate - a great heritage. Lucky are we to be living in such an age of opportunity. There are no limits to it. The door is open for you to enter. America knows that you and your contemporaries will carry the Stars and Stripes to higher and loftier accomplishment, and in so doing maintain for peoples everywhere peace and good will toward men.