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Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus
DoN Talent Management Address to the Brigade of Midshipmen
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Thank you MIDN Worth.

VADM Carter, Naval Academy faculty, and most importantly, Brigade of Midshipmen; thank you for welcoming me during this busy and exciting season on the Yard.

So what is the Secretary of the Navy doing here and why do you care? I came here to talk to you about shared interests- your future and the future of our Navy and Marine Corps. That future begins with policies we announce today; and that future is bright.

Whether you are one year closer to graduation, or one of the soon to be Ensigns and 2nd Lieutenants of the class of 2015, you will all join the most formidable expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known. Our Navy and Marine Corps uniquely provide presence around the globe, around the clock – ensuring stability, deterring adversaries, and providing the nation’s leaders with options in times of crisis. We are “America’s away team” because Sailors and Marines, equally in times of peace and war, are not just in the right place at the right time, but in the right place all the time. We get on station faster, we stay longer, we bring what we need with us, and we don’t need anybody’s permission to do what needs to be done.

Our ability to provide that presence is built on four fundamentals: People, our Sailors and Marines; Platforms, numbers of ships and aircraft; Power, how we fuel those platforms; and Partnerships, our strong relationships with industry, international friends and allies, and the American people.

On that list, people come first for a reason. People are the Navy and Marine Corps' greatest edge. That is one of the reasons I have traveled over a million miles in my six years as Secretary, to talk to our forward deployed Sailors and Marines, where they are, on deckplates or deserts. In these conversations, ideas turn to actions. During an all hands call, for example, I started getting questions about why Sailors couldn't wear their ship's ball caps ashore. I didn't know, so I asked the CNO. And he didn't know either. So we sent out a two-sentence order saying it's alright to wear your ball caps. It's a small thing but important and I get thanked for that simple change every place I go.

But often times, ideas get entangled in a briar patch of bureaucracy- they never make it to a level where someone can take action to get something done. So earlier this year, I established the Navy's Task Force Innovation: a group from across the department comprised of thinkers, experts, and warfighters with diverse backgrounds and from every level. Along with the Chief of Naval Personnel, the Task Force has gone out to the Fleet, sat down with Sailors and Marines and listened to their input about how we can better manage the incredible talent of our people.

What we've always known is that the way we recruit, develop, retain, and promote Sailors and Marines is critical to our success. To fight and win in this century we need a force that draws

from the broadest talent pools, values health and fitness, attracts and retains innovative thinkers, provides flexible career paths, and prioritizes merit over tenure. Whether we are talking about systems and tactics in the digital age or personnel management, we must evolve to meet the needs of the future battle space and the needs of our people; or we can – we will – lose.

CNP and Task Force Innovation have answered my call, but until now, we've talked about "what-ifs." Today we shift from "what-ifs" to what's next. Some of the initiatives I announce will take place at the speed of my pen, and some will take place at the speed of Congress. But all of them will impact you- shortly after you are commissioned, as your careers progress, and as you lead Sailors and Marines into the future.

To talk through our initiatives, I'm going to try to paint a picture of what you can expect in the years ahead. Your careers will be defined by flexibility, transparency, and choice, and that starts with service assignment. Our process has already evolved to prioritize "best fit" over class rank. And, next year we will continue refine the system to one that is talent and interest based. Similar optimization models have been used at lesser institutions, like the one on the Hudson River, and they have increased the likelihood that individuals receive their first choice in service assignment from 80% to 99%. Let me say that another way, our new process will all but guarantee that Midshipmen talents and interests are paired to their choice in service assignment; here at the Naval Academy and ultimately in ROTC and OCS. And the Fleet will get the right officers in the right communities.

But we can't stop at service assignment, we have to make big data analysis a permanent part of personnel management. So I am establishing the Office of Talent Optimization here at the Naval Academy in September. This office will identify better ways to align our Sailors' and Marines' talent- getting out of the here and now and focusing on the future warfighting requirements of our communities. They will pilot programs like the one created by LT Mike Mabrey, of the CNO's Rapid Innovation Cell, that apply web-based, "Linked-In" style approaches to officer detailing; and they will report their findings directly to the Chief of Naval Personnel for implementation.

We can't optimize performance, however, until we optimize opportunity. You all deserve a service in which you can aspire to lead at the highest levels, knowing that people like you make it to the top. So we need more women in the Navy and Marine Corps; not simply to have more women, but because a more diverse force is a stronger force. We need educated officers, and women represent 57% of college graduates in America. While the military at large lags society, the Department of the Navy is making rapid progress; and as usual, the Naval Academy is leading the way, with female accessions passing 25% for the class of 2019. In the Fleet, this year, we are also increasing female enlisted accessions, emphasizing those ratings in which women are under-represented. By the time you reach your second or third tour, your squadron, ship, or unit will be much more demographically representative of the nation you serve. And that is critically important both to the quality of our all volunteer force, but also important to fulfilling the principles of the democracy we defend.

Both our platforms and our career paths will allow for equal service opportunities. That is why I'm personally committed to opening all operational billets to women. In the Navy, women wear every warfare pin except for the Trident, reserved for SEAL "trigger-pullers." In the Marine Corps, we are conducting the most comprehensive assessment of physical standards ever undertaken- and the results will enhance combat readiness and effectiveness in all Military Operational Specialties, independent of gender. In all cases, I personally believe we ought to have one standard for both sexes, a standard that matches the demands of the job, and if you pass, you pass.

Regardless of which community you enter, every woman, AND man, deserves a working environment respectful of all, completely intolerant of sexual assault, and supported by programs of prevention, advocacy, and accountability. While there is still work to be done, we have instituted an increasingly effective Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program and a Victim's Legal Counsel that has increased reporting and provided critical support to those who come forward. But we also have to make sure that there is no retaliation or ostracism of people who report- whether by the chain of command or peers.

Support to Sailors and Marines has to extend beyond the workplace. Our greater Navy and Marine Corps family is equally worthy of support. I know that none of you is married and that you don't have legal dependents. However, I also know that won't be true over time and isn't true for NROTC and OCS. And in the near future, all of you will lead Sailors and Marines who are working parents. As a forward deployed force, our optempo is high at sea and ashore. So we must take a holistic approach to supporting families. To make sure you have the time to spend

with your newborn, we are proposing legislation that will double paid maternity leave from 6 to 12 weeks starting next year. We've already established 24 / 7 Child Care Development Centers in 3 Fleet concentration areas, and we are beginning immediately to hire staff in numbers that will enable us to expand Navy CDC services by 2 hours on both ends of the period now served. That should mean that Sailors don't have to worry about child care centers not opening early enough or closing too early. For dual-military couples, who doubly commit to service, we are updating our co-location policy, focusing on much improved opportunity for career progression, joint-service colocation, and active/reserve integration.

Our high optempo also demands a year-round culture of fitness. A high-stakes, bi-annual crucible that often results in Sailor's resorting to drastic unhealthy measures serves no one. The Navy's fitness culture should focus on producing warfighters, capable of accomplishing any mission any time, and it should support healthy lifestyles that reduce overall medical costs.

So we will completely revamp the Physical Fitness Assessment. Our pass/fail system that only, and often inaccurately, assesses one aspect of overall fitness will end. We will instead focus on evaluating health, not shape. As Junior Officers, you will be responsible for the fitness of your Sailors and Marines. In the Navy alone, we separate 1500 people a year for failing the PFA. That wastes our time and resources. In our new culture of fitness, we change the way we measure body fat, supplement PFA cycles with physical readiness spot-checks, and document performance on Fitness Reports and Evals.

To set Sailors up for success, we have to outfit them properly and increase opportunities for physical training. Here at the Naval Academy, you have a full athletic seabag, and you have access to the best facilities whenever you need them. That is not the case in the Fleet. So we will open a CAC-accessed 24-hour a day, 7-day a week gym on every Navy base worldwide and we will issue the Navy Fitness Suit, the one Midshipmen tested here at the Academy, to the entire Fleet. The Marines already have these. Sailors will earn Fitness Suit patches for outstanding performance, and those who maintain that level of performance over 3 cycles will receive the “Outstanding Fitness Award.”

But physical training is only part of the equation. A well-balanced diet is the foundation of a healthy lifestyle. So we must provide nutritious food options for Sailors and Marines at sea and ashore. Our “Fuel to Fight” program, launched by the SEALs at Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, increases the availability of lean-proteins, vegetables, and complex carbohydrates in our galleys. We will further develop the concept at one sea-based and one shore-based unit next year, and implement it Fleet-wide in 2017.

The compliment to a healthy body is a healthy mind. Innovators need stimulating environments and opportunities for intellectual development. The elementary, repetitious and time-consuming tasks of General Military Training just don’t achieve that end and eat into a CO’s ability to spend more of their precious time training to fight and win. Therefore, I am ending GMT as we know it. Beginning June 1st, we will stop all Department of the Navy-directed GMT on Navy Knowledge Online. Command triads will determine if and when training is needed. And to make relevant training more accessible and efficient, I’ve asked the Chief of Naval Personnel

and the Office of Naval Research to develop mobile applications for Fleet release in FY16. We will certainly continue other types of mandatory training like that against sexual assault. You may hear sea-stories of mundane, arduous, and seemingly pointless GMT, but you won't experience it.

But education goes far beyond GMT. Peloponnesian general and philosopher, Thucydides, is credited for saying, "A nation that draws too broad a distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools." To educate Naval and Marine Corps leaders, we provide Immediate and Voluntary Graduate Education, War Colleges, the Naval Post-graduate School, and academic fellowships. But we need more.

A civil-military divide exists in America, and we are missing far too many opportunities to develop battle-proven warriors into strategic thinkers. For example, LT Joel Jacobs, a TOPGUN graduate assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 213 who is here in the audience, has deployed multiple times in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Inherent Resolve. His contributions to a 39-plane alpha strike on ISIS that involved 5 international partners who delivered 19 weapons on 5 separate targets, earned him recognition as the Naval Air Forces Atlantic, Naval Flight Officer of the Year. Yet, despite earning acceptance to Harvard, Tufts, and Johns Hopkins; we couldn't find a way to send him to these types of schools.

To retain strategic thinkers, like LT Jacobs, and to broaden their skills, starting in October, I will expand fully-funded, in-residence, graduate programs at civilian institutions by 30 billets. So if you learn your trade and you excel, we will send you to our nation's top institutions. By the

way, LT Jacobs, let me be first to congratulate you, you earned one of those billets and you are going to Harvard . . . which is a good choice, because that's my alma matter.

As we invest in you, we want to provide you more opportunities to apply your skillsets to the needs of the Navy and Marine Corps on the broadest levels; so we are creating much more flexible career paths. The Career Intermission Program, for example, allows Sailors to pursue family, professional, academic and other interests outside of service without damaging long-term potential. The concept was a success for officers like Porter, Nimitz, and Amos, each of whom took leave from service to broaden their leadership skills and learn from industry. Our pilot program was tremendously successful. So I've submitted a legislative proposal to increase CIP billets from 40 to 400, and we are submitting follow-on proposals that allow participants to consider a menu of compensation, health-care, and timing options tailored to their needs.

Having mastered your warfare specialty, there may come a time you wish to broaden your professional experience, which is why we will partner with Fortune 500 CEOs to create the "Secretary of the Navy Industry Tour." Starting this Fall, commanders will have the authority to send their best-qualified officers to work at America's top firms. When these officers return to the Fleet, they'll bring industry's best practices with them.

But some lessons can't wait; which is why we're asking Congress to amend our current broad-based bonus system to make it look more like those used in the private sector. By granting Department leaders the flexibility to match pay incentives with individual skillsets and talent levels, we can better compensate and retain officers and enlisted.

Of course, our Navy and Marine Corps Team is not about bonuses; it's about leadership.

Leaders who consistently outperform their peers should be advanced at faster rates, not held back by tests or zones. So we will begin adjusting Navy enlisted advancements this year by replacing the Command Advancement Program with a Meritorious Advancement Program, or MAP, that allows Commanding Officers to petition for more of these advancements, or to surrender unused ones. In October we will expand the number of available MAP advancements to 5% of the force and extend them to shore-based commands. In that same time period, we will further empower Commanding Officers, under the oversight of their immediate seniors, to separate Sailors not up to task, reducing delays that can take over a year, without sacrificing due process. In other words, as you lead Sailors and Marines as Division Officers, Department Heads, and ultimately Commanding Officers, you will have more control over who you advance and who you separate, without being subjected to a terribly cumbersome administrative process.

For those in here who will wear the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, and earn the honor to lead Marines, we are revamping our manpower models to mature the force and address gaps in our Non-commissioned Officer ranks. 60% of Marines are on their first tour and 40% are E-3 and below. So we've implemented the Squad Leader Development Program to mature and further professionalize the force. This Program screens small unit infantry Marines, selects candidates based on performance and provides them with opportunities for education, qualification and assignment.

Promoting our troops is important, and so is making sure we promote the best officers with the right skillsets for the future. So, within the limits of the law, we will emphasize broader milestone achievement as the foundation for promotion eligibility. Doing so increases competition and opportunity, allowing the best to rise to the top, regardless of when they were commissioned. As a long-term solution, we are drafting a legislative proposal for FY'17 to eliminate officer management by year group. This allows those who are not ready for promotion to continue to serve in the same paygrade longer, or for those ready, to advance through the system faster. A “golden” path of inflexible career wickets, year groups, and promotion zones will no longer determine your success. Your performance will decide your timeline for promotion and leadership assignments.

These initiatives are aimed at getting the right people in the right jobs at the right time. They're about providing those who commit to defending the American dream an opportunity to live the American dream. They are about fixing our shortcomings so that our best people choose to stay in the Navy and Marine Corps. And by keeping our best people, we will be better warfighters.

But, while we celebrate diversity in our people, we are uniform in purpose as part of an organization that prioritizes service over self. We are uniform in mission, as we protect sea lanes, deter adversaries, assist partners, and strike enemies. We are uniform in our core values of honor, courage, and commitment. And we must be uniform in how we present ourselves professionally, to one another, and to the public at home and abroad.

Uniformity is about ending the way we segregate women by requiring them to wear different clothes. Rather than highlighting differences in our ranks, we will incorporate everyone as full-participants. Take a look at these pictures on the screen behind me. These are from 2009. As you look at the Brigade of Midshipmen, you see male and female mids. As you look at the Corps of Cadets you see just that, a Corps. In fact, for almost a decade, the only way West Point was able to do better than us on the football field was by presenting a unified front. We fixed that and now we are truly undefeated.

In the Navy and in the Marine Corps, we are trending towards uniforms that don't divide us as male or female, but rather unite us as Sailors or Marines. We've conducted a thorough review and both services have already initiated the transition. As Marines continue to test and field a common choker blue blouse, that unmistakable Marine Corps dress, it will be worn at the U.S. Naval Academy commencement ceremony next week along with a common cover. The same applies to the Navy service dress white choker blouse and combination cover. The Naval Academy is about leadership and commencements are about new beginnings. So there is no better venue to debut the future of the Navy and Marine Corps, in multiple contexts, to the Fleet, to the Corps, and to America. I look forward to seeing, not male and female officer candidates, but new United States Naval and Marine Corps officers next week.

As my remarks approach 30 minutes and your attention strays from me to the joys of commissioning week, I want to leave you with a few final thoughts. Look around, a future CNO or Commandant sits in this audience, and he or she may be you. The policies I set forth today are designed to enable all of you to achieve that level of success. But not all of you will aspire to

serve in the same capacity. Some will use service as a launch pad to another career and that is okay. Remember, the Naval Academy is about command, citizenship, and government.

If your career goals lie outside the Naval Service, then move on for the right reasons, and do so with the depth of your Navy or Marine Corps experience supporting you. Remember, your heritage is one of war heroes, Presidents, Olympians, Astronauts, diplomats, CEOs, and the occasional Heisman Trophy winner or talk show host. Transition with pride and remember, “I was a Sailor once, I was part of the Navy, and the Navy will always be a part of me.”

For those who commit to a career of 20, 30, or 40 years, which I encourage each of you to do, take ownership of your Naval Service and make it better for future generations. Dismiss the false and toxic notion that the best officers are getting out, because it simply isn't true. The best officers are the ones forward deployed today, leading Sailors and Marines. Officership is an enduring commitment. While the Navy and Marine Corps are great, they aren't perfect, which is why we have officers- to lead. If you know of ways to make our service better, don't just be the critic, be the man, or the woman, in the arena, whose face is marred with dust, and sweat, and blood, advocating for change, so that we all may experience the triumph of high achievement.

It's because of that tradition of leadership and because of the promising future I see before me I can invoke President Kennedy's words to the Brigade from decades ago and update them for today, “...any man, or woman, who may be asked ... what they did to make their life worthwhile, I think, can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction: ‘I served in the United States Navy or Marine Corps.’”

To the future Ensigns: Semper Fortis, Always Courageous.

And to the future 2nd Lieutenants: Semper Fidelis, Always Faithful.

Thank you, and Beat Army!