

# REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN

## GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

### COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

May 17, 2015

To all of you in the Gettysburg Class of 2015, thank you for inviting me today. I want to express my gratitude to President Riggs and the parents and families of our graduates here for allowing me the opportunity to share such a special moment with you – it is truly an honor.

You know, when President Riggs approached me about speaking here at your commencement ceremony, I could not help but think back to arguably the most famous speech of all time – given here in Gettysburg – President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Honest Abe, as he was called, makes me wish I could be a lot like him in that respect, maybe just a few years younger and a couple feet shorter.

I had the amazing opportunity last year to visit Gettysburg and talk with the Eisenhower Institute Fellows about United States space policy – what a remarkable group of young men and women. So, this is actually my second time having the pleasure of being invited to speak here on this beautiful campus. To give a short side-story, it was after my second date with my wife, Jackie, that I was sure I wanted to marry her. So watch out Gettysburg – my relationship here could be getting pretty serious.

Almost as serious is our reason for being here today. I hate to break it to you, but your loved ones did not travel from around the globe because you would be taking a fifty-foot walk in a funny-looking costume from left to right across this stage. They came, first, because they love you and second, because of what your stroll here represents. This morning, many of you are achieving a lifetime goal and, hopefully for all of you, today a dream is being realized.

This year will be a big one for many of you in the crowd – first jobs, first paychecks, first time learning that laundry is not a biannual event. These milestones are huge and ones to which you should be looking forward. Some of you have known your calling since day one. If so, pursue it! Write for the New York Times, become an FBI agent, create a game-changing renewable energy, work as a NASA astronaut (no pressure). I am sure you have heard one version or another of the “follow your dream speech,” so no need to repeat it. If you have a clear and defined dream, follow it and let nothing stop you. Case closed.

Now I am going to address the majority of you, those who do not yet know what you want to do with your life. Trust me, you are not alone. Join the club! The idea of choosing something, a livelihood or career path, that will help to define the rest of your life is intimidating, to say the very least and I promise you, no amount of partying tonight will delay tomorrow’s sunrise and with it the impending arrival of the real world.

That all being said do not panic – there is nothing to be gained from panicking. A good friend and mentor of mine, Robert “Hoot” Gibson, former Naval Aviator and NASA astronaut, once taught me this very same lesson in a big way. In the lead up to my first flight as a NASA astronaut, I sat nervous and sweating in a shuttle simulator trying to impress my new six-person crew. During the simulator, as is tradition, all was going well until it wasn’t. A shuttle main engine went out, boom, right at liftoff, and while working through our procedure to determine the cause of the engine failure, a minor electrical issue popped up – a distraction from the real problem. Instead of focusing on the cause of the engine failure, I worked to fix the electrical issue, misdiagnosed the minor electrical problem and accidentally killed the power to a second engine – now leaving only a single working engine – not enough to get us to orbit. Now, instead of alive in the air, we were dead in the water. All went quiet. Hoot, my commander, reached over, gave me a good pat on the shoulder, and said, “Charles, did I ever tell you about ‘Hoot’s Law’?”

When I responded that he hadn't, Hoot said: "It goes like this: no matter how bad things get, you can always make them worse."

So no matter how bad things may get in your future, take a deep breath, relax and don't crash any spacecraft or get your life farther off track. The fact that you are sitting here today means you are on the right path. Anxiety in not knowing what lies ahead is par for the course. When I was your age and graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy, I had no idea where my life would take me. When I began my college years at Annapolis, I knew a few things for certain: I was hoping to become a Navy Frogman, today's Navy SEALs, I would definitely not consider going into Marine Corps, and under no circumstances would I consider going to flight school and become an aviator – something about flying through the air in a piece of metal did not sit right with me – I felt it was inherently dangerous. I used to tell people, "My mother did not raise a fool."

Turns out I did not know much at all about my future. If any of you follow baseball, my batting average would have been about 0.000 in terms of realizing my goals going into the Naval Academy. Unfortunately, during my time as a Midshipman, I found out that, at that time, Academy graduates were not able to enter the Navy's Underwater Demolitions Teams (UDT – frogmen) directly from the Academy – only enlisted sailors were chosen for the program. Unable to pursue what I had thought was my calling; I was left at the end of college up the creek without a paddle. So, I began to consider my career options – all sorts of different things. I thought about pursuing the surface Navy, nuclear power, even Civil Engineer Corps. Having been unbelievably impressed by my first Company Officer from my freshman year – he like my dad had been tough but imminently fair – I decided to pursue a career as a Marine Corps infantry officer, but found during my basic training that I really didn't like crawling around in the mud. Now what to do?

My wife, Jackie, had never been enamored by my choice of Marine Corps Infantry and felt we should go to Pensacola, FL and flight school. As a last resort, looking to steer my career in a different direction, I decided to follow her advice and finally stumbled upon my passion – aviation – as a Marine Aviator.

So, to set the record straight, not only would I be flying through the air in a piece of metal, I would be doing so in the Marine Corps. Two things I had all but sworn off ended up defining my career and my life. It's funny how things turn out. In this time of life where the unknowns outweigh the knowns, explore, try new things and accept stumbling upon *your* passion. You are young, energetic – utilize that. Find out what you're good at and what you're not, what you love and what you hate. Like Thomas Edison, find yourself in 999 ways to *not* make a light bulb – use this more independent stage of life to realize a passion and experience the incredible sensation of learning what you love and living it.

Don't fear tomorrow. Let yourself be nervous, let the apprehension excite you. Welcome the focus and clarity that accompany stress without allowing it to paralyze you. Move forward, stomach full of butterflies, knowing that this place, these professors, those parents and grandparents, as well as your fellow members of the Gettysburg Class of 2015 have prepared you for what the world will inevitably throw in your direction. Be bold, be fearless, dream big, and by all means, don't listen to anyone who tells you can't do something or you don't belong.

On my first flight up to space, before most of you were born, I felt what you all are feeling now. I knew I was ready, I knew I had been prepared, but it did not change that feeling in my stomach – an uneasiness staring down the unknown. However, whether I liked it or not, Mission Control began their countdown – from “10, down to 5,4,3,2,1”. I felt each second and my heart beat in unison.

With lift off, much like your departure from Gettysburg today, the goal of lifetime was accomplished and a dream realized.

When we got on orbit, it was unlike anything I expected. Just the most beautiful thing you could ever imagine. I looked out the window, eyes welling up, and saw the continent of Africa approaching – it looked like a big island! As we soared through space, I watched a rotating sphere, so colorful and alive, holding everything I had ever known. Every person I had ever seen, everything I had ever done, my family, my friends, and my home. With this new perspective came a redefined self-awareness. I saw the big picture.

Class of 2015, enjoy this moment, embrace the nervous excitement that comes along with it, but don't lose sight of that big picture – don't forget *your* Earth-view.

Realizing that I stand between almost 600 college students and a diploma, I will wrap up here. Treasure today and look forward to tomorrow. As the sun sets on this much-deserved celebration, see opportunity in your future and the future of our world. The century to come is yours, with this degree the torch is passed. It is your generation that will lead us on our journey to Mars, tackle climate change and maybe even discover that we are not alone in this grand universe.

This degree is a mandate – so take it and run with it. In leaving Gettysburg, be confident and trust that you are ready. In one of my favorite sentences of all time, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, “Faith is taking the first step even if you can’t see the whole staircase.” Class of 2015, have faith, make that first step, take this leap, and jump knowing that the net will appear.

Congratulations Class of 2015! Godspeed and God Bless America!