

Excerpts from Remarks by President F. Dominic Dottavio  
ROTC Dining Out Awards Program April 4, 2009



Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I am honored by your invitation to participate in this award ceremony for the Tarleton Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

- Tonight we celebrate excellence as exhibited by you, our students.
- We celebrate service with honor, the cornerstone of a great military and the foundation of a civil society.
- And we celebrate tradition – the rich traditions of Tarleton State University.

In 1917, when the national ROTC program first came to Tarleton, the US economy was booming. Babe Ruth was a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. Charlie Chaplin was the top movie star. And, on April 6, 1917 – almost exactly 92 years ago – America entered the war against Germany. In his remarks to a Joint Session of Congress on April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson said: *“The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.”* Wilson went on to say that the right to liberty is more precious than peace itself. The previous June, with an eye to the coming World War, President Wilson signed the National Defense Act which created the Reserve Officers' Training Corps so that we would have more well-prepared leaders for the armed forces.

The Tarleton ROTC was there at the beginning and has been part of campus traditions ever since. In the 1920s, the Tarleton ROTC brought the cannon from Fort Sam Houston to our campus and pointed it toward the president's home. Thank heavens it can't be fired any more! In the '20's and '30's, reveille and taps sounded across campus every day. In the '30's, there were weekly “retreat parades.” The greatest tradition of the ROTC at Tarleton is commissioning officers each year – more than 1,600 officers in its 92-years.

At perhaps no other time in our history have we been more aware of the strength, commitment, and importance of our military reserves. Today, nearly every community has seen the deployment of a friend, co-worker, or family member into service around the world. Today, reservists and active duty military – and their families – are serving our nation with great honor.

My gratitude for your willingness to serve is grounded in the service of my father in World War II. My dad enlisted in 1943 before completing high school. Serving in the Navy aboard the destroyer the USS Sigsbee, he saw action in the heart of the Pacific Theatre. The Sigsbee participated in the bombardment of Wake Island, the Marshall Islands, and the Marianas campaign. In March 1945, the Sigsbee was part of the task force supporting the landings on Iwo Jima. In April, the ship was struck by a kamikaze suicide plane that blew the back end of the Sigsbee apart, killing 23 sailors - including my father's gun mate. My father received a purple heart for his service. The Sigsbee was awarded 11 battle stars for service in World War II.

I have accompanied my father to Sigsbee reunions. This group truly is a Band of Brothers. When I see them together, I see pride in their contributions to the war effort, loyalty in their long-lasting friendships, and honor in the way they have lived their lives since.

I wish for each of you in your military service the same measure of that legacy: pride, loyalty, honor.

Over the years, sons and daughters of Tarleton have brought honor to this university through exemplary service to our nation. I know that you will do the same.

One of the most notable of Tarleton veterans is James Earl Rudder. Rudder attended John Tarleton Agricultural College in 1928 and 1929 and served as the Tarleton football coach from 1938 to 1940. His record was 18 wins, 10 losses, 1 tie before being called to active duty in 1941. Whatever his coaching record, it cannot rival his victories as a member of the US Army. General Rudder was a hero of D-Day, commanding the US Army 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion that scaled 100-foot cliffs to destroy German gun batteries. The fight lasted two days at the cost of half of his battalion. They established a beachhead for the Allied Forces to land. He next commanded the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment at the Battle of the Bulge. Rudder was one of the most decorated soldiers in that war.

But his commitment to service didn't end with his active duty. Nor should yours. He continued in public service as an elected official, the president of Texas A&M University and then chancellor of the A&M System.

Through the years, the ROTC Program has prepared other leaders like General Rudder, not only for the military, but for positions of responsibility in the public and private sectors. The idea of "citizen-soldiers" is as old as the Republic. The ROTC Program widened the pool of educated leaders for our armed forces beyond the US Military Academies to some 272 colleges and universities across the country.

The Texan Battalion and ROTC program provide more than an attractive financial-aid package. This truly is a leadership development program. The students being honored tonight are not only studying principles of leadership, they are honing their skills on the playing field, in the classroom, and in campus clubs and organizations.

A glance at the day's headlines reveals the critical need for ethical, selfless leadership – a point of emphasis across the curriculum of Military Science and across this university. We need leaders like you more than ever. We need

your creativity,  
your strategic thinking,  
your passion,  
your energy,  
your commitment to serving to others.

We need you to walk with honor so others will follow.

Let me once again return to President, Woodrow Wilson. When he was President of Princeton University, he said: *“You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.”*

I am confident that you will not forget. You have demonstrated that you already are leaders. I am eager to see all that you will accomplish in the years ahead – for yourselves, your community, and your country. I congratulate your faculty on the strength of the Corps. I congratulate each of you for a job well done.

On behalf of your grateful University, thank you for your service.