

I am sorry not to be with you today to recognize your achievement, and the pride (and patience!) of your loving families. I am visiting our hospitals in the sands and mountains that many of you will soon know well.

Together with Army Surgeon General, Lt. Gen. Eric B. Schoomaker, and Joint Staff Surgeon Rear Admiral David J. Smith, I am learning how we can better train our medical personnel to prevent and to treat the physical and mental injuries of combat, and to help war-torn people care for their own. This visit, like the one we made in January, that included Navy Surgeon General Vice Adm. Adam Robinson, Air Force Surgeon General Lt. Gen. James G. Roudebush, and CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding, MD, should net us “eyes on” knowledge that will benefit our future mission.

These tasks, together with your humanitarian relief for disasters like the earthquake in Peru and the cyclone in Myanmar, and our efforts to prevent and respond to epidemics in Asia and Africa, will challenge your fortitude and measure your devotion to duty. You will be far from your loving families but constantly watched by a God who "neither slumbers nor sleeps."

You will also have the company of line leaders who are "First out of the foxhole and last in the chow line," and young medics and corpsmen who answer "Corpsman up!" or "Medic!" with a prayer and a dash to save a life that has, in some 170 instances in these wars, cost them their own.

Your courage will be of a different sort: exposure to infections and toxins and bombs: yes (and we were reminded of this yesterday morning as a rocket exploded 200 meters from the tent hospital).

But more importantly you will make - and help our troops and commanders make - life and death medical decisions. And you will weigh the medical issues of the patient and the mission. This is the courage that Washington showed when he vaccinated his troops against smallpox.

You will also be challenged to lead by your wisdom, your understanding of people and, increasingly, by your ability to innovate and to communicate. This will mark you as leaders, enabling you to transcend medical technology and play a critical role in preventing crisis from erupting into conflict. This unique form of medical leadership, which transcends the technical craft of the physician and marks the service of every uniformed health care professional (nurse, administrator and others) is hard-won and requires much schooling and practical experience. It is a major concern of all of us who lead in military medicine and is the reason we make such a strong investment in your education as military physicians.

Your hard work and dedication has just begun. Perhaps this is an odd thing to say to a graduating class, but know that I fully realize the hard work and dedication you have already contributed. As I'm sure you've heard before, becoming a medical professional means a lifetime of learning about science and about people.

Please take a minute today to thank not only your families but your teachers and the leaders like the late Dr. Jay Sanford, who nurtured this school to adulthood, Vice Adm. James A. Zimble who has been stalwart in its defense, and President Charles Rice who has built bridges to other universities, the Army, the Veterans Administration, and the National Institutes of Health.

And don't ask your chairman, Everett Alvarez, about his heroism in Vietnam; just thank him for two decades of clear-eyed service to USU, and for his example. And thank the unsinkable Tammy Alvarez for the love that produced, *Fighting For Life*, the most inspiring movie of our lifetime.

Please also thank our unflappable dean, Larry Laughlin, MD, and welcome the distinguished dean of our graduate school of nursing, Ada Sue Hinshaw, RN, PhD. And thank your classmates for buddy learning, and for shoulders to lean on, even as they held you to standards that are incomprehensible in civilian medical schools.

Together, your fullness of dedication will lead to a fullness of life. You will face -- and most of you will meet -- challenges unknown to your civilian colleagues. But these will prepare you to lead, when you conclude your military career, in the world of medicine, or rather, in the medicine of the world.

Many of you will distinguish yourselves as "doers," many as teachers, and all as leaders by example. Some of you may follow the path of the 17 former service members like Joe Murray and Ed Krebs and Gerald Edelman who won the Nobel Prize in medicine, or should have, like the late Maurice Hilleman and Judah Folkman.

Basic research is one way to serve, as are clinical research, and health services research. But you can also serve just by spending time with researchers. They need to know your needs. That is one of the secrets of success of the great surgical pioneers who began their careers in the military: Harvey Cushing, Michael DeBakey, Denton Cooley, James "Red" Duke, and Ken Mattox. (Almost all are Texans: facts are facts).

So, tomorrow you will hear from Dr. Elias Zerhouni, your commencement speaker. Please take his words into your hearts.

Dr. Zerhouni has led the National Institutes of Health into an innovative era of interdisciplinary focus. He and his NIH colleagues have pursued a different path from yours: They are specialists dedicated to discovery and invention on a time span of decades. We are grateful to them for partnering with us in our new areas of focus for USU: brain injury, psychological resiliency and stem cell therapeutics. We also partner with NIAID's Dr. Anthony Fauci in infectious diseases, and are likely to do more with NIH in areas like imaging, biomedical engineering and informatics. And let's not forget telemedicine and Web-based education, by which the unique lessons learned at USU can benefit our allies everywhere.

We are also learning from leaders in public health like Institute of Medicine President Harvey Fineberg, MD, CDC Director Julie Gerberding, MD, HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt, who has led the nation's efforts in informatics and in avian influenza, and FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach, with whom we are developing new ways to monitor drug safety.

In each area USU brings unique needs and responsibilities, and talents, to complement the deep specialized knowledge of our civilian colleagues. Armed with the new tools that result from these collaborations, and, recalling that only a few years ago Soviet soldiers were driven from Afghanistan more by preventable diseases than by rockets, you will quickly make decisions that change the course of an epidemic or of a war.

Catch your breath now, express your thanks, and accept from me the thanks of our surgeons general and Secretary of Defense Dr. Gates. Then go out to lead, by serving those who guard our families and our freedom.