

Good morning Veterans, distinguished guests, students, and friends of the Boston College community. Father, thank you for the Mass today honoring Veterans. Thank you to the Veterans Alumni Network and BC staff for planning and hosting this important event. A special welcome to friends and family members of those whose names are on the wall and whose ultimate sacrifice we remember.

It is so wonderful to be back in Boston and I am grateful to the BC Veterans Alumni Network for inviting me to speak here today. With the exception of a brief stop in 2008 and later in 2019, I haven't been in Boston since I left for my military basic course in 1996. It was surreal to fly into Logan yesterday after so many years away from this historic city. Logan was an airport I knew well as a BC student. Now, over 26 years later, I am back with my own children. It is a vivid reminder of how quickly time flies. I am excited to explore the campus with my kids and maybe take the bus to Newton to show them where I lived!

Since finalizing my participation here today, I have been thinking about what to say. Initially, I thought I would talk about the duty and responsibility of leaving a legacy on those with whom we serve. As I continued to reflect and toss ideas around in my mind, another idea began to develop: the connections that bind veterans.

A few years ago when modern technology was a really good cordless phone that could reach all rooms of the average house, I was attending a small all-girls high school in California and looking towards college. Seeing that I was looking at expensive schools "back east," my parents provided me something the military calls: planning guidance. My parents told me they would pay for the cost of college attendance at UC Davis or Sacramento State, but anything beyond those costs, was on me. I think they secretly wanted me to stay close to

home. I started visiting the college & career center where I found a stack of glossy brochures that advertised a way to pay for college: ROTC. No websites, no QR codes, just brochures that showed students having fun and wearing dress uniforms. Pay for college, get \$100 for month, and have a guaranteed job after college. THIS WAS FOR ME. I completed the post card and requested an application.

I arrived to BC in the fall of 1992 with a 4 year Army ROTC scholarship. Our first ROTC event was at the MODS where we met cadets from the other classes...that was where I first met my friend and fellow cadet Shari Fries (now Rivas). My first impression: this isn't so bad. I was a little nervous about the 6-week, post junior year advanced camp stories I was hearing. A few days later, it was with much shock and surprise that I received a phone call on my Keyes North dorm landline: "tomorrow be at the Newton bus stop at 6 am to get a ride to leadership lab. Just wear something comfortable and we'll issue your uniform at the lab." "leadership lab? Issue? 6 am? What is this craziness? I was even more surprised when they handed me camo uniforms and boots, taught me how to low crawl, the phonetic alphabet, how to use a claymore mine, TA-312, and other tactical skills foreign to life as I knew it. Where is the dress uniform and what about the social events I saw in the brochure?

Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, a few weeks later, I found myself on a bus to my first FTX weekend at Fort Devins...the rappel tower, the guns, shooting guns, the barracks, the food, the hours...this was not what I envisioned. I wanted to be back in Boston hanging out like everybody else. And as we rode the bus back to campus on Sunday afternoon, exhausted and dirty, I started to feel and sense...I was connected to everybody else on the bus. We were connected through the hardship we had just experienced...specifically, I most closely felt the connection to the other freshman cadets as we were all in

the same level of learning and trials. Still a connection was also established to those that were sophomores, juniors, and seniors. As much as I would have loved to quit for some more normal college experience, I was now connected to these other ROTC cadets. We were in this together. 2 x a week I went to the Newton bus stop at 6 am for transport to ROTC leadership lab or PT. Andrew Fetherston was another cadet on Newton...he was my battle buddy and we called to make sure neither of us overslept. Despite exhaustion, I had to get up, Drew was waiting for me. And vice versa, I was waiting for him. And beyond Drew, Shari, Dave, and Steve were also counting on me. Then there was my first squad leader MS-II Shane Walsh, the tall, loud kid from Texas. And MS-IIIs Guillame Beaupeare (now Major General) and Rob Rivera who were Cadet Rangers that trained us to learn the basics of being a Soldier. And the MSIVs who encouraged me in my struggle to do 18 push-ups and pass the physical fitness test. As I reflect on these memories, they are still so fresh in my mind.

In the blink of an eye, I was a senior and I was part of cadre responsible for training the younger cadets. And after commissioning, as I departed for my first military training course in Arizona, LTC Richard LaCroix the senior officer at the time, said "April, I am so envious. You have so many wonderful opportunities in front of you....time will pass so fast," he said. After that there were many people, many lessons, and many new adventures. Eventually in 2002, I found myself in Korea for a second time. I was a company commander and had command responsibility for approximately 150 soldiers conducting critical reconnaissance missions 24 hours/day. I will never forget the young supply Soldier from North Carolina. 20 years old, stationed in Korea and I had to tell her that her 16 year-old brother had been shot and was not expected to live. I will also never forget when I had to adjudicate punishment to young Soldiers who made bad decisions and were now in trouble. To look at the young soldiers and realize their lives were in my hands, was overwhelming.

Later during that same assignment, a senior officer talked to some of us junior officers about the idea of legacy. Part of our duty as leaders was to think about the legacy we left for these Soldiers, how we developed them, helped them improve themselves, and what we wanted our legacy to be. I had never heard this concept of legacy in previous leadership discussions, but it resonated with everything I was observing and feeling in my role with soldiers.

My Army journey continued. It took me to Iraq and later Afghanistan. In each of these deployments, I wanted to run away. I wanted to bury my head in the sand and refuse to deploy. I couldn't. People to my left and right were depending on me. We were in this together. In fact, one of the most powerful examples of this glue is from Christmas in Iraq 2004. Many of us ran a Christmas 5k at our base. I have a picture from that day that shows me, a Catholic standing between a first generation American, Buddhist officer and a born again Muslim American flight surgeon. We were connected in our desert and wartime hardships. Each of us depended on the other.

And with each assignment, besides this idea of dependence, I was also thinking about the legacy and how I would leave a legacy. I would talk to soldiers about their education, family, and professional plans. I would support them with letters of recommendation, encouragement, time, and other resources for their pursuits. And I would tell them, remember this and do the same when you have the ability to support others within your realm of care or influence. All the while, I had leaders above me who were leaving their legacy on me in terms of mentorship, training, and leadership examples.

One of my favorite leadership philosophers is retired and now deceased Admiral Stockdale, a POW at the Hanoi Hilton for 8 years. He summed it up perfectly:

In a 1981 commencement address at John Carroll

University, Stockdale stated the key principle of leadership, which is servanthood:

From this eight year experience, I distilled one all-purpose idea, plus a few corollaries. It's a simple idea, an idea as old as the scriptures, an idea that is the epitome of high-mindedness, an idea that naturally and spontaneously comes to men under pressure. If the pressure is intense or of long enough duration, this idea spreads without even the need for its enunciation. It just takes root naturally . . . That idea is you are your brother's keeper.

Whether in those early days at BC or later in any of my assignments, the reason I stayed or showed up was for those to my left and right. I knew that there were others around me prepared to endure the misery, pain, and hardship. It made us stronger together and, in some cases, kept us alive. We were each other's keepers.

On this day, we honor our brothers and sisters in arms, both living and deceased. All veterans, present today and throughout the entire BC community, are bound through soulful connections that were established through hardship, sacrifice, pain, joy, beauty, and so many other experiences that are part of our common experience. For those whose names are on the wall, including Dave Connelly with whom Shari and I served as cadets at BC, we recognize that we are our brother's keeper and we have a duty to honor them. The legacy they have left is in the world we see today. The freedom we enjoy and the freedom enjoyed in many places around the world. In the case of SFC Smith, the freedom enjoyed by the people of South Korea.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today. It has truly been an honor to share this day with all of you. Thinking through this keynote address has provided me an unplanned opportunity to reflect on the journey, lessons, and

sacrifices of my life as a Soldier. So glad I sent off that postcard more than 30 years ago and honored to be counted among the veterans...And as we said at the end of every formation, EAGLES FORWARD!