

Excalibur 2016

and Mrs. Boland, Mr. and Mrs. Walters, members of the Excalibur Society, of Carlisle, Camden Academy and Camden Military Academy. I would first of all like to thank you for attending this ceremony, and for your everlasting support. I speak for the whole of our Corps of Cadets when I say that your individual and collective efforts have transformed this institution for the better.

My name is Santiago Villalobos. I'm from Brazil, and I am currently the Battalion Commander of CMA. I will graduate from Camden Military in May 2016 along with my seniors. I first arrived as a freshman, after planning the move for a year. My parents knew that Brazil's educational opportunities were lacking. At my previous school back home, academics were a low priority even to the most dedicated students. I wasn't one of the dedicated ones. I also continuously struggled to keep my head above water to the front, not understanding the effect any of this would have on my future. My uncaring attitude led to my life falling apart. I knew I needed a fresh start. Shortly after, I found Camden on the internet, and it was decided rather quickly that I would be attending. On my first visit to the school, the Dean of Students, John Heflin, spoke to us about the story of Elijah Kitts, which I'm positive anyone on a tour has heard before. He was the perfect example of a kid who turned his life around and became Battalion Commander. That was the first time I thought of the position, even though it did seem like a long shot. Col. Heflin also uttered the phrase, "You get out of this and you put it into it." Throughout the years, this phrase has become famous around campus. We've all heard or thought about it before, one way or another. It is because of this statement and the truth it upholds that I have realized my potential and even brought my brother from overseas to study here. He has begun his freshman year here in 2015. Whenever he and I think about how we ended up here, there's always shock. It's funny how things work out. Neither my family nor I would've imagined that I would emerge here, in charge of speaking to the noble people that are present tonight. And for that, I am thankful to my parents who pushed me and to my mentors who led

me. Initially, I had no clue as to what to say at this ceremony. How does one express the gratitude of over 250 cadets, not even including faculty members? I figured it would be a good idea to remind you all of what your efforts placed into this Academy are for. Such as an unspeakable amount of brotherhood. Each one of my peers can agree that there is something about living together, working together, marching together and facing back the same difficulties together that brings us closer than any other place could. Undisputable discipline. How many other high schoolers have the privilege to say that they are in charge of at least five cadets, some of whom are even older than the leader? Or that they clean their living areas every day to inspection standards and still stay on top of their academics and sports? Or that they live, work, and breathe far away from home, for weeks or months at a time, and always obey a chain of command? Record academics. Most, if not all, cadets can say their academics have improved drastically, due to two hour study halls every weekday night and individual attention granted to students in need by teachers. And finally, unprecedented leadership. Not only are our peers leaders themselves, but we experience and learn leadership from military men whose very job was to lead others. To all the cadets and former alumni in this room, I'm sure your Tactical Officer's name popped into mind. Their tough discipline has helped you and you know it.

Thanks to your efforts, our journeys have been possible. Not only possible, but life changing. As my first year's Battalion Commander Ruiz told me, "You won't soon forget what you've learned here." Many aforementioned alumni have approached me and reiterated this phrase in different manners. And it's thanks to all the ladies and gentlemen accounted for today that that has been achievable. Thank you.

