

Princeton University Army ROTC Officer Commissioning Ceremony, May 31, 2011
Remarks by President Shirley M. Tilghman

Thank you, and good afternoon. I would like to extend my own warm welcome to one and all – and to General Gustave Perna in particular – as we gather in this historic place to celebrate a pivotal moment in the lives of two newly minted Princeton graduates: Nathan Plough and Amanda Van Duynhoven. In addition to earning bachelor’s degrees, they have served with distinction in the Tiger Battalion, preparing themselves to “support and defend” our nation’s Constitution as officers in the Ordinance and Adjutant General Corps of the U.S. Army.

Public service takes many forms, but few require one to make the kind of sacrifices, the life and death decisions, demanded of our military forces. In this time of conflict, the pressure on those who wear our nation’s uniform is especially great, because they will face the intractable challenges posed by war zones like Afghanistan, and in a world where their every word and deed will be viewed under a digital magnifying glass. Indeed, the complex conflicts of today cry out for liberally educated officers – men and women whose depth and breadth of knowledge, critical faculties, and sensitivity to other points of view and cultural traditions can help the armed forces and their civilian leadership dispel the fog of war or keep a fragile peace. As an ROTC alumnus put it when speaking on this occasion in 2004, “Today’s battlefield is one of ideas as much as it is one of swords,” and Nathan and Amanda are well positioned to navigate this battlefield, thanks to the education they have acquired on our campus.

On behalf of Princeton University, I would like to commend you both for serving your country in the way you have chosen and to wish you well in everything you undertake. I would also like to thank Colonel John Stark and executive officer Major Gregory Vinciguerra for all they have done to strengthen the Princeton Army ROTC, to instruct and inspire its cadets, and to ensure that it advances Princeton’s educational mission while fulfilling our commitment to serve this nation and all nations. I suspect it is no coincidence that an unusually large number of students in the newly admitted Class of 2015 have expressed an interest in joining the Tiger Battalion – 15 in all – which is good news indeed. And, in the best traditions of the Army, both Colonel Stark and Major Vinciguerra are moving on, the former to Afghanistan this summer and the latter to Fort Leavenworth for further study. I know I speak for everyone assembled in this room when I say our thanks go with you.

I would like to close with the words of the valedictorian for the Class of 1942 as he and his classmates prepared to go off to World War II. “The ability to think clearly and act rightly is the most valuable asset which we have received from our years at Princeton. . . . This ability we must preserve and cultivate to the best of our power so that we may discharge with honor our responsibilities in winning the war and in making the peace that will follow.” That is the spirit in which Nathan and Amanda will take their oaths today.