Coast Guard Academy Holds Virtual Graduation Ceremony for Class of 2020



Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz delivers remarks during the Coast Guard Academy virtual graduation ceremony.
NEW LONDON, Conn. – The U.S. Coast Guard Academy's Class of 2020 is the largest and most inclusive graduating class and includes the largest number of female graduates in the institution's history, the academy said in a May 21 release. They also became the first class to hold a virtual commencement ceremony due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commencement day activities began at 1 p.m. with recorded congratulatory messages from a host of flag officers, elected officials and celebrities, including TV weatherman and producer of the Coast Guard TV series Al Roker, as well as actors Gary Sinise and Kevin Costner, who referenced his portrayal of a Coast Guard swimmer in the film "The Guardian."

The five international students from the class were also sent congratulatory messages from officials representing their respective home countries of Haiti, Mexico, the Philippines and the Federated States of Micronesia.

The official ceremony consisted of a combination of live streamed footage from the official party on Cadet Memorial Field at the Academy, along with a mix of pre-recorded videos that closely followed the traditional run of past events. The event ended with recorded messages from the graduates to the rest of their classmates.

As the distinguished honor graduate of the Class of 2020, Ensign Alaric Stone gave an address that touched on the

successes of his classmates despite the unprecedented circumstances they found themselves in and the bonds that hold them together.

“It is a testament to our resilience in the face of adversity and our ability to take failure in our stride,” Stone said. “With 2020 vision we’ve been able to look beyond hardship and see what is truly important. Each other. Through trials and tribulations both big and small we have always remained a team. A family.”

In his remarks, Rear Adm. Bill Kelly, the Coast Guard Academy’s superintendent, reminded the audience of the inclusive nature of the class.

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>
> *Rear Adm. Bill Kelly, Coast Guard Academy superintendent*

“This year, we graduate the largest number of African-Americans, Native-Americans and Alaska natives and we continue to graduate more Hispanic officers than ever before,” Kelly said.

“The hard work to be more representative of the nation we serve is paying dividends, and while the demographic profile of this class is the most diverse ever, it’s the perspective, the skills and abilities each and every graduate brings to the service that makes them uniquely qualified to serve and lead during these unprecedented times.”

Standing on the stage alongside the official party at Cadet Memorial Field, Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz made brief remarks before introducing a prerecorded message from U.S. Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs

of Staff.

Milley told the graduates that, as leaders, they would be counted on during difficult circumstances.

“Honor, respect and devotion to duty,” Milley said. “These words can’t be abstract to you. In our profession, you must develop a bond of trust like no other occupation in the world. You have to trust each other. You have to trust the chain of command. You have to trust the petty officers and the seamen, and they must trust you.”

In his recorded remarks, Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolfe welcomed the graduates into the U.S. Department of Homeland Security team and reminded them what it takes to serve in the current environment.

“As frustrating as it may be, the unorthodox situation in which we find ourselves today is emblematic of what you will all find when you are on the front lines defending this country, and that is the need to be prepared for the unexpected,” Wolfe said.

“Put simply, life is going to look a lot different out there than it did inside your classrooms at the academy, and that is why I expect you to always keep learning. It is the best way to prepare yourself for the challenges that lie ahead.”