

Commencement Message: Bayog National High School – 18 March 2014 By Col. Valentino Edang

Introduction

Bayog Lord Mayor Leonardo Babasa,
Honorable Horace Paul Anlap,
Principal Danilo Ungang, faculty and staff of Bayog National high School,
Family members and relatives,
Distinguished graduates,

Good afternoon and welcome to our commencement exercises for school year 2013 to 2014!

It is not every day that I get invited to deliver a commencement message to 235 very promising graduates and a congregation numbering over 1,000. So when I was requested to represent our company, TVI Resource Development Philippines Inc., I immediately welcomed the opportunity to impart – what I hope to be – a lasting impact on these impressionable young minds before me today.

At this point, I would like to thank Principal Danilo Ungang for trusting to me to deliver a parting message to our graduates before they venture off into the bigger world. (Turning to Ungang): Sir, *maraming salamat po!* I hope my message today will be commensurate to your expectations.

And to our dear graduates, I hope that my story may serve as an example and support our theme today: *“Di natitinag and pusong Pilipino (The Filipino heart is steadfast).”*

Acknowledgements

Being residents of Bayog, I am sure you all know TVIRD – the company I work for. Since its establishment, TVIRD has espoused responsible mining in all its engagements, especially with its host community. Moreover, as it is set to commence its operations here in nearby Sitio Balabag, it takes extra strides in ensuring that its endeavors support the sustainable development of the province where it operates – these endeavors translate into social, environmental and economic benefits for all, as seen in the company’s flagship project in Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte.

TVIRD has been in partnership with the municipal government of Bayog and Bayog National High School since 2010 both in promoting quality education and values as well as developing productive young citizens who will continue to propel the Philippines further into the 21st century. It is good to note that early on, the municipality and the institution’s thrust for education runs parallel with TVIRD’s overall direction for sustainable development.

Thus, in the years to come, I am confident that TVIRD and Bayog municipality will see progress bourne from an even stronger partnership. TVIRD is also grateful to political will of the Provincial Government of Zamboanga del Sur – which paved the way for peace and progress here in Bayog.

Youth and career

Prior to joining TVIRD in Canatuan, Zamboanga del Norte, I was a service man in the Armed Forces of the Philippines where I built my military career of over 30 years. The AFP was my proving ground for demonstrating a quality that motivates me to this day: *“Desidido and pusong Pilipino.”* The Filipino’s heart is a determined one. And I will tell you why.

I come from a very modest family. I grew-up the son of a farmer while my mom was a simple housewife. And as I had many siblings, my youth taught me a lifelong lesson on sharing as we had to take part in what my good father provided for us. I am sure most of you can relate to this. *“Mapagbigay din pala ang pusong Pilipino...kahit nalalamangan na ng mga kuya at ate niya (The Filipino heart is charitable...even when overwhelmed by older brothers and sisters).”*

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I know I can probably laugh about it today, but imagine having to wear short pants until well into high school where the other boys were already in long pants! In fact, I had to cry for my father to buy me a pair of rubber shoes before my graduation. He eventually obliged and got me a pair – much to my delight.

Soon after my graduation, I joined the military service, which was completely different from the safe and carefree world that I knew. Suddenly, I was on my own with no brother or sister to protect me...no mother or father to cry to. While training was difficult, nothing in the world could have ever prepared me for the horrors of conflict and strife between brother Filipinos during my first assignment as an enlisted lieutenant in the Philippine Army.

On life's lessons

In 1974, I joined the 19th Infantry Brigade, which was shipped-out to defend the Philippine Government's interest in Buluan, Maguindanao. At this most uncertain time in my life, despite the horrors of war and seeing your buddies being shipped back in body bags, I believe it was determination that got me through a period of great confusion. At this age, you also do not know what real pain is.

I will not engage you in the graphic details of my assignment in Maguindanao, nor the ones in Jolo, Sulu. Although what I will share is the dedication that I put into every endeavor.

You see, I was also already married with kids at that time. I am sure some of your parents present here today who have worked in Manila or abroad – or simply away from home – know what I mean. On the one hand, I was assigned to several locations to serve the army; while on the other hand, my wife and children were miles away back home. The thought of the uncertain and something happening to me and never seeing them again crossed my mind several times.

Through it all, my family served as my inspiration. It is to them that I dedicate all my struggles and the extra diligence that I put into serving my superiors' requirements, earning the status of being their 'favorite.' Now being a 'favorite' also has its drawbacks since they always delegate more work to you – including the occasional massage that they require after a day's work.

I was their favorite because I worked hard. I was their favorite because I never complained. But most of all, I was their favorite because I was a warrior who fought with both head and heart, always moving forward while keeping what is truly essential in mind – and that is to get home alive and safe to my family. *"Talagang 'di natitinag and pusong Pilipino. Matibay ito (The Filipino heart is truly steadfast. It is tough)."*

Instilling values

During moments of peace, loneliness can be your greatest enemy. As I spent most of my life in remote locations and very unfriendly territories, I find comfort in knowing that my children have grown quite well under my wife's tutelage and discipline.

In the years that followed, I rose to the rank of Colonel, and by this time, my children were on their way to becoming accomplished professionals in both the US and here in the country. My friends always ask me what I did to raise them so well. I reply that they may not be able to do what I did, simply because I made the hard choices. I made the supreme sacrifice of serving my country in a faraway place, if only to show my children by example the qualities of discipline, determination, independence, hard work and an unquenchable spirit to serve both God and country. These, my dear graduates, will take you very far in life.

Even today as my children and their families often ask me to sit back and enjoy my retirement, I simply tell them that I cannot do that just yet, owing to a commitment that I made to TVIRD and our communities here in Bayog. And that is (1) for TVIRD to operate responsibly and in harmony with the community, (2)

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to support the government's responsibility to uphold peace and order in the area, and (3) to pave the way for peace and the prosperity of surrounding barangay communities in Bayog.

I gave my word, dear graduates. And this cannot be broken. *"Hindi ito matitinag (This cannot be broken)."*

As you venture into the world, you will constantly be reminded of the safe and happy place that Bayog National High School was for you. The lessons that you learned in this institution as well as the friendships you have formed will be the ones that you will have for life. But most of all, as you encounter challenges, uncertainty or even loneliness in the future when you go off to college or work in a faraway place, let your experience here be your source of peace. Let it be the anchor that will keep you grounded. Let it be your north star to guide you in every venture that you embark on.

Parting message

Please allow me to leave you with one last anecdote at this time—

Whatever choice you make in life – whether you choose to pursue a college degree, a technical or vocational course, or to work and help your families – choose a path and keep your eyes focused on what is essential. How will this help you develop as a person? How will this contribute to your family? Will this put you in a position to help your fellow man?

If you choose to take either Liberal Arts, Education or Agriculture in Bayog, or courses offered in Pagadian – or if you choose to take a course in mining and metallurgy – answer this question: will this take me a step closer to where I want to be?

If you choose to work or engage in business, choose one that you know very well – or at least make an extra effort to excel in what you do. There is always more pride owing to a hard-working farmer, like my good father was, than there is to a mediocre doctor, for example, who could not care less.

And should you consider a career in mining, then TVIRD is the company for you. While TVIRD is in the business of mining and mineral processing, it has also committed itself to the development of its host community. I was with the company since its early days in Siocon and everybody was against us: environmentalists, the Subanons, countless NGOs, religious groups and even the local government. They perceived us as a threat to their livelihood.

But through genuine engagements over the years, both TVIRD's mining operations and development projects helped Siocon rise to become a first-class municipality. Today, the town is thriving with livelihood and progressive infrastructure as well as a green, sustainable environment for the future. This is the same dream we share with Bayog.

Dear graduates, whatever path you choose, put your hearts and minds into it. Work hard, learn to rely on yourself and do not let anything deter you from pursuing what you believe in. *"Tandaan ninyo na 'di natitinag and pusong Pilipino (Remember that the Filipino heart is steadfast)!"*

And between here and where you aspire to be in the future, always remember that there is no alternative for discipline, determination and the unquenchable spirit to serve both God and country.

Congratulation to the Bayog National High School Class of 2014!

Mabuhay kayong lahat!