



# Creating a Future day by day

By Col. Jack Rhodes

Honors Program graduates from The Citadel often go on to highly competitive and exalted places: service in the Navy's Nuclear Program; graduate study at institutions like Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University; law school at the likes of Duke and the University of Virginia; medical school at Johns Hopkins. Sometimes they are supported by prestigious fellowship awards from the Truman Foundation or the Fulbright.

When they matriculate at The Citadel that hot August day, however, they are just knobs, like everybody else. During the first days and weeks when these new cadet-recruits have just arrived, many things are on their minds. Fearing failure, they struggle to measure up to the physical demands of their new environment, along with the seemingly endless number of rules, regulations and expectations. This demanding process, plus the new college-level academic demands they face, absorbs all the energy they can muster—and then some. Throw a growing concern for honor and the Honor Court into the mix, and you have a young man or woman who is overwhelmed. Before you know it, The Citadel is the cadet's whole world. For four years, that world demands all the attention cadets can give it, and the intensity of that total enterprise produces graduates we can be proud of.

There's another piece of the puzzle, though. The Citadel's mission is to produce the citizen-soldier: someone prepared to serve our country either through the armed services or through contributions made in civilian professional life. Those students who aspire to a particularly competitive path after graduation need to start thinking about that as soon as they enter college or, in some cases, sooner. And, they need to keep thinking about it. They need to do more than just think, too. They need to do something about it.

This is a lot to ask of 18-year-old students with a plate already full. Just a few months before, their biggest concern was whom to take to the senior prom or what dress to wear to it. Getting out of high school was a huge step. Entering college was a momentous event. Then, coping with the fourth-class system is a struggle, one that they tackle on a daily basis. All the forces of their lives converge upon the daily struggle to make it just one more day. They miss Mom. Sometimes, it feels as if the weight of the world—and by the world, I mean their first sergeant—is pressing down upon them.

In the midst of all this, the future can get lost. And yet, the future is precisely what they're here for. To use the admittedly histrionic language of a character from Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, "the future becomes the present, the present the past, and the past turns into everlasting regret if you don't plan for it."

So, how does the Honors Program help our students to plan for the future? We begin even before they become our students. Prospective Citadel Scholars are counseled when they come for their on-campus visit before they have graduated from high school to keep their eyes on the time after they finish college, to plan for it and to take action based on those plans. It doesn't usually occur to a high school senior that there are only three summers left once you enter college; that is, summer as he or she knows it—the season of free time and lounging at the beach. This vacation period will effectively cease after college when the world of work will transform summer into simply the hot time of year. These young high school students are encouraged to see their future summers as an opportunity to do