

Bob Hope  
1968 Thayer Award  
Acceptance Speech

Thank you very much.

General Schuyler, distinguished guests, I don't have to tell you that this is one of the big days of my life - and I've had some big days. But this is just wonderful and I am so thrilled to get this - this West Point Oscar. Now, this is the first award I have ever received that carries PX privileges. And I thought the message with it was very beautiful and I appreciate it very much, General Schuyler. I'd like to be humble, but this is an election year. I figure that the only reason you picked me is that the other comedians are out campaigning.

General Bennett reminded me that they were supposed to do this on Saturday, last Saturday, but I was booked in Kansas City and so they did it today. Well anyway - no, I have been very busy the past couple of weeks entertaining our fighting men at different universities around the country. By the way, I understand the students at Columbia have finally come to their senses - they agreed not to expel the president. I had an offer - I really had an offer - to speak at Columbia. Well, it was more of a dare and my insurance company cancelled it. But it's a great honor to be here at West Point, this great institution made famous by Warner Brothers. This is a new experience for me - I have never played to our troops off Broadway like this. It is just a great thing. Really.

You men have a great destiny to hold this country together until we see how the campaign comes out. I haven't seen this many men in uniform since Sophia Loren called the desk at the Beverly Hilton and asked for a bell hop. But this is a great institution. There is so much brass here the saluting keeps the place air-conditioned. And West Point has a great athletic tradition. This is where the Lonesome End originated - of course that was before they invented Right Guard. I used to come here and watch the games when I was on Broadway and I was up here watching Davis and Blanchard when Colonel Blaik had the team here. I suited up many times but he never sent me in. Because I played myself, in fact I was a center but I had to quit, I was too ticklish. And my quarterback was always using my towel. I hate that - don't you?

Before I forget it, I want to say that I enjoyed the West Point Glee Club at the opening of Madison Square Garden. I thought they were just marvelous. And they really added a little class to our show and am looking forward to using them again.

I was kind of tickled by General Schuyler's reference to my work for the aged. I guess that is why they put the sign up "Welcome Bing." I guess so. I know Bing would have been here tonight but they have early bed check at Sun City. At his age you know he must get his rest. When I went to Hollywood he was very nice to me. In fact he was the first one in Hollywood, I think. I think it was just Bing,

a few Indians and Ramona and she was going steady with Georgie Jessel, if I remember. But they broke up because she wouldn't buy an Israeli war bond. I think that was the story. And, Oh, by the way, I think the Israeli campaign was something. And I love the way they finished that war - you know, in a hurry. I really do. I wish somebody in Washington would buy a black eye patch. I think we could go places. Can you imagine finishing a war in less than a week. I think it one. Of course they had to finish it early because their Army closes down on Saturday. But I just think it was wonderful, I really do. And all their equipment was rented. I think it was just marvelous. No, actually it was a matter of dedication because the Egyptians captured one Israeli soldier and they said, "You're amazing, it took 20 of our men and 4 tanks to bring you in." And the Israeli soldier said, "You think that I am something, you ought to meet my husband."

This has been a day for me. I just loved that ceremony out there, the Review. I thought it was magnificent - enough to make the June Taylor dancers throw themselves off the Palisades. Really. I haven't seen that kind of organization since the telephone operators went on strike. No, it's all those cadets moving in perfect unison - restores my faith in life. It is nice to know there are still teenagers who can agree on something.

West Point has given this nation the great presidents, many great presidents. That was in the old days. Our future presidents, I think, will come from the Screen Actors Guild. Although Ronald Reagan says he is not a candidate, he's been made up for 6 months for something. I am sure he would like to be president. He just doesn't know where to go to read for the part. Almost everybody is running this year except the Fugitive. I know that Bobby Kennedy thinks he has a good chance because he has a good record in the Senate and we know he is very effective in the house. No, I shouldn't kid about that because he does have 10 kids. It explains why he does not have time to comb his hair. I just think it's a wonderful thing. And he is a nice fellow - he never had a chance to go wrong because he went right from kindergarten to Attorney General.

I just want to tell you that I am just very flattered and I am most humble when I think of the other recipients of this award - like President Eisenhower, General MacArthur, Cardinal Spellman. I feel as out of place as Dean Martin at an AA meeting. Or Phyllis Diller at the Miss Universe contest. No, it gives me a great, great kick to be here, really, to get this honor. It's just too much for me.

I know this dais here - I have been associated with quite a few people up here. I know the last time I was here was in 1946 when I came up here to do a pep rally just before the Notre Dame game. And General Taylor, Maxwell Taylor, was there and we had quite a time. I went around to all these halls and a jeep with a bull horn said, "Get up, Get up, Get up." It seemed like they were all ready because they were on that field and we did a little

rally for the team. I think they won, didn't they General? I think that was the year they won. No, I am sure - wasn't that the Davis & Blanchard thing? I think that was Davis & Blanchard - Mr. Outside and Mr. Inside - they won everything. And if they didn't, they don't have to worry about me, I know the feeling. I have been connected with the LA Rams for so long and I have always been more or less of an athlete - big chest, hard stomach. Of course that is all behind me now.

Very few people know it but my family has a long military tradition. My great-great-grandfather was morale officer for General Custer and my great-uncle sold tacos to the Rough Riders on San Juan Hill. And my cousin is dialogue director for Gomer Pyle. But you know when I hear Jonathan Seaman's name - the last time I saw him of course was in New York at the West Point dinner and before that we had the pleasure of meeting a couple of times in Vietnam, when the general was connected with the Big Red One Division and I had five beautiful girls with me but he noticed me too. And we had a wonderful time over there. He always made sure the girls were well taken care of. For instance they had 25 MP's with machine guns guarding - it's true - with machine guns guarding the girls. He took real good care of them and for the fellows they had a midget with a sling shot. And of course when I see General Bradley, whom I have known and played a lot of golf with, and as you know he is now with Bulova, which proves that old generals do not fade away, they just keep on ticking. He is one of my great friends in the golfing world. The last time we played at the Army-Navy course in Washington. He plays like a general by the way. Everytime he putts, he snaps to attention, yells "Fall In." And it is pretty hard to beat a fellow that rattles his medals while you are putting. But the last time we played together we came in the club house and I said, "I think I am the worst golfer in the world." The General said, "no, I am the worst." I said, "Well, let's match cards." He said, "All right." I said, "What did you have on the first hole?" He said, "An X." I said, "You're one up."

And of course you know Rosy O'Donnell, who has been connected with us and talked me into doing a show at the right price at Madison Square Garden and is now head of the U.S.O., has been one of my dear friends. He's doing a great job getting all the acts, auditioning the different fan dancers. Some dancers he auditions five or six times just to make sure they have it. But he is a wonderful fellow and he is a fighting man and with a name like Rosy, you better be able to fight, I want to tell you. But the year before last in Vietnam, General O'Donnell sat and watched my show for every performance and found out what bombing is really like. I met quite a few of these distinguished generals in the battle zones. This should be a novelty for them, seeing what the front of me looks like. You know I saw them under fire and they saw me under fire and I must say that some of them were firing at me. You know that is why this award has a special meaning for me - it is comforting to know that men who have a 200 year tradition of duty and bravery have such a sincere understanding of chicken.

I understand that my name will be inscribed on a plaque in the dining hall but fortunately not my picture, which might affect the appetite of sensitive cadets. Now they told me today that the Sylvanus Award - the Thayer Award - is not to be confused with the Sylvania Award, which I received one time. I think they gave me that one time for screwing in light bulbs. I think that was it. No, Sylvanus Thayer was the founder of the Academy here. He discovered West Point one day when he was AWOL from Annapolis - I read it somewhere. And he was responsible for many of the present-day Academy traditions. It is not generally known but he was the first one to throw his hat in the air and that was 30 years before you had a football team. It was Sylvanus who first uttered those immortal words - "Beat Navy." No, but he was quite a man and this award is a high spot in my career. I haven't been so excited about anything since I noticed Bing's first wrinkle, or since Lyndon made me an honorary bird. I just want to tell you that award I received on the Plain out there today really thrilled me; the one from you cadets. And it is a plaque that I will never forget. It is a very, very high honor. You know I consider myself very lucky and before I forget, I actually don't need anything. This is a sort of a plus for me, because I am so rich. You read Time magazine, didn't you? They said I was worth \$500,000,000. I think their computer drinks. No, it is true - \$500,000,000. I wish I had that kind of money, I tell you. It's caused a lot of problems for me. They asked some flamboyant Italian friend of mine that was going steady with Virginia Dare - they asked him just how much I was worth. He said, "Oh, about \$500,000,000," and fell down. They put it in the magazine and it has been rough for me, I will tell you. Bus loads of relatives are arriving at my house, eating the furniture and different things and my poor wife is going crazy ripping up all the mattresses, looking under the rugs and I'm helping her trying to find it. And of course the Internal Revenue Department is standing around saying "Where have we failed." I don't have that kind of money, If I had that kind of money, I wouldn't go to Vietnam, I'd send for it. No, but I feel very lucky and I consider myself lucky to be grabbing this honor here today. We are all lucky because living in America is a great privilege, the only thing greater is that wonderful feeling in your heart when you know you deserve the privilege, for the simple reason that you are earning it, that you are paying for your little slice of freedom. These are sensitive times. We are embroiled in a conflict that requires brilliant military strategy and the keenest diplomatic hand. That is why there are so many opportunities available to real Americans today. Sometimes you wonder about the character of those demonstrators who are trying to make patriotism a dirty word. You know, it is not fashionable to be a hawk any more and want to win. That went out about a year ago but I am a strange kind of a bird. I am a hawkish dove - nothing like a pigeon - but if I have to lay an egg for my country, I'm ready. Believe me. This is the time in our history when we must think of our heritage and the responsibilities that go with it and our salvation lies with dedicated Americans who have only their country at heart. You know, you read about the headlines now about everybody jumping on the peace wagon, and that is



a great thing because we all want peace. They say what an unpopular war. I don't remember a war that was popular. But this is really an unpopular war. People hate to be even caught talking about it. And I want to say it may be an unpopular war, but we have five or six hundred thousand of the most popular Americans over there fighting for our lives right today, ladies and gentlemen, and we've got to back them up. Believe me. They're putting their money where their mouths are and they are willing to give their lives for what they believe in.

It is kind of funny talking this way in front of all these generals you know, that really have experienced it and have been around a bit too. All the fighting isn't being done overseas. You can't read the morning papers without being a little worried about the current college craze of sit-ins and demonstrations and I think it is great that our young men and women are concerned about peoples's rights because that is the American way. That's why the world looks to us for help. But if this concern becomes a means of self-glorification, if it becomes a college game, we're in for some real trouble. America needs the ideas of its young people. It needs their idealism and I only hope that they aren't all hoarse when it is their turn to be heard from.

It takes a strong man to live in this kind of world. A man of constant decision, a man who is not afraid to speak when he should and who also knows the strength of silence. That's what they teach here at the Point - discipline - the magic word. For the last twenty-five years I have met and worked with the cream of our military men from all branches of the service. Men who are dedicated to keeping this country and its way of life firm and strong and I have laughed with them all over the world and I have never met a finer bunch of men. That is why this award means so much to me. And I wish my mother could have been here today - I wish she could have lived to see this day. If I 'd brought this home she would have said, "Quick, take it back before they call the cops."

This award, coming as it does from the incubator of great Americans, will hold a high spot in my trophy cabinet and my heart and I thank you. You made me very happy and very proud.

Thank you.