



Address at the 2011 Summer Commencement

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on August 12, 2011**



The following is an excerpt of the speech which was presented to attendees of FIU's 2011 Summer Commencement Ceremony- Ceremony 3 on August 12, 2011 honoring Richard Smith, FIU's most senior graduate.

Will Professor Darden Pyron and Major General Juan Ayala please escort Doctoral Candidate, Richard M. Smith, to stage?

And now I am proud to honor a determined student, a dedicated father and grandfather, and a decorated veteran. He is Richard M. Smith. When Richard M. Smith receives his Ph.D. in just a moment you will witness something so special that it will likely never be repeated again here, or perhaps anywhere else in the United States. Richard M. Smith is the most senior person ever to graduate from FIU, and certainly one of the oldest to ever earn his Ph.D. anywhere.

Richard was born in the period known as the Roaring 20s! A time where Calvin Coolidge was in the White House, the foxtrot dance was all the rage, and the stock market boomed; all this long before the computer, iPod, or Facebook.

So Richard *is* special because of his commitment to learning; But something else makes him *even more* special. You see, Richard M. Smith was just finishing his freshman year at the University of Pennsylvania when, like so many young Americans your age, he was called into the service of his country in the Army Air Corps. He was sent to fight for the cause of freedom in Europe during World War II. Richard M. Smith was part of the crew of a four engine B-24 Liberator aircraft that bombed Nazi Germany and airdropped tons of supplies and countless spies over Norway, Denmark and Sweden.

For his service and courage, Richard M. Smith received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal, among other recognitions. Richard M. Smith and thousands of other young brave men and women, including my father, were part of what one commentator called The "Greatest Generation" – Courageous soldiers who fought in the air land, and sea to liberate Europe and Asia from tyranny-- in the most **destructive and deadly** World war that we have ever known.

50 years later in 1994, an American president, remembering the lives lost at a memorial ceremony overlooking the former battlefield of Omaha Beach in Normandy, France solemnly stated “Let us never forget –when these... soldiers* Were young...they saved the world..”

Mr. Smith – make no mistake – we **must** take this precious and unique moment of your graduation to assure you that we, and freedom lovers everywhere, are indebted to you. We are indebted to a whole generation of brave, young Americans and the many thousands of whom never returned to their families and loved ones because they made the ultimate sacrifice for our country.....

After the war in late 1945, like thousands of other returning soldiers, Richard Smith finished his bachelor’s degree, got married, had three daughters, and ran his family’s successful women’s clothing company. But like so many others from the Greatest Generation, after retirement he wasn’t done, he went to grad school. When Richard M. Smith enrolled in the Ph.D. program at FIU he was already in his 80s. Under the mentorship of Professor Darden Pyron, who himself is a founder of our FIU, Richard completed his doctorate.

And today Ladies and Gentleman, at 87 years old, our decorated combat veteran, and dedicated husband and father, the member of this class of 2011 will receive his Ph.D. in history – right here, right now. Richard M. Smith-- today we honor your service, your courage, and your passion for learning, all of which have led you to this milestone achievement.

You **truly** represent what it means to turn the impossible into the inevitable. And I also would like to recognize the family that has supported Richard in all of his accomplishments – his wife, Zenaida, and his daughters, Betsy, Rande , and Cathy. Family members, would you please stand and be recognized?

And now we will confer a Ph.D. in History to Richard M. Smith, this outstanding member of the Greatest Generation and a genuine American hero.