



Good evening Corps

Thank-you for allowing me to take about 15-20 minutes of your time to officially say farewell in the midst of one of the most busiest times in the semester. As your Superintendent, I could not be more proud of each and every one of you and what you have accomplished during your time here as a cadet.

Thanks also for the parade. I know the pain it is to pull that together, but you all looked great. I've stood in the reviewing party of your parades for the last 5 years, and this one was special. You have honored Shelly and me, and it is more than we deserve, and know that we will gladly stand *with you* and *for you*, for as long as we are physically able to, because you deserve nothing, nothing less. You all are the best. Thank-you.

A couple of weeks ago was the 73<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V-E Day, which marked the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany's forces to the Allied Forces, bringing the war in Europe to a close. The men and women who served during World War II are part of what has often been referred to as the "Greatest Generation." That's a term that journalist Tom Brokaw coined, arguing that these men and women fought, not for fame and recognition, but because, in Brokaw's words, it was the right thing to do.

Some dignitaries have referred to your generation as the new "Greatest Generation" – although I consider you all the 9-11 generation – a generation that saw its country attacked and internalized the fact that our very way of life is now threatened, and as a result, you decided to do something about it.

When you came to West Point, our nation was at war. And when you came to West Point, each of you knew full well that you could join an Army at war. And yet, you



came nonetheless. You came with the deep desire to serve, to stand for some something much larger than yourselves. You came because it was the right thing to do.

While you are here, you will or have studied war, the history of war and the ethics of war. You watched the news of what was going on in the Middle East, North Korea, and elsewhere. But regardless, you remained firm in your commitment and what you believed in; you did not waiver or falter.

Instead, you counted yourselves among the generations that have gone before you to stand in the gap between this evil that is out there and our very way of life. Because of that, you have no idea what an honor it is for me to stand among your ranks and consider you brothers and sisters in arms. I commend you, and salute you, and am very proud of each and every one of you.

When you graduate, each of you will join the brotherhood and sisterhood of those who stormed the beaches at Normandy, hunted the enemy in the A Shau Valley of the Republic of Vietnam, parachuted into Panama, beat incredible odds in the streets of Mogadishu in Somalia and subdued our enemies in both Iraq and Afghanistan, while rebuilding both those countries.

LTC White, a retired basic training Battalion Commander from FT Benning in 2006 said it best when he spoke to his graduating Soldiers. When the policy makers finish talking, when the debate has ended, when negotiations have failed and orders are given, it will become your mission to lead the young men and women assigned to your care, to execute national policy for the last 300 meters to any given objective. You are the substance behind any policy undertaken by this nation deemed important enough to



send our national treasure into harms way – absolute proof positive that the United States means business when their boots hit the ground.

Each of you are special for many reasons, but the fact that you stood up and said “Send me” at a time of war speaks volumes about your character. Becoming a member of the United States military is always a big decision, but to do so in times when our national security is most at risk, is perhaps the noblest thing you could ever do. For you have already internalized the ethic of “Duty” and service to “Country” when you reported on R-Day, because like 99.5 percent of your peer group, you could have easily opted for a safer existence. The fact you are here right now truly makes you the best and brightest we have in this nation.

I have had the honor to serve with some of the greatest leaders in our generation. The Ray Odiernos, Mark Milleys, Del Daileys, Chuck Jacobys, Dave Petraeuses, Lloyd Austins, Scotty Millers, Joe Votels, Tony Thomases, Vince Brookses, Mike Scaparrotties, Bob Browns, and many more. And while serving with them, I have learned so much.

I learned of the privilege and honor to lead America’s national treasure – its sons and daughters; but to lead is hard. When you walk around West Point you see statues of Eisenhower, and Patton, and MacArthur, and not necessarily statues of airplanes, boats, tanks or rockets. That is because this is what makes our Army so great, because we are a people business that involves human interaction especially in the crucible of ground combat. In the Army we lead and motivate our Soldiers in the toughest and

most difficult of times, and that is where we do it best. You too will have this honor and will be challenged to do it well.

I learned that the best and brightest are not necessarily on campuses or in the corporate boardrooms. Don't ever think for a minute that those running around on some college campus or in some corporate business have anything on you. They don't. You are privileged to have the one advantage that all of them covet – you will know many of life's truths, you'll know about the goings on in Iraq, Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and many other places. You will know some of life's hard truths and some of its purest devotions. You will never have to guess.

I learned that leading Soldiers is not coddling them, but to hold them to the highest of standards. They are Americans, and more than anything, they want to be a winner and they want to be part of a winning team. High standards make them the best and that is what they want. I encourage you to lead in everything you do, with the highest of standards. Don't baby them; develop them and build pride and confidence in their weapons, their battle drills, themselves and their teammates, because of the high standards and tough, difficult training you led them through.

I learned that our best leaders lead from the front. I watched GEN Odierno walking the streets in Mosul, or GEN Austin leading his entire Division from the berms of Kuwait to downtown Baghdad. Inspiring Soldiers to move when common sense would tell them otherwise not to. But they watched their leaders lead from the front every time, and that is what made a difference. I've seen Division commanders visiting Soldiers in

the motor pools and weekend guard posts, and in the shittiest of places. A hello, or a nod makes a difference every time.

I learned that great leaders perform with excellence in everything they do. Excellence is performing to the upper level of one's potential, but it is also moving toward areas that are not common or comfortable. Great leaders are not afraid to move in that direction, knowing they will make mistakes, but they will learn and get stronger and better as a result. Great leaders also encourage their subordinates to stretch knowing they too will make mistakes, but great leaders underwrite their mistakes as an opportunity to learn.

Great officers are risk takers, and the greatest risk is not necessarily making a mistake -- but failing to stand up for what is right. *Character* is the principle measure of one's worth, and great leaders will always, always chose the harder right despite the outcomes every time.

The greatest privilege our Nation can give you is to lead such magnificent men and women. They will challenge you and disappoint you, but when the chips are at their worse, they will never let you down. They will even give their life for you so that you can lead their brothers and sisters in arms another day.

I recall visiting one of my Soldiers in Walter Reed when I was home during mid-tour leave, who lost both arms and both legs in an IED in Iraq. We had 4 months before we would return, and this scrappy E4, sitting in a chair while being spunky and cocky told me he would fly to our home post, and meet his platoon as they returned from their combat tour. There was nothing he wanted more than to be back with them. And sure

enough, with his whole platoon present, he flew to Honolulu and with two prosthetic legs and two prosthetic arms; he walked off the plane to the arms of his brother platoon members. In that moment, in that reunion, there was not a dry eye anywhere in that platoon, and even this Division Commander, standing on the side watching this incredible reunion, had a hard time not shedding a tear or two myself. Brandon Marocco is his name. You can look him up on Google and see his incredible story. But there is nothing that will stop this Soldier. His tenacity and grit inspire his unit still to this day, and he inspires me to always stand up for these incredible men and women and to do what only is right for each and every one of them.

I have learned that great leaders build inclusive teams where everyone feels valued, respected, that they contribute to their unit and its mission, and they are safe and secure both emotionally and physically, despite their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, faith or not faith, gender orientation, or even their political affiliation. They never accept indifference or injustice and judge only on standards and how well they do their job.

I learned that whether you serve 5 years or 43, you will never regret your decision to serve your Country in the United States Army. And contrary to the vast majority of your peers, you have elected to do what others would never dream of doing. And when 50 years from now, your grandchildren are studying this war in their classrooms, and when they sit on your lap asking you, "Grandma and Grandpa, what did you do in this war on terror?", you can proudly say that when your country needed

you the most, you answered the call of duty and served. Your only regret will be that you could not have served longer.

But what is the most important thing I learned? That there is no nobler calling in the world than to be a Soldier in the United States Army.

Life as a Soldier is not easy. That is why it was the collective goal of those of us charged with your training to make sure you understand that. Your TACs, TAC NCOs, DPE, and DMI cadre, instructors, CCDP and MX400 teachers – they all know what awaits you when you assume leadership of your Soldiers. Their sacred duty was to ensure that you are not surprised. The vast majority of your staff and faculty have been to the battlefield and I can't overstate that fact. They have put into action much of what they taught you. They have moved under fire, seen the enemy up close, and they know that this endeavor is deadly serious. Your leaders have humped the steep mountains of Afghanistan with a 120 pound rucksack on their back, gasping for breath in the thin mountain air in pursuit of the enemy...muscles screaming, back aching, sleep and rest nowhere in sight. They have chased the enemy through the streets of Baghdad or Ramadi, reacted to IEDs, and fought the enemy from 10 feet away.

This is why duty demanded that the training you receive here presents a challenge. It's why you did all those pushups...and why you'll do a thousand more. It's why you ran all those miles...and will run many more. It's why you fired hundreds of rounds, it's why you marched and marched with no end in sight. It's why you had to succeed on the APFT, or suck up the dust from generations who have gone before you taking the IOCT. It's why you competed on the fields of "friendly strife" in order to



develop the discipline to be part of a team and learn to play with pain, because your teammates counted on you.

It's why your parents can see the change, simply by the way you stand, and most importantly, it's why you have begun to appreciate the brotherhood and sisterhood and pure camaraderie that is gleaned through nights you sat in the freezing rain next to your battle buddy, walking the area with your beast roommate, finding humor studying for your TEE at 0300 under the lights out policy, or sharing a cold MRE. You will come to appreciate the midnight talks with your roommates, the freezing rain day after day during CLDT, the blisters from the AASLT 12 mile road march, and the sores from ticks and mosquitoes that just wouldn't heal in the heat of summer – realizing all the while that you're forming bonds, at moments such as these, that will last a lifetime.

The most complicated battlefield in the history of warfare awaits you. The complexity of the cultures you will engage with requires intellectual agility and understanding as we have never seen. As numerous leaders have referred to this environment - including LTC White: You'll engage in vicious close combat on one block, protect children as they attend school on the next, and restore water and power on the third...all of this simultaneously. You will, on a daily basis, make life or death decisions with only the time it takes to blink an eye...to process, decide and take action.

You will often find yourselves as part mayor, part district chief, police chief and arbitrator of disagreements among ethnicities and tribes as varied as our 50 states. You will personify daily the oxymoron of the "strategic corporal." A decision that you make





under duress, with little time for reflection or thought, may quite literally impact the actions of policy custodians in our nation's capital.

You are the latest band of brothers and sisters miles away from the flagpole and making things happen in the very best way you can. The techno wannabees in the corporate world can't begin to imagine the vast responsibilities you had accepted. You will be scrutinized like no warriors before you. Expected to eradicate our enemies, pacify the critics and abide by rules of land warfare as we are committed to doing. You'll hold more responsibility and do more in the next few years than most people will do in a lifetime. High expectations to be sure...but you will succeed.

You will have internalized, through the pain of lessons learned, the absolute integrity of the Warrior Ethos – "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade." You will make mistakes, and yet, you will learn and get better as a result. But you will be great and absolutely magnificent. For you would not be here if you do not have what it takes, and do not for a moment doubt that you are lacking one bit of training and preparation necessary for success. Your country's leadership and this Academy's leadership have complete faith, trust and confidence in each and every one of you. Because you are, to borrow a phrase from LTC White – "you are a United States Soldier - steely eyed, knuckle-dragging, flat bellied, Oakley wearing, door busting, but when appropriate, compassionate and kind".

Your West Point experience from Day One has been all about developing you to be prepared intellectually, physically, militarily, morally and ethically. I guarantee that

every day, you will draw on something you've learned here – whether you learned it in the classroom, on the playing field, during a military training exercise or just over a soda or cup of coffee with an instructor.

But above all else, it will be your character that will define you as a leader. So if you remember nothing else that I've said here this evening, remember this: *Do not let anyone or anything steal your character and what you know is right. There is nothing out there worth losing that.*

I know many of you have seen the movie Saving Private Ryan. Without a doubt, the film has left a lasting impression on my generation regarding the debt we owe to our older generations.

The film opens with a harrowingly realistic reenactment of the D-day invasion of Normandy. We see the action through the eyes of CPT John Miller (played by Tom Hanks). Through the rest of the film, Miller leads a search party to locate Private Ryan, whose three brothers have just been killed in action. The last, and only surviving son, is to be sent home to his grieving mother.

As the soldiers penetrate behind enemy lines, they open a Pandora's Box of moral questions: Why are these eight called to risk their lives to save one man? Don't they have mothers, too? Are they just pawns in some cynical PR maneuver by the War Department? How much is one man's life worth?

There is no easy answer to such questions, but at the end, the producer, Steven Spielberg shows the only answer possible. Miller and the majority of his men have been mortally wounded; as the captain dies, he gasps to Private Ryan and pulls him close to

his face and with his dying voice says, “Earn this. Live a good life. Earn this.” In other words, men have died for you, now live a life worth of such sacrifice.

What a weight of moral duty to lay on a man’s shoulders! Fifty years later, the former Private Ryan, now an old man, visits the soldier’s graves in Normandy and with tears in his eyes he says, “I lived my life the best I could,” he speaks anxiously to the gravestones. “I hope in your eyes I’ve earned what you have done for me”.

From General Douglass MacArthur’s Thayer Award speech in the fall of 1962, he told the Corps: “The Long Gray Line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and gray, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, Honor, Country”.

Said another way: “Earn this you cadets of today. Live a good life. Earn ... what the long grey line has done for our Nation. Are you worthy of such sacrifice?” And when you are at the end of your career, whether it is your 5 year obligation or a 40 year run as a four star general, I hope you can respond, “Ma’am/Sir, I hope in your eyes I have earned what you have done for me”.

Our Cadet Creed encourages us to live about the common level of life. If you aspire to lead an uncommon life you have to deliver. You have to achieve in whatever you do, or you won’t succeed. So pledge to lead an uncommon life. Pledge to have an impact. Pledge to achieve. Pledge to lead a life of excellence. And pledge to win with character. In other words, “Earn this”.

Before I depart, let me share a couple of final thoughts, a number of which I’ve taken from LTC Smith’s talk in 2004 that I referred to earlier.

1. I will never apologize for being a Soldier in the United States Army and don't ever feel that you have to either. This is the life I have chosen – the life I have lived for almost 43 years. It isn't risk free, it isn't always easy. But in the humble opinion of this proud Grunt, it's always been a life worth living. There is no more noble profession than the one of which you are about to enter. It is a portion of your life spent in the cold, hot, snow or rain – facing danger during peace and war, while making the best friends you will ever have, men and women who will have your back no matter what life brings. As Americans, we aren't perfect – but I can think of no better place.
2. Draw your energy in the days ahead from your friends, especially your classmates who you have developed bonds deeper than your own blood brothers and sisters. And then, when you get to your unit, draw your energy from your Soldiers, who you will care for even more than your own family. If they trust you, they will respect you and if they respect you, they will go to the four corners of the earth for you and gladly give their lives to protect yours, so you can lead their remaining brothers and sisters another day.
3. Draw your strength in the days ahead from your values, particularly the values of this institution. Let the values of Duty, Honor, Country be the moral compass that guides you in the decisions you will make, to do the harder right and be able to come home and look America, your parents, your spouse in the eye and know that you were trustworthy, *faithful and true to your word*.

4. Don't ever forget those who got you here, who stood by you through the good and the bad, who supported you even when no one else did – your parents and your family. They've gone through an emotional roller coaster while you are here, and they will continue as they watch you succeed and fail, and get up and do it all over again. They love you more than you can imagine, unconditionally, and will be there for you no matter what. Please don't forget to thank them and give them a hug often.
5. Finally...stand tall. Suck it up when things get hard and remember that they can and usually will.
  - Stay aggressive and be on the offensive.
  - Keep your weapons clean and your bayonet sharp.
  - Write and call your parents often. They never stop worrying
  - Never panic, because once you do, you have lost.
  - Watch out for one another – because when things look the worst, you'll need each other the most.
  - Hydrate.
  - PT every day.
  - Keep your head on a swivel and your eyes wide open.
  - Remember that it's always better to be the one to deliver the blow.
  - Be proud to be called a Soldier.



And always remember, that as this nation's 21<sup>st</sup> Century warrior, America is relying on you as you assume your post, standing in the gap between this evil and our way of life.

Like the men and women who have gone before you, you will risk everything. Like them, you will put aside the instinct for self-preservation and risk your lives for the men and women in your charge. You will march and move forward under fire. You will persevere, and like them, you will win. And what will have inspired your efforts? Looking at you today I know the answer. It is your faith and your belief; your loyalty and love; it is your duty, your honor and your love of country.

So, as I look out at you all right now, I am absolutely confident that our Army and our nation are in very good hands. When you leave here, you will be ready. And I couldn't be more proud of you.

You were great this year Corps. Finish strong! May God bless and protect each and every one of you.

Go Army; Beat Navy!