

Army War College celebrates Distance Class of 2011 graduation

Staff Sgt. Corey Baltos, and Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs

Army War College celebrates Distance Class of 2011 graduation



Maj. Gen. Gregg Martin, USAWC

Commandant, speaks to the 365 members of the Distance Education Class of 2011, during the graduation ceremony on July 22. Photos by Tyler Davis.

For students of every graduate receiving their diploma go [here](#)

For more photos visit the [USAWC Facebook page](#)

For videos visit the [USAWC YouTube page](#)

July 22, 2011 -- One more challenge faced the senior officers as they celebrated completion of two years of internet-based studies at the Army War College's distance education program. The largest graduation class in college history received their diplomas on a day of record-breaking heat, July 22, at historic Carlisle Barracks.

The USAWC Distance Class of 2011 completed a two-year curriculum in strategic studies. The graduating colonels and lieutenant colonels represent the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force – most of the members of Reserve of National Guard – and 14 senior federal civilians and senior military officers representing Canada, Estonia, and Croatia.

“Each of you graduates has elected to take the road less traveled,” said graduation speaker Dr. William Perry, Stanford University professor and former U.S. Defense Secretary. “Each of you graduates has been selected to be a leader in the future of our military services, and that has made all the difference in your life.

Col. Stephanie Wilcher, Dunham Health Clinic commander, smiles as she receives her diploma.

“In this world, all of your training and all of your leadership skills will be tested,” said Perry. “But, you have spent two years honing those leadership skills at the best military college in the country, maybe the world. You are as well prepared as you can be for the challenges you face.

“I for one will sleep better knowing that the training of this group of Citizen-Soldiers, our future military leaders, are dedicated to preserving the peace and stability of the world.”



USAWC Commandant Maj. Gen. Gregg Martin saluted the graduates' accomplishment.

“Today marks an amazing transformation,” said Martin. “You’ve completed the formal journey of personal and professional development within the Army War College program.

“You’ve shifted your thinking from the tactical and operational level to the strategic level, and you can face the new level of senior leader responsibilities with confidence,” he said.

As the graduates prepare for the next phase of their careers, they reflected on their Army War College experience.

“It’s truly been an amazing experience,” said Col. Andy Keirn, commander of the 301st Regional Support Group in Butler, Pa. “The course really help shift my way of thinking from the tactical and operational to the strategic. That’s the next level that many of us will now find ourselves operating at.”

“This course lets you take a step back and look at the big picture,” said Lt. Col. Dale Waltman, director of the Joint Emergency Operations Center at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. “It gives us time to think about what we’re reading or learning about during the discussions.”

Dr. William Perry, Former Secretary of Defense, spoke to the graduates about the challenges they would face as future



strategic leaders.

USAWC distance education students face the additional challenge of balancing the responsibilities of both military and civilian careers. Many deployed at some point during the two-year program.

“I deployed to Afghanistan during the second year,” said Lt. Col. Leslee Sanders, chief of the

Medical Research Division at Ft. Bragg, N.C. “The faculty and my seminar mates totally understood, and worked with us in whatever way they could to help us out. It was really amazing.”

Her classmate, Col. James Waskom, deputy commander of the 256th Infantry Brigade Combat Team of the Louisiana Army National Guard, had a similar experience while deployed.

“Many times there were operational issues that forced me to miss deadlines or group discussions,” said Waskom. “I received great support from my faculty instructors and encouragement from my seminar-mates.”

The camaraderie of the seminar enhances the students' experience. The course creates student links through online forums and two resident phases at Carlisle Barracks.

When Donna Welton arrives in Kabul, Afghanistan, in August to be the State Department’s public affairs officer, she’ll bring new insights into the military, she said.

“I’ve spent the last two years learning with and from many great leaders in the military,” she said. “I know that any time I have a problem or want to bounce something off someone I have someone to call who I know will give me great advice.”

“You each bring your own unique perspective to the discussions, which is where the real learning takes place,” said Keirn. “The second year really helps strengthen the bond between us in the seminar.”



Graduates Col. Suzanne Vares-Lum and Lt. Col. David Lopina pose for a photo with their diplomas.



“I’m looking at folks that will be wearing stars some day,” said Lt. Col. Greg Jackson, who works for FEMA in Atlanta, Ga. “To me, these program shows that the system does work and

we have the cream of the crop in this course. I’m humbled to be a part of it.”

“I enjoyed the experience and the interaction with my classmates,” said Marine Lt. Col. Mark Jamison, a lawyer with the 1st Marine Logistics Group at Camp Pendleton, Ca. “Every time I go to an Army school I am better for it,” he said, mentioning attendance at the Army Judge Advocate General School.

Application of the Army War College education was immediate, noted Lt. Col. James McCormack, who commands the 154th Quartermaster Battalion in Philadelphia, Pa. and an administrator at Bloomsburg University.

“Sometimes I think we forget that the military doesn’t operate in a vacuum and that many times we are faced with similar issues in our civilian jobs as well,” he said. “A number of times I was able to apply some of the concepts we’d been discussing to projects at my civilian job.”

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 22 July 2011