

Maj. Gen. Williams says farewell to USAWC Class of 2010

Maj. Gen. Williams says farewell to USAWC Class of 2010



In his last time addressing the Army War College Class of 2010 before graduation, Maj. Gen. Robert Williams, USAWC Commandant, delivered these remarks in Bliss Hall--

In my final days as a Soldier and the commandant of the Army War College, my message this afternoon is a simple one, but also serious. Let me begin with the simple part.

You have been a terrific class, you have had, in our opinion, a great year, and you all have a bright and challenging future ahead. As I stand here, I am painfully aware that some of you have packers at the door, so with that in mind, I will try to be brief.

Thanks for the great work that you and your families have done for this community. Thanks to all the spouses of the class of 2010 whose collective energy have been remarkable this year.

As all of us in this room know, leadership is the hallmark of our profession, and your class leadership, starting with Col. Roger Schuck and Brigadier Zaki Mokhtar, has been outstanding. I want all the seminar leaders, all the class officers, please stand up and be recognized for your contributions. Your class demanded the faculty give you all that they could deliver, and yet you always supported the team here. I thank all of you for that.

I also want to thank all the class committees, but especially the yearbook team. The yearbook committee labors in relative obscurity and their product is not seen until you are all dispersed but their efforts are significant. Would Col. John Mauk and the yearbook team please stand up and be recognized.

Now -- a special thanks to this class for a great effort at Jim Thorpe Sports Day. I would ask the Jim Thorpe committee chairmen stand up and be recognized. Thanks for giving me an undefeated tenure as

the commandant. Let the word go out to Maxwell, to Newport, to Fort McNair, to Quantico – you missed your opportunity – the class of 2010 would not be denied. By the way the class of 2004 stands ready to hand over their very special hats, but not to you.

Now let me be a bit more serious.

You are about to re-enter the day to dayservice of protecting the nation. Some of you will deploy within a few days of graduation; others inevitably in your next year or two.

We are, ladies and gentlemen facing an existential threat— these are extraordinarily dangerous times, and it is my belief that the collective threat that all of us face today is more dangerous than the threat that ominously hung over this great country during the Cold War.

That threat makes the lessons, and the context of your education here all the more important. For those of you who have already deployed in harm's way, your experience gives you a sobering view of the near term, and my hope is that those experiences reinforce the importance of your year here.

In the days ahead many of you will begin to make an important transition; from the need to demonstrate physical courage to the need increasingly to demonstrate moral courage. Most of you have already begun this transition. You will be less a hands-on leader, and more a leader who employs the indirect approach because of the scope, the span and the nature of your responsibilities. I know that



many of you already recognize this from your experience. It is a very different battlefield that you will be asked to serve on in the days and years ahead. When first you stood on some hill, on some battlefield - and I know many of you have done this- and immediately saw the entire battlefield before you-- it was easy.....---in the days to come it will be much harder--the reality of the battlefield--for you--is something far beyond the kind of time and space relation that you experienced as a Lt., a Capt., or even a Lt. Col. It will be hard--much harder and the stakes will be enormous. I am confident that all of you in this room are up to the challenge. As I have told many of you this year--welcome to the big leagues.

Use your well honed instincts, your personal relationships, and the education you have received here and elsewhere and you will do well.

That said, never forget,your passion for our Soldiers and your responsibility for leadership. Someone

will always have to get Soldiers to move off the beach, or from behind that stone wall, someone will always have to get Soldiers to take the objective----increasingly for you though, it will mean taking a hard position---to change an ill conceived policy, to move an organization forward, or perhaps to stand up--in the face of real professional danger-- to change a poorly conceived operational concept, or an incomplete campaign plan----the point is, leadership makes the difference; it is and always will be important at the tactical level--and it is no less important at the strategic level.

Now for some very serious thoughts, and they are serious indeed, I believe I owe you a bit of reflection on what I believe your generation of strategic leaders will face in the next 5-15 years. And so let me begin:

I believe your generation of strategic leaders will face

- potential war-- and I mean war in the traditional sense, a real conventional conflict, perhaps on the Korean Peninsula, perhaps in the Middle East, perhaps in some location completely unimaginable to us here on this day in this auditorium. The reality is there, the conditions are ripe, and you may have to lead your nation through this enormous challenge

- your generation will face potential economic challenges the like of which the country and world has not seen in over 90 years. Your generation will face the question soon as to whether strategy should dictate resources or resources should dictate strategy.

- your generation will face a complex world in which conflict is the noun, where--to use a phrase you have heard a lot of this year, a whole of government approach is demanded, but were the rest of the government is largely absent.

- your generation will face environmental catastrophes - the likes of which we are seeing right now in our own gulf and sadly perhaps you will face catastrophes that are even worse.—you will be called --to bring order out of what will surely be chaos.

- last but not least, I believe your generation will have to rebuild an army. We are approaching 10 years into this war. Long wars have an interesting characteristic about them, in that, they act like giant crucibles on which all training, education, combat developments, and organizations are shaped and forged. So it has been with this war. The real question is, has this war, has this crucible, forged the training, the education, the combat developments and the organizations the country needs in the next century- and not for “this” war, but the next one.

You in this room have to answer that question. And you in this room must have the vision to see what that war might be and you in this room must develop the narrative to convince your political masters,

your Army, your Air Force, your Navy , your Marine Corps, and the country to move in that direction. This will require moral courage and real leadership. It will be very hard indeed.

T.E Lawrence in his great work, the seven pillars of wisdom wrote passionately about how in the wake of “his” war , the Arab revolt against Ottoman Turkish rule, and I quote, “old men came out and took from us our victory, and then remade it in the likeness of the former world they knew.”

Now the interesting thing about Lawrence’s passage here is that like some of you in this audience he was worried about his army returning to its former self—

Characterize it as you will, I am speaking about your former Army—big, heavy, combined arms like etc etc. But the fact is as right as Lawrence was in his time, he was also very wrong, and had the British Army shaped itself in the wake of WWI as Lawrence wished, they would have been woefully unprepared for WWII.

The truth is T.E. Lawrence was captured by “his” war and not the war that was coming.

So like T.E. Lawrence, be concerned about the Army you have to build and lead, but also be concerned that you do not become the tired generals who want to fight the last war, and remake the world you know so well.

That is your world ladies and gentlemen—I may have it wrong and in a sense I hope I do have it wrong

Now to a slightly lighter tone.

Stay in contact, especially with each other. The Army War College is about lifelong learning and outreach. We stand ready to serve you wherever you go with faculty support or access to our materials. Keep us informed about your operational reality— we must always be ready to adjust to the conditions and you can help your college do that.

Let me close on a personal note of appreciation. Many of us here have sons and daughters in this profession. My son is preparing himself to be a Lieutenant. With that said, it is the most personal and heartfelt measure of my confidence and respect for this class that I would be honored to have any one of you lead my son in your future commands. I wish all of you the very best. I will miss all of you a great deal.

Ladies and gentlemen, the enemy remains at our gates ---the republic calls all of you for service yet again.

God bless you all and God Speed. I’ll see you Saturday at the parade ground.

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 09 June 2010