Cyber Chief to Army War College graduates: Expand competitive edge with partnerships, next-gen investment

By Public Affairs Staff 05 June 2020

GEN Paul Nakasone speaks to the graduating class of the Army War College at the 2020 graduation ceremony at the historic parade field at Carlisle Barracks, Pa. He addressed historic and future opportunity in applying technical innovations.

The student body assembles within social distancing guidelines to celebrate a milestone in professional careers and investment in the future of the US Armed Services and that of 75 partner and allied countries.

Graduating today were 224 U.S. Army officers, 25 Air Force, 8 Navy, 17 Marines, 1 Coast Guard officer, 22 senior federal civilians, and 79 international officers.

Army Lt. Col. Gabe Vargas, New Mexico National Guard, is a graduate of the US Army War College, Class of 2020

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The U.S. Army War College Class of 2020 represents the diversity of America and its global allies and partners. Students are representatives of the county from all branches and components of the nation's Armed Forces, a cadre of deeply experienced civilians, and 79 international fellows. Seventy-five countries are represented, to include first-time participants Angola, Azerbaijan, and Liberia. Over the course of most of a year, they have pursued knowledge, skills, and relationships that will serve them in senior leadership assignments.

* Find photos at www.flickr.com/photos/usawc/
* A ceremony highlights video will be available at www.youtube.com/usarmywarcollege.

At the June 5 graduation ceremony on the historic parade field of Carlisle Barracks, Pa., Commandant Maj. Gen. John Kem reminded the class of

another graduate, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who spoke with his Soldiers this day 76 years ago about the weighty and risky decision to shift D-day from June 5 to June 6 - 75 years ago. Guest speaker Gen. Paul Nakasone invoked history as well. He reminded the graduates of the war college students of the 1930s who had helped build the foundation of strategy for World War II, recognizing that war would take place on many fronts and challenge us technologically and tactically.
A USAWC alumni, Nakasone now wears three hats, as commanding general of the U.S. Cyber Command, director of the National Security Agency, and chief of the Central Security Service. When he completed his Army War College studies in 2007, the graduates of this college became the brigade commanders and leaders of the surge in Iraq, while many in the current class of 2020 were our company commanders who ensured our success on the battle field, he said.

Throughout the ceremony, there was a sense that the graduates were at another turning point in history.

"Like many graduates right now from high school and college and beyond, you'll find yourself walking out to a world changed," said Gen. Nakasone. "You will find a ready market for strategic leadership.... As an Army and Joint Senior Leader, let me assure my US colleagues, we are expecting a lot of you."

A new challenge awaits these leaders whose careers span an era focused largely on counterterrorism, he said. "Now, great power competition, evolving technology and, yes, COVID 19, and our need to appreciate that the secure environment is more than friends against foes -- these will be the challenges of the second decade of the 21st century," said Nakasone.

"Readers of the NDS tend to focus on lethality as the objective of the document. It is not. The goal is to expand the competitive space with our adversaries. Lethality is only one way to do that. The NDS highlights partnerships as a critical way to expand the competitive space because ... the United States military does not have a monopoly on the best ideas, the best talent, or the best capabilities. Partnerships need to be grounded in something more than a formal contract. They need a mix of shared interests and shared values. They're also nurtured by personal connections.

I see these shared values, especially, at the core of international partnerships.

Find photos

Find the Graduation Ceremony HIghlights video

"There's a premium on building consensus and coalitions around your decisions, and to do so artfully with greater finesse and less force," he said. And, foundational to your future success [is] the talent you will inherit, you will develop, you will lead in the coming years."

"You have a responsibility to lift the next generation. You have a responsibility to create a positive culture. Your impact on the next generation of talent will be everything. As a leader in the technology arena, I've come to understand the struggle to recruit, train, and retain true talent ...."

"That instinct to build connections and share a common cause - to seek talent in all corners of our work -- also takes us a little further afield. We don't succeed alone. You need partners. The scope of your responsibilities and the outcomes you'll be expected to generate will grow beyond the resources under your direct control. This is true at the individual level. But you can also see it at the national level and in our National Defense Strategy.

"One of the reasons our partnerships are so critical is because so much power has shifted from large scale weapons systems to technology," said Nakasone. "Countries from around the world want to work with the US military - yes, because they see shared interests but more fundamentally because they believe in the benefits of the international system that reflects our values."

Students reflect on the Carlisle Experience

Students foreshadowed Gen. Nakasone's themes of vision, strategy and relationships in a series of pre-ceremony interviews about their 10-month graduate education experience at Carlisle. They expect to apply strategic mindedness and a new appreciation of agility in their future service.

Class president Army Col. Shawn Underwood will next serve as commander of the 157th Infantry Brigade, relying on insights from this year. "The biggest thing is I've got to look up and out. I've got to think what my senior leaders want, understand their thought process and then I need to take that and interpret it down and in to the brigade level, but it is really about how we fit into the big picture of the US. Army and the Department of Defense."

No class year is entirely without hiccups, but this class absorbed a few, to

include 2.5 months under COVID-19 precautions, leading to an interesting perspective: "I will miss the adversity," said Underwood. Our class was resilient and I do not use that term lightly. The seminar group itself and the bonds we have formed have made us stronger and we will take that with us as we depart from here and go on to serve our country."

The International Fellows' senior class representative, Bangladesh Brig. Gen. Ferdous Salim, spoke to the power of international relationships that will endure beyond graduation. He'll miss the friendships across more than 75 nations, he said. "This is a great learning experience because of the cultural environment you have here, and trying to understand each country's and region's viewpoint. That is the greatest leaning experience.

"At the strategic level connections and networking are very important between armies, nations and countries. That is one of the biggest gifts the college gives us," said Salim.

Army Lt. Col. Jason Tate, soon to be an Acquisition Program Manager, graduates with a clearer understanding of national power. "We tend to rely too much on the military power, but I think the power of diplomacy, information and economics is very key. And that was one thing that was really impressed on us here at the war college."

"This year demonstrated how the Army is still able to adapt and overcome. So yes, we had the COVID pandemic and so we went all virtual and distributed learning middle to the end of March, but we were still able to continue to do a lot of learning, still be successful, and benefit from the classes we had, although 99% of them were virtual," said Tate.

Army Lt. Col. Gabriel Vargas will return to the New Mexico National Guard in Albuquerque as G5, a job that will underscore Nakasone's comments: "The interaction between different ideas to solve a complex problem. I met individuals here who have different ideas to solve those problems in a strategic way. In doing that, I believe that it will solve current issues that are going on in the Guard and my state."

Air Force Lt. Col. Stephen McNamara will travel the shortest distance, post-graduation, taking a new role as Chief of Strategic Plans with the Pennsylvania National Guard's 193rd Special Operations Wing.

"A great lesson that I am going to take with me is the experience of working across the agencies with other services as well as our civilian counterparts and really gaining a lot of understanding of their priorities and their

perspective and what that bring to a larger strategic conversation.

"I was extremely grateful for my seminar. They are great people and dedicated professional. And I really looked forward to going to class every day because I really valued their input to the discussions."

McNamara highlighted the positive lessons of the COVID environment, for the military as an enterprise with respect to a deeper appreciation of virtual engagement in lieu of in-person meetings.

Tina Cancel, Department of Navy Civilian, found the COVID situation to be a strong reminder of the importance and power of adaptability. "This is just another reinforcing mechanism about having processes and plans and then being able to go with it," she said about the faculty and students' adaptation to new ways of operating.

"As someone who has worked solely for Navy commands as a civilian this has really given me great exposure to the joint flavor of the DoD, particularly the Army, something I had not been exposed to so it has been quite an experience," said Cancel.

Graduating today were 224 U.S. Army officers, 25 Air Force, 8 Navy, 17 Marines, 1 Coast Guard officer, 22 senior federal civilians, and 79 international officers. The U.S.Army War College is a joint and combined institute of professional military education, accredited to confer the master's degree in Strategic Studies and Joint Professional Military Education-Level II certification. The Resident Class of 2020 completed a 10-month graduate education.

With the graduation of the Resident Class of 2020, the alumni rolls of the U.S. Army War College have grown to more than 32 thousand leaders. The distinguished graduates include these and more: President Eisenhower; and, Army Generals Pershing, Bradley, Patton, Taylor, Lemnitzer, Ridgway, Gruenther, Clark, Abrams, Collins, Schwarzkopf, Joulwan, Shalikashvili, Sullivan, Reimer, Tilelli, Bramlett, McCaffrey, Crouch, Hartzog, Griffith, Luck, Maddox, Peay, Franks, Odierno and Thurman; and, Marine Corps Generals Cates, Dunford, Gray, Hat, Holcomb, and Lejeune; and, Navy Admirals Halsey, Pratt, Hart, and Oldendorf; and, Air Force Generals Myers, Kenney, McNarney, and Vandenberg; and, Ambassadors Davies, Troxel, Underhill, Dickman, Davis, Countryman, and Bullington.