

Thanks Bill, and thanks to the entire team here at the School of Advanced Military Studies for setting up this 25<sup>th</sup> reunion.

I am honored to be in your company, and heartened to be in the presence of so many friends, old and new. I am grateful for the opportunity to take a few minutes to pay tribute to this amazing program and its remarkable graduates. For this week we celebrate with great legitimacy the outstanding service of SAMS graduates worldwide in peace and war. Unique among higher educational programs, this school has indeed generated “agents of change” for the US military and for our Allies. Our collective common cultural outlook has spread through the formations of so many armed forces now that it has become commonplace from Kabul to Kurdistan to hear informed and literate discussions of the value of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, of the fog and friction of war, of *schwerpunkts* and *l'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace*. No respectable staff officer in a Combatant Command, Corps or Division today can brief campaign or contingency plans without a clearly defined end state, branches and sequels, and a passing reference to at least one 19<sup>th</sup> Century doctrinal giant. In just over a generation's time, this program has brought historic, evolutionary, and firmly grounded change in the very way we think about the future of conflict in the American way of war. It has redefined our lexicon, reordered our thinking processes, and established a corps of leaders, thinkers, and planners who in the last two decades have reset the conditions for American military success.

Your tribute to General Huba Wass de Czege is where it all begins. Huba's well earned reputation for brilliant analytical thought and for leadership brought this vision to life, and moved this remarkable concept of education from idea to institution. Huba and General William Richardson, then the TRADOC Commanding General, compelled the Army to take a major strategic risk by making a decisive institutional

statement that intellectual preparation mattered: that the Army was willing to invest time and talent in critical thinking. That decision was a watershed moment in our officer leader development, with an astonishing payoff for the Nation. SAMS could rightly be called the most brilliant education for critical thinking in military history, and the most revolutionary change in the planning structure of standing armies since the creation of the Prussian General Staff in the mid 1800s. The proof of principle has been the outstanding performance of our graduates in every major campaign of the last 25 years. I was privileged to serve as a company commander for LTC Wass de Czege in a previous century, and know firsthand what an extraordinary and inspirational leader he has always been. Thank you Sir, for all of that.

Bill Caldwell and I were in the fifth class to graduate SAMS, the Class of 1988. From the distance of Aschaffenburg, Germany, where I was serving with 1-7 Inf as a BN S-3, I heard about the program from a number of officers; it was already seen as the next big thing – an opportunity to spend another year at Leavenworth in great company, to study the profession, and then move back to troops following a small excursion in a planning billet. We were told it was experimental and competitive, and that the first grads were doing very well in the Army. When we got to Leavenworth for CGSC, the applicants for SAMS began to meet informally, and we really looked forward to that next year. We also remember then current Director, Rick Sinnreich, gave us a persuasive brief in Bell Hall that included many mythical promises including free laptops – big stuff in 1986! The laptops never materialized, but the promise of SAMS came roaring to life.

Our SAMS year was terrific. We had superb instructors, all led by the new Director, COL Don Holder. He kept all our overbearing egos in good check, encouraged rigorous dialogue and insisted on high

standards of scholarship and discourse, some of which we attempted! Doctors Berlin, Epstein and Schneider tried to keep us on azimuth with theory and doctrine while a rich panoply of guest speakers, like Bill's father LTG William Caldwell III, added the right dose of reality to our millions of pages of Peret, Chandler, and Stofft. We developed enduring bonds of friendship and respect for each other that have lasted for over two decades now. We truly believed we were in the best of company. We also believed that we would go out there and make the change that the curriculum spoke to. In some measure this came to pass. Our class produced ten flag officers; *all* in that class of 48 served well and long. We also had the first Air Force Officers, who had some initial reluctance about another year away from flying. But they not only assimilated rapidly, they also brought us all kinds of useful wisdom about their own culture on and off duty.

18 Months after my SAMS graduation, on the night after the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment and the 82d jumped into Torrijos Tocumen Airport in Panama City, I was flying in a Blackhawk from the Corps TOC to the 82d TAC to meet with Major Bill Caldwell about setting the new boundaries between the two commands. For months SAMS grads had worked Operation Just Cause with great attention to detail, full scale rehearsals, and the requisite synchronization of and collaboration with all services and special operations forces. That planning community was SAMS centric, and reflected the very essence of this program in its scope, vision, and in the exceptional quality of its graduates. And as I looked out on that dark night at the millions of lights in Panama City with the fires still burning in the Comandancia and near the airport, I thought about the rapid success of this coup de main executed for the right reasons, with maximum force and minimal loss. It was an epiphany about the effectiveness of SAMS and its great promise come to life. I

was to see the same phenomenon in Operation Desert Storm just over a year later. There, even more graduates made the crucial difference in the quality of the operational and strategic planning and in the execution of the fight as some of our first battalion commanders and brigade commanders took charge.

Today you know with the same confidence that your leadership skills can make the difference in an equally just cause, and you know that this institution has played a major role in support of our Nation and our Allies from Panama to Paktika. For it is the collective story that you have made as graduates of SAMS that we honor this evening. 25 years of purposeful, substantive achievement in peace and war, in every corner of the globe, leading, designing and planning.

Over those past twenty five years SAMS has become the gold standard for officers of character and intellect, who work terribly hard to get the commander's intent right, who plan day and night to find the best course of action for the mission, the CONOP, the COA, who have a reputation for critical thinking, for thinking in time, and for understanding the multiple uses of history. SAMS graduates are consistently the one commodity called for by combatant commanders around the world today; God forbid those traditional quotas are unmet. This past Saturday in the world wide video teleconference at the Pentagon, one of the liveliest discussions centered on the current status of the SAMSTERS" who were just sent to Afghanistan.

This increased demand for SAMS grads is also based on the deadly serious requirements of a complex contemporary operating environment. Our military is transforming, but for sixty years our organizing principle has been to succeed in major conventional war. Now we need to be prepared across a spectrum of conflict that includes our current

operational focus on irregular war and counterinsurgency, or the consequence management attendant to a WMD incident, or the concern for the possibility of a failed state with a nuclear arsenal. But what threat will come like a bolt out of the blue in the next three to five years? How well do we divine the future? You know better than most from your studies here that we have an imperfect record of predicting the next conflict.

Other major changes in the world have a more indirect bearing on your capacity to plan and lead: the explosion of information technology, the rapid expansion and subsequent influence of the internet, and the attendant growth and availability of PDAs. The unblinking eye of the 24-hour multimedia cycle places increased emphasis on the need for SAMS graduates to clearly understand the press, and their own role as strategic communicators. Here at Leavenworth you are doing that with exceptional focus on the new media. No one in our senior ranks understands this better than Bill Caldwell.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, junior officers and Non-Commissioned Officers are leading their formations with exceptional professional competence, courage, and compassion. They are adept at both the kinetic fight and the use of baseline diplomatic, governance, informational, and economic skills. They have learned to listen well and wisely--and to respond--to the disparate voices of local tribal councils. But they are not SAMS graduates. They succeed using the computations of algebra, while you employ strategic calculus.

What makes you different? You have an exceptional education in the operational art, experience as combat leaders, a well honed sense of understanding complex problems, and a healthy skepticism of school solutions. This is the *fingerspitzengefuehlen* that places the SAMS

graduate at such a high premium in every senior level staff or combatant command. The word subject matter expert is an often overused term, but for our soon to be graduates, it's true; when it comes to doctrine....people will look to you to be the expert.

Whether you are the chief of log plans in 2ID or commanding a BCT in Diyalla Province, the SAMS grad today is a major actor in the war of ideas we face around the globe. You understand exactly why Karl von Clausewitz emphasized the political objective in statecraft, and why he reminds us still today that the first act, the most important act of the statesman or general who crafts a grand strategy or a military campaign is to ascertain the nature of its end state. You are cognizant of and often a participant in the rational discussion of every key national security policy decision we face. What calling could be more relevant especially at a time when critics of our strategy and strategy making abound?

SAMS grads provide something else that is largely uncommon today in our Western expectation for instant analysis, and that is a sense of context. You understand our military, its structure and its culture. Your understanding of *history* is meaningful to your ability to sense and appreciate. It is both the apprehension of what has happened in the past and your critical thinking skills about the present and the near future. That sense of history is often much more important outside the US. A popular phrase in Afghanistan is “the American Soldier may have the watches, but we have the time”. Blood feuds, great military disasters, and loss of beloved territory are remembered for centuries, from Albania to Azerbaijan and from Kashmir to Kurdistan. When you understand the sense of *their* past in context to your own present then you reinforce the wisdom of Mark Twain who said that “history may not repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”

SAMS grads also understand the simple but elemental value of communicating across many different commands and cultures in a common language. Here is a great key to unlocking so many doors in your world, the common syllabus of this curriculum, the unique language of SAMS. Language, it has been said, exerts a hidden power, like a moon on the tides. For the SAMS grad, the words of Fellini are more apt – A different language is a different vision of life. It is the vision of your education that connects across boundaries and ranks structures and time. You know the need for precision in those exchanges, and the amazing power that common communication brings to your mission.

All these acquired skills mean that your advice and counsel and analysis are most often welcomed by the field commander or the senior policy decision maker; but not always. There have undoubtedly been times when your critical insights will be lost on your audience. Tough and rational critical thinking merits time and thought. We tend to be an impatient society; we have a strong preference for speed at the expense of context. Fast food, fast results, fast forward, so often caught up in the romance of current operations. But there is risk here without pausing to think strategically. In the words of the poet AE Houseman describing one of his protagonists: “Three minutes of hard thought would have convinced him of the weakness of the argument. But hard thought is hard and three minutes is a long time.” Your analytical thought is often the intellectual brake on the commander’s operational accelerator..at other times you may also want to be the thoughtful advocate for bold action.

The role of the SAMS grad is not universally understood or appreciated. All elites bear a measure of healthy skepticism from those who apportion resources, especially if they are well educated, and as

professionally sound as yours. You have created a natural competition in a meritocracy, and that competition is growing. We demand more of you –and faster today--from a relatively small population in a time of war.

Let me use an analogy that captures some of this classic tension:

A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a woman below. He descended a bit more and shouted, 'Excuse me, can you help me? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don't know where I am.'

The woman below replied, 'You are in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You are between 40 and 41 degrees north latitude and between 59 and 60 degrees west longitude.'

'You must be a SAMS grad' said the balloonist. 'I am,' replied the woman, 'How did you know?' 'Well,' answered the balloonist, 'everything you told me is, technically correct, but I have no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is I am still lost. Frankly, you've not been much help so far.'

The woman below responded, 'You must be a general officer '

'I am,' replied the balloonist, 'but how did you know?' 'Well,' said the woman, 'you don't know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise, which you have no idea how to keep, and you expect people beneath you to solve your problems. The fact is you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow, it's my fault.'

We must always be prepared to articulate the value of SAMS in ways which move that balloonist forward. Today there are plenty of constraints on the institution that can create downward pressure on this goodness. Demands on the US military currently exceed its supply of formations. A reduced defense budget, the high costs of personnel, the constant need for modernization and the burden of the wars all add up to strain on the military, and by extension, questions about the effectiveness and the size and scope of your part in this program.

You have some new competitors out there. Our armed forces are moving aggressively to improve their leadership skills and their understanding of the operational art in the wake of our increased overseas presence. This is reflected in the curriculum in our school houses, from the career courses to the senior service colleges. The creation of very large joint staffs, joint task forces, and non standard requests for forces that we see in the building each week, has also required the creation a large group of non-SAMS planners, many of whom do quite well. All these initiatives in some manner are forms of competition.

SAMS is not content to rest on its laurels nor should its graduates. This year there is a move towards expansion and broadening. Every year a dynamic review of the subject matter takes place as it must. For there is always the balancing act between teaching new information from theater that elucidates campaign planning and the operational art of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, while holding on to the wisdom of the past. So we look for the right combination between teaching the relevant lessons of Fallujah without discarding the Melian Dialogues of Thucydides. We look at the prospects of design without discarding the principles of war.

The synthesis of these two approaches – the clear value of your work arrayed against multiple demands in the armed forces, will take time. For today, we take enormous pride in the professional competence of the school of advanced military studies and its alums. Your work is critical to our national security, essential to our national purpose, and serves a deadly serious mission. We need you.

Finally, the plans shop can be occasionally isolated and unsupported work too, far away from the standard affirmations of merit or accomplishment that we are used to in a cohesive unit of Soldiers. One thing that was missing in the early curriculum was a focus on the need for a sense of balance that SAMS grads must have. If you are going to sustain the excellence for which this program is being recognized this week, you must do so by ensuring you have balance in your life. This is not the equilibrium or stasis that we think of in science, it is a balance that simply places you in position to lead your units and to sustain your own life at the same time. It means that you provide for yourself and your family as much as your organization, that you find time for yourself to reflect and to think about the way ahead, that you have coping mechanisms to ward off the inevitable stress that always accompanies those who lead, and that you stay healthy. Your fitness is essential in your capacity to lead.

Former SAMS Director, Greg Fontenot, once reminded me of this need for balance by quoting the words of John Ruskin: “the sum of a man’s life is not the rank he attains, but rather what kind of person he becomes.”

And what has been and will continue to be one of the most important outcomes of your education here at Leavenworth? That in the middle of the night of a grave conflict or in the throes of a high risk policy crisis,

you will be able to communicate face to face, or by phone, or email, with those classmates and other SAMS graduates who can bring the problem to resolution. So much begins with the sharing of half burned hamburgers in seminar picnics, or coaching another year of youth soccer on post, or in your clear willingness to *listen* first to an international officer in class.

Dr. Seuss--not a major player in our syllabus though some monographs may have benefitted from his sense of clarity--spoke to us when he wrote the title for his last book: **Oh the places you will go**. Here are three stanzas for all SAMS grads on this silver anniversary:

“Congratulations!  
Today is your day.  
You’re off to Great Places!  
You’re off and away!

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself any direction you choose.  
You’re on your own. And you know what you know...

You’ll look up and down streets. Look’em over with care. About some you will say, “I don’t choose to go there.” With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you’re too smart to go down a not-so-good street.”

A lot simpler than Clausewitz on choosing the right end state, but the point is the same. And a reminder to remain modest in our self image.

In closing, SAMS grads today will face the challenges of the next decade in the same way that we have done for twenty five years--with honor and dignity, with the power of your intellect as well as your arms,

and all in accordance with the enduring values that mark our profession. Never forget that the privilege of being selected for SAMS must always be returned by a commitment to do your very best, for this program is a rare gift that merits an equally exceptional return on the investment.

Remember what Captain Miller says to Private Ryan in his last words on that blinding, deafening street of death: “Earn this.” And you will.

Ladies and Gentlemen. Look around you, for you are in the best of company.

Thank you very much.