

ILE Graduation Address
Satellite Campus – Fort Gordon, GA
LTG Robert L. Caslen, Jr.
23 June 2010

Thank you for that kind introduction and that warm reception. It is truly an honor to be here with you. Congratulations on what you have accomplished and I am very proud of you.

I hope that the education and interaction with the other 67 students in your class over the past few months has marked the beginning of a new and critical phase in your leadership development. As I was reviewing your experience and educational backgrounds, I can't help but be impressed. I also trust you have had some interesting discussions in your classes, and that this course has provided a nice break and a time for reflection.

All of you know that your family has contributed immensely to where each of you is right now. We also know that we could never do what we as professionals and warriors do for a living without their support and care and love. We go off on deployment enjoying doing the work in the profession we have signed up for, only to leave the raising of the kids, resolving arguments with the neighbors, fixing the broken washing machine, rushing to the emergency room for the 10 stitches in our kids' forehead – our families have sacrificed more than we can ever imagine over these last 9 years. Would all of you please join me in a warm round of applause and appreciation for the “wind beneath our sails”, our wonderful spouses and children – our families?

Many of you will soon return to the operational Army to lead our Soldiers in the most difficult of circumstances and I know it is in your blood and that there is no other place you'd rather be. In fact, I suspect that many of you have passed the point where the novelty of academic life has faded and you are now eager to get back at it. But given what you have done in recent years, I know you understand the seriousness of our profession and the tasks to which you will return.

ILE marks the midpoint of many officer's careers. For me, 1987 was a long time ago...as I suspect it was as well for many of you. But ILE is also usually the first school attended almost exclusively by officers who have chosen to make the profession of arms their career. As such, I want to say a few things about this profession.

First, think about the oath of office we recite when we receive a promotion.

"I, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."

What is foundational is that this oath does not task us to defend any specific territory or persons or property. This is an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States, the ideals of our founding fathers and the guiding document for our Nation that has endured for over 200 years. Notice also how there is no time limit to our commitment. Our profession demands that we provide 100%, each day that we wear the uniform.

Our profession of arms is built upon a relationship of trust with the American people. And as you move up in positions of increased responsibility and leadership, how you lead and how you prosecute the tasks required in our profession will have both a direct and indirect effect on the trust America has with not only our mission, but with us as Soldiers. Our behavior is intricately linked to building this trust.

Trust is not only critical to our profession, but I would argue to the success of our military operations. History is replete with examples of protracted conflicts that lost the support of the people of the nation. In the US, we only need to look back at our last protracted conflict of Vietnam. The Clausewitz trinity – the Military, the Government, and the People – applies explicitly today. If we as professionals lose the trust of the American people, then we risk the very success of our mission.

Like any professional ethic, the military is an expert group, charged by its client to conduct extraordinary expert business with an extraordinary ethic unique to that group.

As a result, the profession of arms must measure itself by a more rigorous yardstick, since we are called upon to make extreme sacrifices as well as ultimate acts such as the taking of life. We are therefore called upon to have a more scrupulous standard by which we judge ourselves.

As professionals, we are called upon to provide expert advice to those civilians to whom we report. We must be candid and thorough in our assessments. We must “well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office...”

Today’s wars are prosecuted in tremendously complex environments, where the actions of leaders at all levels have strategic consequences. In the counterinsurgency fight we find ourselves in, small unit decentralized operations across a distributed battlefield are becoming the norm. And as a result, the tactical decision a junior leader makes at a split second whether to pull the trigger, or not, often has strategic consequences. Out in the middle of some FOB, where the closest unit is a minimum of an hour’s flight by helicopter, what is it that guides this leader to make the right decision, or not? Who helps this young leader define and understand the parameters of acceptable behavior, or not? It’s tough work for sure.

I would argue that inherent in our professional military ethic are the values of our Nation and the values of our Army. And it is within these values that one finds the parameters of what is acceptable and what is not. They help define the left and right limits and become the bedrock of what we do and why.

I’m not sure how much you have thought about our Profession of Arms, but it is something that has caught the attention recently of our army’s senior leadership. 9 years of war has had an impact on the profession of our Army, and it is something that we may want to study and certainly reflect on. Once you get to your new assignments, I would encourage that you reflect on our Profession of Arms, how you contribute to it as a field grade officer and leader, and how by your very example, you establish what right

looks like to the many junior leaders in your unit that will be looking to you as their “senior leader” and role model.

On another topic, I’m not sure how many of you may have seen the recent article in Army magazine written by retired LTG James Dubik titled, “Time to Lead, and Live.” It is a good article and I hope you have had a chance to read it. But let me share with you three of his quotes and why I feel they are important for leaders at all levels.

The first quote is...

“You’ll never find time to lead; you have to make time.”

As you know, the lieutenants and sergeants you will be interacting with at your next assignment are the future leaders of our Army. You have an incredible opportunity to be a positive influence on their initial Army experience and provide the necessary motivation for them to continue in this profession of arms.

For example, the majority of the lieutenants in your battalion – and their spouses - will make a decision to make our army their life’s profession – or not - during the time they spend in your battalion during their first assignment. And this decision will be based on many things – chief among them is the command climate and the leadership example that you and the other senior leaders in your battalion will make.

What General Dubik is saying is that you will have to carve time out from the accomplishment of your individual daily tasks for professional development, mentorship, counseling, and training. And it is not just the uniformed members of your command that need leadership. Our Army Civilians who make up the continuity of our offices will also be looking to you for creativity, energy, and innovation. Remember how your example will be viewed and followed -- you are now the senior leader that they all look up to and you have an incredible opportunity to be that positive influence and the steady hand of change.

Quote #2 is:

“The urgent is always present. Some of the urgent I must do; most of it, I can ignore.”

Prioritization is very important, and so is delegating and developing subordinates. We all have “pop-up targets” or changes that interrupt our daily schedules. This line that General Dubik wrote was to help us develop a schedule that is attuned to what is important and what is not. This message rings true for any senior Army leader...often we can utilize the “pop-up targets” during our day as opportunities to mentor and coach and teach. When we are looking at only but the trees in our face, we often fail to see the forest, and therefore fail to recognize those opportunities to be a positive influence in someone’s life. The development of your subordinates may be your most important legacy.

And lastly, the 3rd quote:

“This is my life. It’s not a rehearsal for something that will come later. My life does not begin when I retire. It’s now. What is important, therefore, includes nonmilitary activities.”

You won’t deploy to a remote location with your family, but you probably will deploy away from them sometime in the Army. Most of you have already done this numerous times, and the future bodes for the same. I hope that you have had the opportunity over the past year to spend some quality time working on being a mother or father, brother or sister, daughter or son.

All of us will have to deploy at some time, but not all the time. And all of us will have to go out on an exercise – but not all the time. There will be days when we have to work late, but not all the time. But it is during these “other times” that I would encourage you to set the in-box aside, get home for a sit down meal with your family, tuck your kids in bed and read them a bedtime story, and sit down and listen to how your spouse’s day went.

When I was the Chief of Staff for the 101st, my Division Commander had to go down to the FORSCOM change of command for GEN Tom Schwartz when he became

the FORSCOM commander. And when he got back, my boss called all the Brigade and Battalion Commanders together and passed on the new FORSCOM Commander's guidance. You would be surprised what he said. GEN Schwartz told the story when he was a Division Commander, that around 1600 he was driving from a meeting on post, and drove past a kid's soccer field. And there on the field was one of his Battalion commanders coaching his son's soccer team. GEN Schwartz stopped the car and ran out on the field, called the Battalion Commander – the coach – over and gave him a hug and said thanks for not only helping the community, but also for setting the example of breaking away from the office and being with his son.

As you re-enter the operational Army, I hope you remember this story. And I also hope you consider dedicating time to activities that develop your own personal physical, emotional, spiritual and social dimensions. Our Army needs well-rounded leaders to guide our Army through the decades of persistent conflict that are ahead. Remember this: "When you are lying on your death bed, you won't be looking back on your life wishing you had spent more time at the office."

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 have ever done. The fact you are here, right now, truly makes you the very best we have in this country.

As I close today, let me give you a few nuggets of wisdom once provided by a fellow officer, LTC Randolph White, to motivate and inspire some young Army infantrymen. I believe they will provide you some points for reflection as you progress with your own career.

1. I will never, ever, apologize for being an American and don't you ever feel you have to. I will also never, ever apologize for being a Soldier in the United States Army. This is the life I have chosen. It is not risk free, nor is it always easy, but in the humble opinion of this proud grunt, it has always been a life worth living. There is no more noble profession than the one you are engaged in. It is a portion of your life spent in the

cold, hot, snow, and rain... facing danger during peace and war, while making the best friends you will ever have... guys and gals that will have your back no matter what life brings.

2. This current fight is a long and difficult one. As General Casey said when he took the reigns as Chief of Staff, "We are locked in a war against a global extremist network that is fixed on defeating the United States and destroying our way of life. This foe will not go away nor will they give up easily, and the next decade will likely be one of persistent conflict. At stake are the power of our values and our civilization, exemplified by the promise of America, to confront and defeat the menace of extremist terrorists." You have made the decision to stand in the gap between this evil and our Nation's security. I know you understand the consequences, and as I have said before, it is an honor to serve in our country alongside each and every one of you.

3. Draw your energy in the days ahead from your friends -- especially your fellow officers in the profession of arms. And draw your energy from your Soldiers, from whom you will know every detail, every concern, every strength, every hope, every problem, and every aspiration they have. If they respect you, they will trust you. And if they trust you, they will go to the 4 corners of the Earth for you and gladly give their life to protect yours, so that you can lead their remaining brothers and sisters another day.

4. Do not ever forget those who got you here, who stood by you through the good and bad, who supported you even when no one else did -- your parents and your spouses and your family. For they have gone through an emotional roller coaster every day that you have served, 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 hug them every chance you get.

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... watch out for one another... remember that when things look their worst, you will need each other the most... remain steady... hydrate... do PT everyday... Keep your head on a swivel and

your eyes wide open... and remember that as this country's 21st century warrior, America is relying on you as you assume your post -- standing in the gap between this evil and our way of life.

Again, I would like to say congratulations. The foundational leadership traits of professional competence and moral and ethical integrity as a part of strong character will never cease to define our Army leaders. In fact, there has never been a time when such traits were more necessary than now. You all are our Nation's best. It's an incredible honor for an Old Guy like me to serve alongside you. Congratulations... and safe travels. May God bless and protect each and every one of you. Well done, and keep up the great work!

Army Strong!