

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Commencement Address at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado

May 30, 2019

The President. Thank you very much. Please. You just like all those brandnew, beautiful airplanes that we're buying. [*Laughter*]

Hello, Air Force Academy. It's been a long time since I've been here. And what a place. What a place it is. At ease, everybody. [*Laughter*]

I'm thrilled to be here with all of you as we celebrate the incredible class of 2019.

Audience members. Strong!

The President. And you truly make America proud. You make us all proud. Thank you very much. Great job. Really great job.

And I want to thank Secretary Wilson for the introduction and for her 2 years of service as the first graduate of the Academy to be the very important Secretary of the Air Force at a time when we've really expanded out the Air Force and bought equipment like you've never seen before. So congratulations. Thank you very much, Heather. Beautiful job.

And I want to thank three other truly remarkable former cadets: your Superintendent, Lieutenant General Jay Silveria. Jay, come here. Class of 1985. Jay, I thought you were a little bit younger than that. [*Laughter*] General David Goldfein, class of 1983. Thank you, General. Great job. Does a great job; respected by everybody. And NORTHCOM Commander General Terrence O'Shaughnessy, class of 1986. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you, General.

We're also grateful to be joined by Commander of U.S. Strategic Command General John Hyten. General, thank you very much. Spent a lot of time together talking about things. [*Laughter*] And Commander of Air Force Space Command General Jay Raymond. Thank you, General. Space Command.

And to all of the distinguished faculty, coaches, and staff, thank you for forging and refining a new generation of American warriors. We're also joined by many distinguished Air Force veterans and academy graduates. We applaud and salute you all. Thank you very much. Thank you for being here.

And to the thousands of moms and dads and grandparents and family members beaming with joy—and that's what they're doing; they are beaming with joy—thank you for raising rock-ribbed American patriots. America is stronger thanks to your love and your support for these incredible people, these incredible graduates. Cadets, join me in paying tribute to your amazing Air Force families. Go ahead, pay tribute. [*Applause*] That's beautiful. That's beautiful. Without them, you wouldn't be here, and that's the way it is. [*Laughter*] That's the way it is. [*Laughter*]

Most of all, to the nearly 1,000 cadets—who I have agreed to shake every single hand—[*applause*]—they gave me a choice. They said, "Sir, you don't have to shake any hands." Some people do that. Those are the smart ones. They're out of here. [*Laughter*] You can shake one hand to the one person, top of the class. You could shake 10, 50, or 100, and you could also stay for 1,000. And I'm staying for 1,000. Okay? [*Applause*] And I know we're all going to make it. [*Laughter*] There's no doubt about it, right? There's no doubt about it.

To the nearly 1,000 cadets who will soon become Second Lieutenants in the U.S. Air Force: You could have chosen any school, any career you wanted, but you chose a harder path and a

higher calling: to protect and defend the United States of America. I know what you've been through, and it's tougher. But you know what? In the end, it's better. You're going see. You'll see. [Laughter] You'll see.

Today you take your place as officers in the most powerful Air Force in the history of our country and, frankly and very easily, in the history of the world. America commends the integrity, devotion, and commitment of the class of 2019.

Audience members. Strong!

The President. [Laughter] When you choose the Air Force, you choose the noble road of service and duty and devotion. You choose to break old boundaries and unlock new frontiers and live life on the cutting edge. The first air combat happened just one century ago. You are the ones who will invent and define the next generation of air warfare. And you are the ones who will secure American victory all the time. Victory. To dominate the future, America must rule the skies.

And that is what your time at this great academy has been all about: preparing you to do whatever it takes to learn, to adapt, and to win, win, win. You're going to win so much. You're going to get so tired of winning, but not really. [Laughter] Not really. We never get tired of winning, do we?

Audience members. No!

The President. No.

Over the past 4 years, that's just what you've done. You've worked. You've preserved—persevered. You've excelled. You've done so many things that nobody else can do. And in the end, you've come out on top.

It took years of focus and discipline to get here, starting long before "Beast." Right? Beast. You all know what the old "Beast" is, right? [Laughter] Just being admitted to the Academy is a monumental achievement. Only 1 out of every 10 applicants makes the cut. And don't forget: Out of those 10 applicants, there are hundreds that think about it, but they know they don't even have a chance. So remember that. [Laughter] It's true, actually. It's actually true. For those who are accepted, another 20 percent don't make it to graduation, sadly.

Only the best survive to the very end. And here, under the majestic peaks of the Rockies, you have risen to every challenge, overcome every single obstacle, and proven yourselves worthy of the bars that will soon adorn your uniform. You survived BCT, made it to Recognition, and earned your Prop and Wings. You soared in gliders, piloted aircraft, and launched satellites that are now orbiting way, way above us, looking down on us. You performed advanced research, developed new techniques. You honed your skills as cyber operators, and jumped out of planes thousands of feet above the Earth. Not easy. For America's airmen, the sky is never, ever the limit.

That being said, even the best cadets can sometimes get a little bit carried away. Lieutenant General Silveria has informed me that a few cadets are still on restriction for pranks and other fairly bad mischief. [Laughter] You know what I'm talking about, right? And you all know who you are. [Laughter]

So, keeping with tradition, and as your Commander in Chief, I hereby absolve and pardon all cadets serving restrictions and confinements. And that, you earned. You earned it. So you're all on even footing. Is that nice? [Laughter]

This class has racked up a list of truly extraordinary achievements. Two graduating cadets recently received one of the most prestigious awards in all of academia: Rhodes scholarships.

Please join me in congratulating cadets James Brahm and Madison Tung. Please stand up. Wow. Thank you very much. That's a big, fat congratulations from me. That's a tremendous, tremendous job you've done. Thank you. Thank you, Madison. Great job.

On the athletic fields, the Air Force has won 15 conference championships over the last 4 years, which is really something. A hundred and fifty-three athletes have earned All-American honors. Stand up. Stand up. All-American. Wow. *[Applause]* Wow. It's fantastic. Congratulations. Including Rifle Team members Anna Weilbacher and Spencer Cap, who helped the Falcons win the air rifle national title and beat the other service academies to bring home the President's Trophy. Please, stand up. Stand up. *[Laughter]* It's fantastic. But you didn't enjoy beating those other academies. I don't think so, right? Not too much.

And graduating cadet Nick Ready became the first person from any service academy to win the College Home Run Derby—wow, that's a big deal—with a record-breaking 55 home runs. Nick, where are you, Nick? Stand up. Come here, Nick. Come here. Get up here, Nick. *[Laughter]* Oh, good. Come here. Come here, Nick.

You know, they gave him such a lousy seat all the way back in the corner. *[Laughter]* Come on up. Baseball. Home Run Derby. That's something. In all of college baseball. Wow. I want to feel this guy's muscles. *[Laughter]* It's real. That's real. That's great. Thank you very much, Nick. That's a big deal. That's a big deal.

The members of this class come from every background, every State in the Union, and even from our allies overseas. But through trial and training and tradition, you've become one family. It's what's happened. And like one family, you have all been pulling for one of your classmates, who has bravely fought his battle with cancer. Today Parker Hammond graduates as a munitions and missiles maintenance officer, along with the class that has stood with him every step of the way. Great, go—come on, Parker. Get up here, Parker. Parker. Come here. Come here, right? Come here. They love you, Parker. Why do you like him so much? Great job. Great.

A lot of good-looking people in this school, I have to say. *[Laughter]* Thank you, Parker.

This class personifies the spirit of confidence and courage and unwavering commitment that has always defined the Long Blue Line. It's true. It goes all the way back to the very beginning, to the first cadet in the Air Force history.

On in-processing day, you've—greeted at the base of a ramp by the statue of the legendary Val Bourque. Val grew up in a blue-collar family in Massachusetts. During his senior year in high school, he was recruited to play for the Pittsburgh Pirates. That's another baseball player. *[Laughter]* But instead, Val made the same choice as all of you: the choice of life of service. That's what he wanted.

Val joined the U.S. Air Force Academy. He showed up at 4:30 a.m. on the Academy's opening day in 1955, so he would be the first Air Force cadet in history to take the oath of allegiance. He was thinking fast. The Academy proved an arduous challenge, however, for Val. It wasn't easy. As Val's roommate said: "He was hanging on by a thread academically. No one was tested more than Val was. But he was at the very top in [his] character and [in] honor." That's what his roommate said.

After Val finally made it to where you're sitting today, he volunteered to go to Vietnam, and he proved to be one of the best pilots America had. He was amazing. He was incredible. After nearly a year of intense action, he was scheduled to return home. He was very excited, but he asked to lead one more mission. On that day, Val's plane was struck by enemy fire, and he made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. He now rests on these precious grounds, and his fighting spirit lives in each and every one of you. Great fighting spirit.

The heroes and legends of every generation have always had to confront new perils and defeat new dangers. No one can foresee all of the challenges this class will face, but we do know that, with absolute certainty, you are going to be ready to serve. You are going to be ready to lead. You are going to be aiming at the absolute highest point. And you are ready to "Fly, Fight, and Win." Always win. Always.

You exemplify the grit, the guts, and the grace that make America's Air Force, by far, the best in the world. And in the words of your class motto, "Conquer Mind, Conquer All." Each of you has the sharp intellect, deep character, inner strength, and the titanium courage to vanquish any menace that dares to threaten our country or our people. We're always ready. Right, General? Always ready. He's ready. I wonder how that's going to be viewed—that statement—tomorrow in the press. [Laughter] You can imagine. And that's okay. Let them think whatever they want to think.

More than half of you will soon head to pilot training, where you'll prepare to unleash American thunder anywhere we need. Another 45 will join our remotely piloted aircraft program. A record number of you will become space operators. You will specialize in combat rescues, intelligence, missile maintenance, weather, air traffic control, engineering, and much, much more.

Each of you is graduating at a truly incredible time for our country. Our country is doing well. Our country is respected again. We are respected again. And we're reawakening American pride, American confidence, and American greatness. You know that. These gentlemen know it; I'll tell you right now. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. That's very nice.

And we are restoring the fundamental principle that our first obligation and highest loyalty is to the American citizen. No longer will we sacrifice America's interests to any foreign power. We don't do that anymore. In all things and ways, we are putting America first, and it's about time. Our economy is booming, our people are thriving, and our military is stronger, mightier, and more powerful—with all of that new aircraft—than ever before.

I am committed to keeping our military the best trained, best equipped, and most technologically advanced fighting force anywhere under the Sun. Last year, against some pretty strong opposition, which I'll always have, we secured \$700 billion to support our warfighters, followed by another \$716 billion—not million—billion. That's with a "B." [Laughter] Seven hundred and sixteen billion dollars this year.

That means we are delivering 56 new Air Force F-35s, brandnew stealth. I asked somebody on the other side, "What do you think of that plane?" A foreign leader. They said, "We have a problem with it; we can't see it." [Laughter] It's always good. It's always good when they can't see you.

Twenty-four new Reaper remotely piloted aircraft, fifteen new Pegasus aerial refueling aircraft, ten new combat rescue helicopters, and a well-earned pay raise for every soldier, sailor, airman, coastguardsman, and marine in the United States military. And if anybody wants to give up your raise, it's okay. We'll accept that. Okay? [Laughter] Don't do it. [Laughter]

We're also asking Congress to invest more in hypersonic weapons. We have things under development, the likes of which you've never seen; the likes of which you can't even conceive. Artificial intelligence, nuclear weapons and modernization, and space superiority. And we're soon having, as you know, something that I started. And it started a little slow, and now everybody has embraced it: Space Force. And you're going to be working with them.

And, General, I want to thank you for helping us so much. It's been really great. Working with you has been great. A whole new force.

In this stadium today are many of the future leaders who will develop the doctrine, strategy, and technology to restore America's legacy of leadership in space. As you know, other nations are moving aggressively to weaponize space with new technologies that can disrupt vital communications and blind satellites that are critical to our battlefield operations.

It is a time for America to reclaim the ultimate high ground and prepare our young warriors of today for victory on the battlefield tomorrow. It's a very different battlefield. It's a very different type of warfare. But we are so advanced. And when you see what's coming, you won't even believe it. And hopefully—you know what? Hopefully, we never have to use it. Peace through strength. Peace through strength.

As your Commander in Chief, I want you to know that we will pursue and maintain the overwhelming strength we need to deter any aggressor and thrash any foe. For that reason, I am committed to building the Air Force we need with the full strength of 386 squadrons. And we're getting it done too. It's happening rapidly.

Because nothing will ever strike more fear in the hearts of our enemies or inspire more confidence in our friends than the roaring engines of American fighter jets, flown by the greatest pilots on the planet Earth, by far: you. The sound of American warplanes is the righteous sound of American justice.

Today you inherit a legacy of service and valor handed down through generations. It's a tradition built by legends like Rickenbacker, Doolittle, Wagner, Archer, Boyd, Yeager, Sijan, Grissom, and Chapman. Great people. Great people. These trailblazers broke barriers after barrier, and they innovated and adapted to push America further, faster, and on to total victory.

It is the same spirit embodied by your class exemplar, Neil Armstrong, who started out flying jets over Korea and, 50 years ago this summer, planted our great American flag on the face of the Moon. Just like all the aces of our past and the heroes of our history, they were ready to lead when America needed them most. And so is every cadet who graduates today. Is that correct? I think so.

You are the patriots whose names will go down in Air Force history. You will redefine warfare at a very, very critical time in our country's history. You'll win great battles and bring our enemies to crushing defeat. You will explore the boundaries of space, and keep America forever proud and forever free.

So today you take the controls. You're going to push it up and chart your course across the sky. Keep the wings level and true, because your country is sending you on a vital mission: to defend America, protect our people, and to pursue our Nation's great and glorious destiny.

Nothing will stop you from victory. Nothing will stop the U.S. Air Force. And with your help, nothing ever, ever will stop the United States of America.

So I want to conclude by giving a very special congratulations to a very special group of amazing cadets and people. It's the class of 2019.

Audience members. Strong!

The President. On behalf of our Nation, God bless you, God bless the Air Force, and God bless America. This is a great honor being with you. Thank you. And congratulations to everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12 p.m. in Falcon Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Brig. Gen. Charles E. Yeager, USAF (Ret.).

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO, commencement address.

Locations: Colorado Springs, CO.

Names: Brahm, James; Cap, Spencer; Goldfein, David L.; Hammond, Parker; Hyten, John E.; O'Shaughnessy, Terrence J.; Raymond, John W. "Jay"; Ready, Nick; Silveria, Jay B.; Tung, Madison; Weilbacher, Anna; Wilson, Heather A.; Yeager, Charles E.

Subjects: Air Force, Department of the : Air Force Academy, U.S.; Air Force, Department of the : Chief of Staff; Air Force, Department of the : Secretary; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Meetings with President; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Armed Forces, U.S. : Space presence and activities, strengthening efforts; Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: U.S. nuclear arsenal modernization; Colorado : President's visit; Colorado : U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs; Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Economy, national : Improvement; Veterans : Service and dedication.

DCPD Number: DCPD201900353.