

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2020

Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York

June 13, 2020

The President. Thank you, General, and hello, cadets. On behalf of our entire Nation, let me say congratulations to the incredible West Point Class of 2020. Congratulations. Everyone have a good time, enjoy yourselves, because we are here to celebrate your achievements, and great achievements they are. Let us also recognize your remarkable Superintendent, General Darryl Williams, for his outstanding stewardship. General, thank you very much. Great job. Thank you.

Few words in the English language and few places in history have commanded as much awe and admiration as West Point. This premier military academy produces only the best of the best, the strongest of the strong, and the bravest of the brave. West Point is a universal symbol of American gallantry, loyalty, devotion, discipline, and great skill. There is no place on Earth I would rather be than right here with all of you. It's a great honor.

Across this hallowed plain have passed many of the greatest and most fearsome soldiers that ever lived. They were heroes who drove thundering columns of Sherman tanks into the heart of a wicked empire. They were legends who unleashed the fury of American artillery upon our enemies on remote islands and distant shores. They were titans who strode through cannon blast and cavalry charge and stared down our foes through gray clouds of smoke and shrapnel. They were the Army Rangers who led the way up jagged cliffs, the Airborne soldiers who rained down justice in the dark of night, the infantry whose very sight meant liberation was near, and the mighty forces who sent tyrants, terrorists, and sadistic monsters running scared through the gates of hell. No evil force on Earth can match the noble power and righteous glory of the American warrior.

I have no doubt that the young men and women before me today will add your names to this eternal chronicle of American heroes. You will go forth from this place adored by your countrymen, dreaded by your enemies, and respected by all throughout the world. Someday, generations of future West Point cadets will study your legacy. They will know your deeds, they will celebrate your triumphs, and they will proudly follow your example.

To the 1,107 who today become the newest officers in the most exceptional Army ever to take the field of battle, I am here to offer America's salute. Thank you for answering your nation's call.

On this special occasion, we are delighted to be joined by Congressman Steve Womack, Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy, Assistant Secretary Casey Wardynski, and Army Chief of Staff General James McConville, an old grad from the class of 1981.

Let's also express our appreciation to General Curtis Buzzard, General Cindy Jebb, and all of the wonderful instructors, coaches, and faculty members who are continuing West Point's two-century tradition of unrivaled excellence.

To all of the parents, grandparents, and family members watching this ceremony from your beautiful home: Even though you could not be here today, we know this day could never have happened without you. Your love and sacrifice have given America these phenomenal men and women. Cadets, please join me in sending your parents and families the heartfelt thanks that they so richly deserved. They're all watching right now. Please. Thank you very much.

The depth and breadth of the U.S. military's contributions to our society are an everlasting inspiration to us all. I want to take this opportunity to thank all members of America's Armed Forces in every branch—Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve—who stepped forward to help battle the invisible enemy, the new virus that came to our shores from a distant land called China. We will vanquish the virus. We will extinguish this plague.

I also want to thank the men and women of our National Guard who respond with precision to so many recent challenges, from hurricanes and natural disasters to ensuring peace, safety, and the constitutional rule of law on our streets. We thank every citizen who wears a uniform in selfless service to our Nation.

The members of this class have come from every State in our Union. You have come from the farms and the cities, from States big and small, and from every race, religion, color, and creed. But when you entered these grounds, you became part of one team, one family, proudly serving one great American Nation. You became brothers and sisters pledging allegiance to the same timeless principles, joined together in a common mission to protect our country, to defend our people, and to carry on the traditions of freedom, equality, and liberty that so many gave their lives to secure. You exemplify the power of shared national purpose to transcend all differences and achieve true unity. Today you graduate as one class, and you embody one noble creed: Duty, Honor, Country.

Every graduate on this field could have gone to virtually any top-ranked university that you wanted. You chose to devote your life to the defense of America. You came to West Point because you know the truth: America is the greatest country in human history, and the United States military is the greatest force for peace and justice the world has ever known.

The survival of America and the endurance of civilization itself depends on the men and women just like each of you. It depends on people who love their country with all their heart and energy and soul. It depends on citizens who build, sustain, nurture, and defend institutions like this one; that is how societies are made and how progress is advanced. What has historically made America unique is the durability of its institutions against the passions and prejudices of the moment. When times are turbulent, when the road is rough, what matters most is that which is permanent, timeless, enduring, and eternal.

It was on this soil that American patriots held the most vital fortress in our war for independence. It was this school that gave us the men who fought and won a bloody war to extinguish the evil of slavery within one lifetime of our founding. It was the graduates of West Point—towering figures like MacArthur, Patton, Eisenhower, and Bradley—who led America to victory over the sinister Nazis and imperial fascists 75 years ago. It was under the leadership of West Point graduates like the legendary General Matthew Ridgway that the Army was at the forefront of ending the terrible injustice of segregation. It was Army strength that held the line against the brutal opposition and oppression from communism. And it has been thanks to patriots like you that America has climbed to new heights of human achievement and national endeavor.

This is your history. This is the legacy that each of you inherits. It is the legacy purchased with American blood at the crest of Little Round Top, on the crimson beaches of Normandy, in the freezing mud of Bastogne, and the dense jungles of Vietnam. It is the legacy of courageous, selfless, faithful patriots who fought for every inch of dirt with every ounce of strength and every last scrap of heart and drive and grit they had.

And they did it because they believed in the undying principles of our founding. They did it because they cherished their homes, their faith, their family, and their flag. And they did it because when they came to this school, they were taught to hold fast to their love of our country; to cherish our heritage, learn from it, and build upon it. That is what young Americans are taught

here at West Point. That is the legacy that you carry forward as second lieutenants in the United States Army, and you must never forget it.

Through 4 long years, you have honed your skills, trained your mind and body, overcome every obstacle, and earned your place of pride in the Long Gray Line. You made it through the rigors of R-Day and Beast and intensity of CLDT and weeks of training in the blistering heat. You have pushed yourselves far beyond every limit imaginable.

Some of you have even pushed the limits a bit too much. So, for any cadets who have not finished walking off their hours, as Commander in Chief, I hereby absolve all cadets on restriction for minor conduct offenses, and that is effective immediately. Congratulations. [Applause] That's a nice one, isn't it? Don't you feel better now? [Laughter]

Surviving the 47-month experience is never easy, but only the class of 2020 can say it survived 48 months. And when it comes to bragging rights, no one can boast louder than the class that brought Navy's 14-year football winning streak to a screeching halt. You did that. I happened to be there. [Applause] I happened to be there. That's right. That was a big day. I was there. [Laughter] You beat Navy and brought the Commander in Chief's Trophy back to West Point for 2 straight years. So we say, "Go Army, go." [Laughter]

This graduating class secured more than 1,000 victories for the Black Knights, including three bowl victories, 13 NCAA team appearances, and a Women's Rugby Championship with the help of somebody that I just met: 2019 MVP, Sam Sullivan. Fantastic job. Thank you. A fantastic job. Five cadets won national boxing championships, and Adaya Queen brought home two. Brendan Brown earned the title of Powerlifting National Champion.

In academics, 38 cadets have earned fellowships to continue their studies, including First Captain Dane Van de Wall, who received one of the most prestigious awards in academia: the Rhodes Scholarship. Congratulations, Dane. It's a great achievement. Thank you. Congratulations. Great achievement.

But no one modeled the values of the soldier-scholar quite like Lindy Mooradian. Lindy earned both the highest overall class standing and the highest physical program score. She has published scientific research in a prominent journal and set five new records on the athletic track. Lindy, incredible job. Where is Lindy? Where is Lindy? For somebody that did so well, they didn't give you a very good seat, Lindy. [Laughter] We have to talk about that. Congratulations.

Right now America needs a class of cadets that lives by your motto: "With Vision, We Lead." We need you to carry on the spirit of the great General Ulysses S. Grant. Soon after assuming overall command, following 3 years of Union setbacks, General Grant encountered someone heading north to Washington during the Battle of the Wilderness: "If you see the President," Grant said, "tell him from me that whatever happens, there will [never] be no turning back."

We need you to be as visionary as Patton, who as a young man in 1917, became the first soldier assigned to the Army Tank Corps. One month into the job, he saw the future, writing, "If resistance is broken, and the line pierced, the tank must and will assume the role of pursuit cavalry and ride the enemy to death." Under Patton's leadership, that's exactly what they did.

We need you to be as bold and determined as the immortal General Douglas MacArthur, who knew that the American soldier never, ever quits. After leaving the Philippines for Australia at a low point of the Pacific war in 1942, MacArthur famously vowed, "I shall return." For 2 years, he then took great strategic risks and placed himself often in personal danger. On October

* White House correction.

20, 1944, MacArthur stepped off a landing boat, strode through knee-high water, and proclaimed: "People of the Philippines, I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God, our forces stand again on Philippine soil." He then called upon the islands' brave people to rise up and join the fight. America's momentum was unstoppable.

These great leaders were not afraid of what others might say about them. They didn't care. They knew their duty was to protect our country. They knew the Army exists to preserve the Republic and the strong foundations upon which it stands: family, God, country, liberty, and justice. They were true, tough American patriots. That is what our country needs, especially in these times, and that is what you are.

Each of you begins your career in the Army at a crucial moment in American history. We are restoring the fundamental principles that the job of the American soldier is not to rebuild foreign nations, but defend—and defend strongly—our Nation from foreign enemies. We are ending the era of endless wars. In its place is a renewed, clear-eyed focus on defending America's vital interests. It is not the duty of U.S. troops to solve ancient conflicts in faraway lands that many people have never even heard of. We are not the policemen of the world.

But let our enemies be on notice: If our people are threatened, we will never, ever hesitate to act. And when we fight, from now on, we will fight only to win. As MacArthur said: "In war, there is no substitute for victory."

To ensure you have the very best equipment and technology available, my administration has embarked on a colossal rebuilding of the American Armed Forces, a record like no other. After years of devastating budget cuts and a military that was totally depleted from these endless wars, we have invested over 2 trillion—trillion; that's with a "t"—dollars in the most powerful fighting force, by far, on the planet Earth. We are building new ships, bombers, jet fighters, and helicopters by the hundreds; new tanks, military satellites, rockets, and missiles; even a hypersonic missile that goes 17 times faster than the fastest missile currently available in the world and can hit a target 1,000 miles away within 14 inches from center point.

For the first time in 70 years, we established a new branch of the United States military: the Space Force. It's a big deal.

In recent years, America's warriors have made clear to all the high cost of threatening the American people. The savage ISIS caliphate has been 100-percent destroyed under the Trump administration, and its barbaric leader, al-Baghdadi, is gone, killed, over. And the world's number-one terrorist, Qasem Soleimani, is likewise dead.

As Commander in Chief, I never forget for one instant the immense sacrifices we ask of those who wear this Nation's uniform. Already, you have known the crushing pain of losing a brother-in-arms. Today we remember an extraordinary cadet who made the supreme sacrifice in an accident last year: C.J. Morgan. We are deeply moved to be joined by his father, Christopher Morgan. And C.J. was something very special. Christopher is a Secret Service agent, a tough guy. Great guy. Great son, who is looking down right now. Christopher, I want you to know that we will carry C.J.'s blessed memory in our hearts forever. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Tomorrow America will celebrate a very important anniversary: the 245th birthday of the United States Army. Unrelated, going to be my birthday also. *[Laughter]* I don't know if that happened by accident. Did that happen by accident, please? But it's a great day because of that Army birthday.

And as you know, the Army's first Commander in Chief, General George Washington, called the fort that stood on this majestic point "the most important post in America." Its strategic location on the Hudson River was vital to our War for Independence. If British ships gained

control of this river, they would have divided our young Nation in two. So American soldiers stretched a massive metal chain across the waters of the Hudson, from West Point all the way to Constitution Island. I saw a piece of that chain. It's incredible. No enemy ship even dared try to cross. Every link in that great chain was formed from over 100 pounds of pure American iron, mined from American soil, and made with American pride. Together, those links formed an unbreakable line of defense.

Standing here before you more than two centuries later, it is clearer than ever that General Washington's words still hold true. West Point is still the indispensable post for America, the vital ground that must not lose. And the survival of our Nation still depends on a great chain reaching out from this place, one made not of iron, but of flesh and blood, of memory and spirit, of sheer faith and unyielding courage.

Today each of you becomes another link in that unbroken chain, forged in the crucible known as the United States Military Academy, the greatest on Earth. It has given you soldiers that you can rely on to your right and to your left. And now we are entrusting you with the most noble task any warrior has ever had the privilege to carry out: the task of preserving American liberty.

As long as you remain loyal, faithful, and true, then our enemies don't even stand a chance, our rights will never be stolen, our freedoms will never be trampled, our destiny will never be denied, and the United States of America will never be defeated. With the grace of God and the heroes of West Point, America will always prevail. Nothing will stand in your way, nothing will slow you down, and nothing will stop the West Point Class of 2020 from achieving a true and lasting victory.

God bless you, God bless the United States Army, and God bless America. Congratulations. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:48 a.m. in Michie Stadium. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs E. Casey Wardynski; Brig. Gen. Curtis A. Buzzard, USA, Commandant, U.S. Corps of Cadets; and Brig. Gen. Cindy R. Jebb, USA, Dean of the Academic Board, U.S. Military Academy; and Christopher Morgan, Sr., father of Cadet Christopher Morgan, Jr., who was killed in a military vehicle accident on June 7, 2019. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : U.S. Military Academy in West Point, NY, commencement address.

Locations: West Point, NY.

Names: Brown, Brendan; Buzzard, Curtis A.; Jebb, Cindy R.; McCarthy, Ryan A.; McConville, James C.; Mooradian, Lindy; Morgan, Christopher, Sr.; Queen, Adaya; Sullivan, Sam; Van de Wall, Dane; Wardynski, E. Casey; Williams, Darryl A.; Womack, Stephen A.

Subjects: Air Force, Department of the : Space Force, U.S.; Armed Forces, U.S. : Funding; Armed Forces, U.S. : National Guard; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Casualties; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Army, Department of the : Chief of Staff; Army, Department of the : Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Assistant Secretary for; Army, Department of the : Secretary; Army, Department of the : U.S. Military Academy in West Point, NY; China : Coronavirus outbreak; Civil rights : Racial equality; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Law enforcement and crime : Nationwide civil unrest and violence; Natural disasters : Response and recovery efforts; New York : President's visit; New York : U.S. Military Academy in West Point; Sports : NCAA championship teams; Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization.

DCPD Number: DCPD202000443.