

"Address to Cadets"
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Chief of Staff of the US Air Force
Graduation Exercises
United States Air Force Academy
Colorado Springs, Colo.
June 3, 1964

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

NO. 413-64
OXford 7-5131

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EXPECTED ABOUT 12:00 P.M. (Local time)

GRADUATION ADDRESS
BY GENERAL CURTIS E. LeMAY
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AIR FORCE ACADEMY, COLORADO
JUNE 3, 1964

General Warren, Governor Love, distinguished guests, members of the graduating class, ladies and gentlemen.

No one can understand better than I the importance of this Academy or take more pride in its graduates. That is why I am so greatly honored and pleased by the opportunity to join you on this significant occasion.

Through today's ceremony, we affirm our confidence in you graduates, who are superbly constituted and trained for leadership--and dedicated in the service of your country.

Nothing, as I see it, could justify and reward more fully the efforts that brought this institution into being.

Your graduation represents true progress toward meeting the growing need for professionalism in aerospace operations. Professionalism in this field demands continuing mastery of a changing technology and a complex art, and it demands the courage to assert and apply that mastery in supporting national objectives.

So I take pleasure in congratulating you on achievements that denote your fitness for these tasks.

You can be sure that I would value highly the opportunity to be entering on active duty in the Air Force with you at this time.

I emphasize the phrase "at this time" because you are being commissioned in a period that presents a unique challenge to our nation and to the military services.

Through development of nuclear energy and advanced aerospace systems, civilization has attained its greatest capacity for progress or for destruction.

From many sources, we hear expressions of doubt concerning man's ability to avoid using this power for his destruction.

I do not share that doubt. It seems to me that modern weapons make it clear that the penalties for lapses in vigilance and misuse of power that have marred history are now prohibitive.

This means that civilization, in order to survive and progress, must do better than it has in the past.

And, it is my conviction that, in recent years, civilization has done better, according to standards that are acceptable to our country and to the Free World.

It is also my conviction that the United States Air Force throughout its history has done much to make that improvement possible.

My basis for that conviction is the record of Air Force operations through two world wars, the Korean War, and through a long roll of crises such as Lebanon, Formosa, Berlin, and Cuba.

For about the first half of that period, the Air Force was planning, testing, training, and fighting to produce the results that established it by 1945 as a dominant military instrument of national policy.

Since that time we have provided the major strategic deterrent to general war. In that role we have convinced the potential enemy that the risks incurred by full-scale aggression are unacceptable.

By improving and expanding the tactical elements of our military forces, we have apparently convinced him that limited aggression on the scale of the Korean War involves unacceptable risk.

In the process, the Communist world has been forced to operate at the level of subversive action and covert aggression. And our forces are opposing them effectively every day at that lowest level on the scale of violence.

It is vital to understand that these restraints have not resulted from a sudden and miraculous transformation in the attitude and the aims of world Communism. It is equally important to understand that these restraints have been imposed primarily by the superiority of US strategic forces, teamed with hard-hitting tactical elements.

There can be no doubt that these forces have done much to produce Soviet agreement on major issues including arms control measures that are singled out periodically as prime topics of public discussion.

These arms control measures are properly objects of public attention. It therefore is only natural that you graduates should want to know what this trend toward arms control will mean to you in the years ahead.

I am confident that I can satisfy your concern on this point by emphasizing certain continuing requirements that you will have to meet throughout your careers.

In fact, I regard these requirements--and the principles to be applied in meeting them--as important guidelines for defense. Your success in fulfilling these requirements will be essential to this nation's security.

Your first requirement will be to obtain continuing support for the maintenance of US strategic advantage. That advantage must be maintained as the cornerstone of our deterrent posture.

It is interesting to note what President Johnson said on this point in a recent speech, and I quote:

"... We have labored to build a military strength of unmatched might. We have succeeded. If the threat of war has lessened, it is largely because our opponents realize that attack would bring destruction. This effort has been costly. But the costs of weakness are greater than the costs of strength, and the payment far more painful."

End of quote.

You therefore must not permit the requirement for strategic advantage to be obscured by arguments that describe the present world situation as a condition of "mutual stalemate" and "mutual deterrence."

There is no evidence of stalemate in the present power balance. It still favors us by a clear margin. It is still determined by the relative pace of actions going forward in all the areas of national endeavor--social, economic, and military.

In the military area, modern weapons have increased the dynamic character of our preparations for defense. We now gain our security not from geographic isolation but from the continuous maintenance of superior military capabilities.

The mutual deterrence theme obviously assumes that the US and the Soviet [Union] have experienced a mutual threat. That assumption fails to recognize that US monopoly of nuclear delivery systems during the late 1940s and early 1950s presented the Soviet [Union] with no threat of aggression.

And it fails to consider how Soviet possession of nuclear advantage would have affected our nation and the Free World.

It is imperative that these points be understood as the basis for any realistic discussion

of proposals for arms control arrangements.

And from what we have seen of mutual arms control arrangements we know their negotiation, execution, and, in particular, their verification will require very careful, thorough, and painstaking work.

However, we already have placed in effect certain measures which can be considered as a form of unilateral arms control. We can expand and improve on these measures through our own initiative without detriment to our strategic posture.

One example is our development of fast and secure communications to guarantee controlled response of our forces in periods of crisis.

Other examples are the hardening and dispersing of our nuclear delivery systems and the establishment of protected command posts like the one under nearby Cheyenne Mountain.

These measures are stabilizing in their effect because, while obviously not designed for aggressive use, they help to provide a credible retaliatory force that can survive, react, penetrate, and prevail.

The systems making up this force are adaptable to any future method of checks and inspections.

They are and will continue to be the products of an intensified research and development effort.

This underscores a second major requirement that you will have to meet through all the years of your service: that of maintaining technical superiority as the key to strategic advantage.

It is important for us to note some of the reasons why the question of technical superiority will be of such great concern to you.

Research and development is the most dynamic area affecting our security. We cannot prescribe the timetable or the limits for technical advances. Nor can we foresee how other countries will apply those advances to new weapons, new strategy, and new tactics.

In the past it was not such basic developments as atomic energy and jet propulsion that produced technical surprise in conflict. Rather, it was their unexpected application.

Everything we know about the military application of science tells us that weapons of the future will be potentially more decisive in their impact on human affairs. It also tells us that we cannot depend on a static, finite, defense arrangement that is based on any so-called "ultimate weapon."

This means that you will need to apply vigilance and ingenuity in detecting breakthroughs that can affect our security. This applies equally to our three graduates who are reinforcing our sister services--the Army and the Marine Corps.

Beyond your immediate concern with such things as advanced manned aircraft, missiles, and space systems, you must be prepared to deal with the possibility of exotic weapons. These could emerge, for example, from basic scientific research now being conducted.

To weigh the military implications of new developments in these fields you will have to understand their effect on the nature of conflict. And this brings me to the third requirement I want to discuss.

During your careers, you will fill command, staff, crew positions, and technical assignments. In these capacities you will be faced with the constant requirement to update your thinking on strategy and operational concepts.

You will also have responsibility for conducting the flights and launches that will validate these strategies and concepts under all conditions of tests and combat. That is the hard core of your professionalism, in which your knowledge, your experience, and your skill must be unequalled.

Your prospects are good for an immediate start in attaining these qualifications, both in the launch control center and in the cockpit.

Our present force of missiles will build toward an objective of more than 1,200 by 1970. Over that period, our force of more than 6,000 first-line aircraft will be continued with new, improved models coming into the inventory.

With pilots expected to be in short supply over much of that period, many of you will gain experience with these systems at a rapid rate.

Where my career began with the 150-mile-an-hour P-1, yours begins with the supersonic F-4C and B-58 and will progress through new aircraft and manned spacecraft to systems not yet conceived.

As you gain experience with these systems, here are some of the strategies and operational concepts that will undoubtedly claim your attention.

The idea of using force to achieve total defeat of an enemy is now only one of the available choices. When you consider the damage levels that high intensity war can bring even to the nominal "winner," total defeat of the enemy may be the least desirable choice.

For the future we need to improve our methods of using weapons to gain precise, but limited, objectives for particular crisis situations. This would increase our capability to neutralize selected targets which are important to the enemy. If carefully applied, these actions could force him to back down from his initial aggression and negotiate our respective interest.

I think we also need to further develop concepts for rapid deployment of forces to produce a desired deterrent effect in certain areas.

Our composite air strike forces and strategic airlift forces have provided some excellent examples as a guide for this effort. Their rapid movement to trouble spots like Lebanon, Berlin, and Thailand has demonstrated the fact that we can prevent the exploitation of power vacuums that may exist.

We also need to increase still further the effectiveness of our operations against guerrilla forces. And we need even better methods for countering acts of covert aggression that are carried out through the movement of men and weapons across recognized borders.

There are many other ideas that need developing in recognition of the fact that flexibility is essential at all levels of deterrence or conflict.

Now, as a final comment on strategy and operational concepts, I want to stress the importance of a counterforce concept of deterrence.

By "counterforce," I mean the ability to destroy selective elements of the aggressor's strategic offensive systems, thereby reducing his capability to attack us.

I believe counterforce provides the best deterrent because it is based on a concept of destroying or neutralizing the military forces which the enemy must depend on to gain a victory.

And through this effective deterrence we achieve the principal objective of our military forces--that is, the full protection of American lives and property.

If deterrence should fall, counterforce provides for maximum limitation of damage under the worst possible conditions.

Thus, counterforce, in situations involving either the success or failure of deterrence, provides the greatest dividend that we can gain from any strategy.

I have placed emphasis today on the areas of concern that I believe will claim a major share of your effort and attention.

These are:

The requirement for strategic advantage.

The requirement for technical superiority as the key to strategic advantage.

And the requirement for refining strategy and operational concepts.

There are problems of broad and changing context, and I have talked chiefly of the fundamental principles involved.

I am convinced that the continued application of these principles will pay great dividends.

At the strategic level their application will be effective in preventing general war.

At the tactical level their application can prevent limited wars and uphold national policies in conflicts of lesser intensity.

These principles offer the best hope for preserving conditions that permit the non-violent adjustment of disagreements among nations.

I can think of no higher purpose to be served with the time and talent at your command.

In my 35 years of service, I have seen aerospace power remold or set aside many traditional military concepts.

Since 1945, it has compelled action on a broad and continuing basis to meet the hard requirements of our security as determined at the highest levels of national leadership. That action, though discomfiting to some, is essential to all.

As you carry that action forward, you will build on a proud heritage of military service.

And you will attain a clear and lasting identification with the aerospace pioneers who enriched that heritage.

They were men of vision, of strong moral and mental fiber, and of sure and steady skill.

They operated, as you will, at the forefront of scientific advance and close to the limits of human skill and endurance.

Through periods of calm, crisis, and combat, they served with unfailing courage. And their achievements remain a living force in the pace and momentum of progress.

In protecting the life and freedom of our society, they earned a public trust that will now reside in you.

I know that, in fulfilling that trust, you will match their integrity of thought and action, that you will persevere, and press forward, and succeed.

My heartiest congratulations and best wishes to all of you.