

1973-2023 Legacy Class Speech

Lt. General John F. Regni, Superintendent 2005-2009, On Behalf of the Illustrious Class of 1973

Good morning Class of 2023. It is my distinct honor and privilege to represent the Illustrious Class of 1973 today, your 50-year Legacy Class.

Some of you may be thinking right now, great, I get to stand here in my Service Charlie uniform and hear from my old uncle or grandfather with some elderly advice. Well rest assured, the Academy experience was so foundational and impressionable for us, we vividly remember it all...we can still think like cadets...so I will make this short and to the point. Listen up.

Four years from now...or more appropriately in Doolie Cadet Knowledge lingo, in 1,393 days plus a wake-up, you will march into Falcon Stadium, and the President of the United States may be there to address you...and welcome you into the officer corps serving the Air Force and the Nation. The President will give you a charge...to conduct yourself with honor, with leadership and dignity, as you launch into your duties supporting and defending the Constitution of the United States against all enemies. So consider our words from the Class of '73 as a bit of a pre-graduation and pre-commencement speech...on what to grasp, and take away from this Academy, over the next four years.

All of you volunteered...you had other exciting options...and you chose the Academy and the Profession of Arms. Yet as you sweated through the Assault Course, you might have had thoughts of why did I ever choose this? Well you are not alone...on August 15th 1969, many of us as newly minted Cadet Fourth Classmen were wondering if we indeed made the right choice...in my case, my high school classmates were at Woodstock listening to Jimmy Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, and Country Joe McDonald and the Fish. Google it...

But there is no doubt you made the correct choice...you wanted to be here...your senators and congressmen/women want you here...and so does the Academy. I say that last piece because there were over 1,000 fully-qualified applicants who wanted to be here in your place, but instead you beat them out...and trust me, those not here today would trade places with you in a nanosecond.

So the Class of '73 has a few points for you to ponder...and to strive for...so when you do cross that stage, and salute and then shake the President's hand, you are ready to fulfill that charge of being our Nation's leaders of character.

1. Take full advantage of the Academy and all it has to offer. Its world-class academics, the hand-picked superb staff and faculty, the Commandant's 4-year leadership laboratory, the airfield, the athletics and fitness, the Character & Leadership Center, the thought-provoking guest speakers, and the myriad of cadet clubs. Soak it all up...be engaged...be all-in. Get every penny's worth of taxpayer dollars they and we just invested in your education and leadership development.
2. All of the above can and will be akin to drinking from a firehose. Take it, absorb it, one day at a time. You'll have great days...and an occasional bad day—let those last ones roll off your back and learn from them.
3. Set your goals sky high.
 - Academically, be like Lt General Frank Klotz, a Prep School grad and one of our 4.0 GPA cadets and a Rhodes Scholar.
 - Athletically, be like Doctor Oderia "Big O" Mitchell, an All-American football player and varsity basketball player, and a renowned orthopedic surgeon.

- Airmanship-wise, be like Captain Chesley B. Sullenberger III—Sully was our class recipient of the Outstanding Cadet in Airmanship Award thus his heroics on the Hudson River were of little surprise to us.
 - Militarily, be like General John Corley who command Air Combat Command, be like my summer roommate General Steve Lorenz who commanded Air Education and Training Command, be like Lt General Donny Wurster who commanded Special Operations for our Air Force, and be like General Norty Schwartz our 19th Chief of Staff...for among you may very well be the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and Chief of the Space Force in 2056.
4. Become Leaders of Character. You'll take the Honor Oath today...those are not just words but a way of life...and admittedly a new way of life for most of you. The Academy ensures every program here is founded upon and laced with character and honor lessons—internalize them, and embrace them.
 5. Treat everyone with dignity and respect...your squadron mates, your classmates, the upper class, and when you are more senior those subordinate to you, the civilian community downtown—everyone. Especially cadets and others who don't look like you, or think like you, or those from different parts of our country or from foreign lands. You are now part of a most-diverse team...of men and women, of different races and ethnicity, of different cultures and habits, of different faiths and beliefs, of different military rank and responsibilities. Make respect for human dignity a foundational plank of who you are...and who you become.

You will have a broad team of professionals to guide and mentor you through our Academy. Your Legacy Class—The Illustrious Class of 1973—is also here to help. Our relationship won't end here today with one speech; you'll see us across the spectrum of cadet activities led by Dr. Ron Scott our Class President and Lt Col Bill Diffley the Class Vice President and Legacy Chair

...and we'll try to not be like your grandfathers when we wax eloquently about our time as cadets from 1969 through 1973...and our military careers and civilian leadership roles thereafter.

Best wishes on your most exciting—and meaningful—journey ahead. '73 stands ready to assist.

Now back to the Parade and your formal Acceptance into the Cadet Wing.