

Class of 1977 Acceptance Day Parade Welcome Address

Good morning, General Clark, General Marks, General Letendre, and 2027. I'm going to follow the principles of effective time management this morning and use this welcoming opportunity to also answer the big question that I'm sure has been on your minds since the minute you stepped off the bus at the base of the ramp- is this worth it? I suspect that it's on your mind right now.

To answer that question I'm first going to take you back 46 years to the summer of 1977 when I was a student at navigator training about to fly a simulator mission. This particular mission involved a high-speed, low-altitude bombing run and the target for scoring purposes was the Air Force Academy. The aim point for our simulated bombs was the center of the cadet area.

As soon as the simulator started I moved my crosshairs for the aim point from the cadet area to the commandant's office. A number of my classmates aimed at the Dean's facility over in Fairchild because, well, you know, experiences differ. Nobody aimed for the Chapel-even as lieutenants we knew that you don't poke the bear.

It will not surprise you to learn that the scores for that particular simulator mission were the highest of any of our simulator rides.

Now the point of this story is to let you know that there will be days here when you would like nothing more than to fly over this place and drop a bomb on it. If you haven't experienced them already, those days are coming. And there's likely to be more than one or two of them.

It's part of the process that you heard my classmate Steve Simon talk about on July 4th and it's standard operating procedure.

Now skip ahead 45 years to last fall and my class reunion. I note that as individuals, my classmates and I are pretty much what you see here- grumpy old men wandering aimlessly around their communities. But together, in any type of group, we are members of the United States Air Force Academy Class of 1977. We number among our members astronauts, rocket scientists, generals, software pioneers, science fiction authors, war heroes, and, well, spies.

Walking into the ballroom where my classmates were gathered gave me, among other things, an immense sense of pride at being part of that august body, even as my own individual body isn't doing so well.

I'm damn proud of my classmates and their accomplishments, and that pride has stayed with us, it rides with us, if you will, like it will for you, from the day you graduate going forward.

There are many other feelings that attach to a gathering of your classmates. Such as the understanding that all of you are members of what I call the true 1%, the men and women who signed the unlimited liability clause of our agreement to serve our country. There's a mutual respect that comes from being forged in the same furnace and sharpened on the same stone, that every person you look at in that room has gone through the same firing and tempering. The knowledge that all of you were pushed hard and not found wanting.

To paraphrase Norman McLean, the Great American author of the West, to know that you are part of a group who love the universe, but are not intimidated by it. And the affection that you have for each

other, your brothers, and for you all, your sisters, in arms. This is what you feel walking into a room of your classmates. I can tell you without exaggeration that for the three days of those reunions, that point in Colorado Springs is one of the happiest places on earth. and in the face of that and many other similar experiences, those bomber days just fade away. So, hell yes, it's worth it.

Now we've answered the big question, so after the parade, you can all move on. I'm going to leave you with words from your Contrails that I trust you will not have to memorize but are found in 1977's Welcome to you. Trust in your talents, lean on your classmates, keep your sense of humor, and make the next four years your best.