

Graduation Speech of Note: Warrant Officer Advanced Course Class 26-004 - Leadership is a Lifestyle!

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Editors Note: This publication has never run a graduation speech. Most are written for a room and do not survive the page. This one does. CW3 Starr did not simply deliver a speech — she built one worthy of its subject. Her charge to classmates to be builders of the Army, not merely participants in it, reflects a leader who already lives that standard. She excelled in the course and helped shape it for those who follow. That is exactly the kind of leadership this publication exists to recognize.

Good morning distinguished guests, leaders, families, and fellow graduates of Warrant Officer Advanced Course 26-004. Today is a milestone. It marks the end of a course that has tested us, shaped us, and brought us together to meet shared objectives. And today, you stand here not just as individuals who completed another in a long line of Army trainings. When I look at our group, I see more than graduates. I see builders. Yes, builders. Because long after this class is dismissed and we return to our home stations, long after the 1059s are submitted, and long after we forget our shared pain of the hours spent working on papers and projects together- what truly matters is what we have built. The Army does not endure because of equipment. It does not endure because of technology. It does not endure because of facilities or budgets. The Army endures because of leaders like us who choose to build.

We will build teams.

Every formation that we join, whether it is a squad, a platoon, a staff section, or a company, will be shaped by our influence. Not just by what we do, but by how we do it. Teams are not built by rank alone. They are built by trust. Trust is built when our words mean something. Trust is built when we show up prepared. Trust is built when we carry our share — and oftentimes, someone else's share as well. The Soldiers serving alongside you will not remember every order you gave. But they will remember how you made them feel. They will remember whether you listened. They will remember whether you cared. They will remember whether you showed up for them, for the team, for the organization when it mattered. That is our construction work. **That is laying a foundation.**

We will also build organizations. An organization is more than a patch on a shoulder, a unit guidon, or a name on a building. It is culture. It is upholding a standard. It is reputation. Every day we will either reinforce the standard — or erode it. When no one is watching, we are still in the background building. When we choose the harder right over the easier wrong, we are building. When we enforce discipline with fairness and consistency, we are building. When we mentor someone who is struggling, we are building. And when we put systems and processes in place that will be in place long after we leave a place, we are building. Organizations are not shaped in grand speeches. They are shaped in daily habits. In small corrections. In quiet, strong, expert leadership. In moments where no one applauds us. In doing expert things expertly because that is how they deserve to be done, and that is what the Army needs of us. And over time, **those small acts become legacy.**

That brings me to the most important thing we will build: our legacy. Legacy is not about awards or positions. It is not about how many coins we collect or how many lines fit on our OERs. Legacy is about impact. Years from now, someone we led will be leading others. The way they counsel, the way they correct, the way they encourage, and the way they carry themselves will all be a reflection of something we taught them. **That is legacy.**

The Army is full of stories about great battles and historic leaders. But the true backbone of this institution

is something quieter, but just as impactful— it is the thousands of men and women who showed up every day and built something that outlasted them. We may not serve forever. None of us do. Uniforms eventually come off. Assignments change. Careers transition. Some of us may only have a few years left of service. But the character we build in ourselves — and the character we help build in others — will go far beyond our time in service. That is why being a builder matters. Builders think long term. We do not just ask, “What helps me today?” We ask, “What strengthens this unit for tomorrow?” We do not just ask, “How do I look to my rater or my senior rater?” Instead, we ask, “How does this team perform, and how can I improve it?” We understand that leadership is not about spotlight — it is about building structure, about strengthening the foundation. It is about creating something strong enough that it still stands even when we are no longer there to hold it up.

Graduates — all of us are returning to an Army that will continue to challenge us. It will continue to test our patience. It will continue to test our resilience. It will continue to test our commitment. There will be days when it is easier to disengage than to invest. To rest on our laurels. To coast on our previous success. Instead, choose to invest. Choose to build. We must choose to build discipline in ourselves and confidence in our Soldiers, build cohesion in our teams, and build pride in our organization- and build it in a way that lasts. One day, years from now, someone will stand where we are standing right now. And they will carry forward the culture, the standards, and the example that we helped shape. Make sure what we leave behind is solid. Make sure it is worthy. Make sure it is something that strengthens this Army long after our boots leave its soil, after we hang up these uniforms we wear with pride for the final time. To the leaders that got us here, thank you.

Builders do not build alone. Your support is part of this foundation. And to the graduates, today we did it- we passed, we did the thing! But tomorrow, it's back to work to continue building the strong foundation we began years ago. Continue to be more than participants in this institution. Be builders of it. Congratulations. I am proud of all of us. The Army is stronger because of us. And its future will be shaped by what we choose to build next. Thank you, class 26-004 and remember- Leadership is a lifestyle!

