**14587, Louis Preziosi**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to welcome everyone to this year’s Officer Candidate School graduation. We have the pleasure of our state and junior officers, and our NCOs joining our graduates this year. I also want to thank our graduates’ family members and friends for joining us as our nine graduates become newly commissioned second lieutenants in the Army National Guard of Connecticut. As the former Commander of this school and a graduate back in 1970 I am honored to be invited to speak this year.

Since I am both a former student and a former commander, I can honestly say I understand the feelings of every graduate has here today. I’m very pleased to see we finally have a new military auditorium to house the graduation ceremony even though the old one did serve us very well for many years. During your time here in school you have all developed a strong comradery among yourselves. That comradery will go a long way during your military career and now that you’ve developed it here, you know how to develop it whenever you change assignments over your career. Some of the friendships you make will be limited to a particular assignment. Other friendships you will find will last a lifetime. I encourage you to appreciate and nurture those friendships for they will invaluable both personally and professionally.

Surviving and thriving in a military career requires commitment: commitment to your family, commitment to the United States, and commitments to being a career officer as well as to other officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted soldiers. With that commitment you must have a large dose of duty, honor and loyalty to the same things. This is not just a short term enlistment for you. You expended the time and effort to become officers to build a career that defines you and you can build over a lifetime. Over your lifetimes you will be required to make a lot of sacrifices that will affect your professional and your personal lives. But, those sacrifices will be worth the effort because of the results that you gain from those sacrifices.

Today you become commissioned officers. I’m sure you all want to throw your hats in the air and shout your excitement. You have every right to be excited. You have worked hard and accomplished much. I know that you are looking forward to your new assignments as well. Once the initial excitement wears off you will need to remember the important thing about being an officer. It’s not about being in charge. It’s about being a leader. The best leader leads by example. You can do that by being fair to your subordinates, by taking advice from experienced non-commissioned officers and soldiers. Life and work are learning experiences and you can learn from anyone regardless of their rank and position to you.

As leaders you will be asked to make snap decisions. You will be asked to make difficult decisions without always having all the facts you need. And, you will be expected to make those decisions using all the knowledge and experience you possess with exacting accuracy and sometimes with very little time to make the decision. Only time and experience will bring about that level of accuracy. But, your diligence in learning from every experience will help you to learn what you need as quickly as possible.

Sacrifice will become something that you take for granted. You will take it so in stride that you will not know how to live without it. But, leadership is a life you have chosen so the sacrifice itself will not seem too great for you. In order to meet these commitments as a career officer you will need your family support. If you are already married remember that any decision you make will affect your spouse and children. Be sure to consider how it affects them whenever changes are coming your way, especially if those changes are optional for you. If you aren’t married yet, make that a consideration early on in any new relationships. You have made this commitment. But, spouses and children won’t have a choice once you make your decisions or accept new assignments, but to follow you in those assignments. How you handle the responsibilities will affect your family relationships positively or negatively which will in turn affect how much they support you. It is part of the cycle of life, so consider your family as you navigate your career and they will be more likely to support you.

World events will affect how your career moves forward. Changes in the world will create changes here in the United States. I have already witnessed how those changes have affected my career in the military and I’m sure you’ve seen some of those changes as you studied military history. We are no longer in an era where the international world is separated from our lives in the United States. World events now affect us more quickly on the home front, causing us to prepare for military challenges on our own soil. These challenges will be in addition to the normal responsibilities of the National Guard.

You have just completed the most stringent officer training possible. I encourage you to take on the challenges of leadership with everything within you. You have the traits necessary to be good leaders. Have confidence in what you have learned and what you can do with that knowledge. During your career you will face many different types of challenges that will test your training, test your knowledge, test your experience and even test your professionalism. But, you have what it takes to meet these challenges. You are professionals. You have what it takes to be the best officers in the Connecticut National Guard. You can be proud of what you have accomplished and what talents you bring to the Guard.

You can also be proud to be a member of the Connecticut National Guard. I have served in the Guard for 40 years now and it was one of the best decisions I ever made in my life. It has provided me with a solid career doing work that I am proud to have done. It has provided me and my family with security and many benefits over the years. I couldn’t imagine doing any other type of work or having any other career.

I congratulate you on your accomplishments and wish you all great careers.

Thank you