

Branch Night Remarks (20 Nov 2014)

Thanks Will – it’s an awesome privilege to share this special evening with the magnificent Class of 2015, “*For Those We Lead*”.

GEN Shinseki – my first Brigade Commander as a LT in the 3rd Infantry Division, LTG and Mrs. Caslen, LTG DeFrancisco, LTG Jordan – my second brigade commander as a LT in the 3rd Infantry Division, CSM Duane and Ms. Grimm, BG Trainor and COL Brazil, Mr. and Mrs. Corrigan, Mr. and Mrs. McClure, other distinguished guests, and most importantly, the members of the Class of 2015. Welcome to tonight’s branching ceremony.

Our heartfelt thanks to the many senior leaders from across our Army that are here to represent all 17 branches. The impressive list includes MG Rapp for the Corps of Engineers, my recent 4ID battle buddy BG Rainey for the Infantry, BG Frost and CSM Harris for Cyber, BG Matlock for Armor, and several more from the various branch proponents. We truly appreciate the time you have made to personally welcome our Firstie cadets into each of your branches.

We are honored tonight by the tremendous representation from the 50-year affiliation class, led by their class president MG Gill. West Point 1965 is a truly great class and the gentlemen here represent their legacy. One that includes 79 Purple Hearts, 115 Bronze Stars for Valor, and 76 Silver Stars. They include a former Chief of Staff of the Army, a former Superintendent, and a Medal of Honor Recipient.

The class also includes CPT Carl Robert Arvin, killed in action in Vietnam, who provides us with daily inspiration every time we walk through the hallowed doors of Arvin Gym. The Class of '65 has supported, mentored, and encouraged the Class of '15 every step of the way – from Beast Barracks through this evening – and will be there shoulder to shoulder with you when you join the Long Gray Line in May. Please join me in a round of applause for the US Military Academy Class of 1965. [PAUSE].

Tonight marks another significant milestone in your cadet experience and Army profession. You are a step closer to being commissioned into the greatest Army in the world. One of the things that makes our Army so great is the integration of all of the branches. Whether your primary role is closing with and destroying the enemy, providing devastating fires, ensuring mission command capabilities, protecting the force, or sustaining combat operations, each of your branches has a distinct role. Further, every branch is filled with great Officers, NCOs, and Soldiers that share your newfound identity.

Based on the needs of the Army, 70% of your class is branched into combat arms. For the first time ever, 15 cadets branched directly into the brand new Cyber branch. The #1 cadet in the class chose infantry. Though not universal, satisfaction rates remain very high with 80% of the class receiving their #1 choice and 96% of the class receiving one of their top 5 choices. This is a significant achievement, given that we had a 25% cut in AV allocations from the previous year. Most interesting to me, 40% of the class changed their top preference since this time last year, which tells me that collectively you are engaging in the branch education and mentorship program.

I commend you for embracing this talent management approach, and for choosing branches that maximize your potential to our Army.

And now, it is my absolute privilege to introduce our guest speaker, whose 34 years of honorable service surely gives special insight to our great profession and to the identities represented on the insignia in your envelopes. LTG DeFrancisco is the quintessential example of an experienced combined arms leader. For the Avengers in the house, he is a fellow alum from company A-1. Throughout his career, he served in Europe, Korea, and the Continental United States. He served two combat tours in Vietnam and one in Panama for Operation Just Cause. His awards and decorations include the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, the Purple Heart, and the Ranger Tab. His commands include twice as a battery commander in Vietnam, the 7th Infantry Division Artillery, and the 24th, then later 3rd Infantry Division.

Our Academy, Army, and Nation are grateful, as well, for his service since retiring as the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of US Pacific Command. Whether it is serving on the Board of Directors for the Army Historical Foundation, on the Transition Teams for our last four Superintendents, or by nurturing connections across the Long Gray Line, this incredible leader continues to positively influence those serving on point for our Nation.

Class of 2015, please join me in welcoming our 25,824th graduate and 2013 Distinguished Graduate – LTG Retired Joseph E. DeFrancisco.