

General Albert P Clark's Remarks
Parent's Orientation, Class of 1975
1245 Hours, 5 July 1971

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, fathers and mothers of our new cadets.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Air Force Academy, and to extend my congratulations to each of you on your son's achievement in being selected a member of the class of 1975.

I know that a few of your sons have come here today with some degree of trepidation. Some of you may feel a touch of apprehension yourselves, concerning the challenge of the task which your sons have undertaken.

Yet, in spite of this quite normal concern, I can assure each parent that it can be remembered as the first of many proud moments you will share with your son in his Air Force career.

I would like to focus my brief comments on the initial phase of the fourth-class training program, basic training—or "BCT," as it is popularly called. My remarks are limited to this area for two reasons:

First: this is where your son will be during the next six weeks;

Also, because: later, after this initial phase of training has been completed (over the Labor Day holiday) we will host many more families at the class of 1975 Parents' Weekend. At this time, and in conjunction with the start of the academic year, you will receive much more comprehensive presentations from not only the Commandant of Cadets, but the Dean of Faculty, Director of Athletics, and Chaplain as well.

Following my remarks, the Commandant will introduce a most perceptive, little film, entitled, "What Makes a Man." It should serve to help you understand the scope and the nature of the arduous and challenging course some 1400 young men have chosen to undertake.

This film will offer you an insight into the summer training program, the purpose of which is to affect the necessary transition of our young cadets from civilian to military life. As you will see, the program is designed to bring out the best in each man, physically and mentally. It provides invaluable leadership training—and it creates an environment within which your son will be able to experience the satisfaction that comes with pride in his performance, his integrity, and his courage.

The self-confidence and poise that will come from having met successfully the challenges of summer training will serve him well as he faces further challenges during his four years here.

And as he progresses with his studies, his character development, and his physical training, he will find strength and a newly acquired self-assurance.

The coming weeks will find your son engaged in a strenuous and demanding program. He will have started down a new road, but one with high rewards in terms of personal satisfaction. As they strive to achieve, they deserve, above all, our support in their decision to pursue a career as an Air Force officer.

Some of you may receive letters from your sons, which will reflect something of the impact of the rigors of their training and the demands our program places on them. Some may reflect doubt or confusion as to our objectives and the meaningfulness of it all.

Please be reassured that it all has a purpose, and our experience with results over the years gives us confidence that it achieves its purpose.

The fact that they complain, doesn't mean they are weak or marginal cadets, it means that they are quite normal. Very few of your sons will find these demands familiar or comfortable.

Our goal for the young men who enter the Academy is and must be to train them mentally, physically, and militarily to assume a most important and demanding role of leadership in the defense of their country. To do this, we must create an environment within which stamina and dedication to service can be tested and evaluated.

The system teaches responsibility, self-discipline, and obedience—and the lessons are learned in such stern and uncompromising ways that they are not soon forgotten. It is our conviction that a tough, demanding fourth-class year is essential to the acquisition of good traits of leadership for the future.

History offers us no instance where a nation was successfully defended in difficult times such as these by leaders who are the product of a permissive training environment.

The next six weeks will be his most difficult time. He may experience homesickness, he may react against being told what to do, and against the system in general. Beyond what we will do for him to help him over these hurdles, your encouragement and confidence and pride in him are very important. Write often and remind him of your confidence in his ability to succeed.

Fathers and mothers, you have a fine boy, or he wouldn't be here. I appreciate the opportunity to tell you this, and to reassure you that we will look after him.

I look forward to greeting many of you at the informal reception which follows, and I hope that you can return to take another look at your boy in September.

I am sure you'll be pleased with what you see!