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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 2: “ You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR  
and the New Deal**

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**File No. 1229**

**1939 June 12**

**West Point, NY –  
Commencement Exercises - Address**

SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT  
WEST POINT COMMENCEMENT  
JUNE 12, 1939

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MR. SUPERINTENDENT, FELLOW OFFICERS:

I take pleasure in greeting you as colleagues in the service of the United States. You will find, as I have, that that service never ends -- in the sense that it engages the best of your ability and the best of your imagination in the endless adventure of keeping the United States safe, strong and at peace.

You will find that the technique you acquired can be used in many ways, for the Army of the United States has a record of achievement in peace as well as in war. It is a little-appreciated fact that its constructive activities have saved more lives through its peace time work and have created more wealth and well-being through its technical operations, than it has destroyed during its wars, hard-fought and victorious though they have been.

With us the army does not stand for aggression, domination, or fear. It has become a corps d'elite of highly trained men whose talent is great technical skill, whose training is highly cooperative, and whose capacity is used to defend the country with force when affairs require that force be used.

But it has also been made available to organize, to assist, and to construct, when battles have to be waged against the more impersonal foes of disaster, disease, or distress.

This is sound army work; for the military strength of a country can be no greater than its internal economic and moral solidarity, and the task of national defense must concern itself with civilian problems at home, quite as much as with armed forces in the field.

The alteration of economic life in the past generation has almost completely changed the task which you assume today. Your predecessors, commissioned Second Lieutenants as short a time back as ten years ago, would find many of your problems unfamiliar.

Technical developments have transformed methods of warfare. They have required revision of tables of organization of armies, as Aviation, motorization, and mechanization became the military necessities of the day. The individual fighting plane of yesterday has been supplanted by the cohesive squadron; the motor vehicle rumbles where once trod the weary feet of marching men; the infantry tank and cavalry combat car clatter where formerly the dismounted soldier engaged in personal combat.

The machine age has laid its iron grip upon the world's armies; and technical developments have demanded the modernization of our military establishments, a program which has been prosecuted vigorously during the past six years. During recent months international political considerations have required still greater emphasis upon the vitalization of our defense, for we have had dramatic illustrations of the fate of undefended nations. We seek peace by honorable and pacific conduct of our international relations; but that desire for peace must never be mistaken for weakness.

on 4<sup>th</sup> floor

Yet experts tell us that though technical change has transformed modern warfare, the coming of the machine does not mean that we shall ever have a robot war from which the primary human elements, courage, heroism, intelligence and morale will have departed. So far from submerging men, the modern developments emphasize their responsibilities.

Recent conflicts in Europe, the Far East and Africa bear witness to the fact that the individual soldier remains the controlling factor. The tactics of the future intensify, rather than diminish, the necessity for high qualities of individual leadership. The object of developing aviation, motorization, and mechanization is to attain the highest possible degree of mobility.

For us, this is essential; the vast expanse of territory of a nation as large as the United States renders economically impracticable the maintenance of fixed defensive installations at all vital strategic centers, even were these desirable as a matter of policy. Yet this greater mobility in turn means that units, whether platoon,

regiment, or division, may be widely dispersed -- the units being broken down to the point where the individual is "on his own."

During campaigns units are increasingly scattered; in actual battle, they may be widely apart. The strain upon those in command of the individual units calls for qualities of leadership perhaps never before required in military history. Though the day of the individual champion may have passed into history, the day of the leader of small and large units is still young.

Leadership has meaning only as it brings about cooperation. When men are working upon a great problem, but must work by themselves, or in small groups without close contact, there is danger that they may not pull in the same direction. Cooperation means discipline, not meticulous though unthinking obedience to guard-room technique, nor blind mass cooperation of a Macedonian phalanx or the close order attack. Discipline is the tempered working together of many minds and wills,

each preserving independent judgment, but all prepared to sink individual differences and egotisms to attain an objective which is accepted and understood. When men are taken far apart by mechanics and specialization, teamwork is far more essential than when they are close together; for it must be teamwork of the mind as well as of the body.

Some of you, no doubt, in fullness of time will find yourselves with responsibilities even greater than those of bringing about the cooperation of military units. When the supreme test of war comes -- and I hope it never will -- an army, to be effective, must command the cooperation of all elements in national life. The men then charged with the national defense must be able to bring into harmonious action the civilian instruments of production, and of transport, and of finance; they must deal with labor, with industry, with management, with agriculture, and with costs.

To do this requires sympathetic knowledge of how other men's minds work and of processes by which non-military life operates. There is no greater quality of discipline than the ability to recognize different techniques and different processes, and by persuasion and reason to bring these divergent forces into fruitful cooperation.

You have seen the problem in its smaller aspects here at West Point; let me commend to you in your army careers a continuous study of problems outside as well as inside the military field, as the necessary preparation for the greatest success in your chosen work.

These qualities of cooperation, discipline and the self-restraint and self-reliance which make them useful, are the very fabric of modern life. If it can be developed internationally as well as nationally, we shall be materially nearer to a realization of our hopes of peace.

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I am sure the lessons you have learned at West Point will be of use in peace, no less than war; and that in you the nation will take the same pride, maintain the same confidence, as, through the generations, it has held for the officers of the Armies of the United States.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

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Orig. reading copy

Mr. Dugling - I have  
boxed the original  
& drafts of this  
speech - These can  
be filed - M. Eber

SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT  
WEST POINT COMMENCEMENT  
JUNE 12, 1939

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War Department draft as  
rewritten by A.A. Berle.

June 9, 1939.

MEMORANDUM

West Point Commencement,  
Monday, June 12, 1939.

Mr. Superintendent, Fellow Officers:

I take pleasure in greeting you as colleagues in the service of the United States. You will find, as I have, that that service never ends, ~~in the sense that~~ it engages the best of your ability and the best of your imagination in the endless adventure of keeping the United States safe, strong and at peace.

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leader where the individual is now being scattered;* During campaigns units are increasingly scattered; in actual battle, they may be widely apart. The strain upon those in command of the individual units calls for qualities of leadership perhaps never before required in military history. Though the day of the individual champion may have passed into history, the day of the leader of small and large units is still young.

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~~you the nation will take the same pride,~~  
~~Maintain the same confidence, as, through~~  
~~the generations it has held for the~~  
~~officers of the Army of the~~  
~~United States.~~

Submitted by General Thayer - War Dept. Draft.

Upon graduation today you begin your careers as officers in a modernized defensive force, the like of which would have been rather unfamiliar to your predecessors who were commissioned second lieutenants even so short a time back as ten years. With astounding rapidity technical developments have transformed the face of warfare and <sup>required</sup> necessitated revision of tables of organization of armies. Aviation, motorization, and mechanization are the military <sup>succession</sup> ~~succession~~ shibboleths of this day.

The individual fighting plane of yesterday has been supplanted by the cohesive squadron of today; the motor vehicle rumbles where once trod the weary feet of marching men; the infantry tank and the cavalry combat car clatter where formerly the dismounted soldier engaged in personal combat. The machine age has truly laid its iron grip upon the world's armies. These technical developments have demanded the modernization of our military establishments, a program which has been prosecuted vigorously during the past six years. International political considerations have required even greater emphasis upon the vitalization of our defense elements during recent months. We know today, that vigilance is no passport to peace, and that right, in the age, needs a sword.

[ There is nothing glamorous about military service in this age. Very grim is the profession upon which you embark today. The successful performance of your varied duties will make unrelenting demands upon your capabilities and talents. The day has long since passed when routine parade-ground instruction and meticulous orderly-room observance of administrative requirements occupied in full the time and the efforts of the commissioned officer of the Regular Army.]

" Although <sup>was born</sup> in war I say that technical developments of recent years have transformed the face of warfare. <sup>in war</sup> However, the advent of man-replacing machines of war by does not mean that we shall ever have a no means presupposes the initiation of a completely mechanical war—a robot war—from which primary human elements, the courage, and heroism, the <sup>morale</sup> <sup>and organization</sup> tension and fear of men, will have departed. The Recent conflicts in Europe, the Far East, and in Africa bear witness to the fact that the individual-soldier, no matter with what weapon armed nor by what type of vehicle transported, still remains the controlling factor [on the battlefield.]

That <sup>as it</sup> the tactics of the future will serve to eliminate necessity for the exercise of high qualities of individual leadership is a wholly fallacious supposition. The development of aviation, motorization, and mechanization

The strength of a defense force is multiplied by its speed. Yet this

have as a primary objective, the assurance of the highest possible degree of mobility.

Mobility is an essentiality in the armed forces of a nation so

large as the United States. So vast an expanse of territory renders eco-

nomically impracticable the maintenance of fixed defensive installations at

all vital strategic centers. Increased mobility in turn presupposes wide means that links

dispersion of units, be it with the platoon, the regiment, or the division, may be widely dispersed. During campaigns this is increasingly necessary because then too the increased employment of automatic and semi-automatic weapons,

the longer ranges of guns, and the greater effectiveness of aerial bombs.

necessitates further scattering of organizations during campaign. Dispersion

During actual battle, augments to a dangerous degree the problems inherent in successful control of

organizations and individuals on the field-of-battle. The successful exercise

To achieve control under the conditions of mobility and dispersion will be required v.  
viewed for the

future will demand the exercise of personal leadership to an extent probably

never before approximated in the history of warfare.

Recognizing the hazards involved in battlefield dispersion, aware of the difficulties incident to the control of highly mobile units, the Army intensively studies the problem of so-called "stream-lining" organizations to a

size permitting the commander to impress upon his subordinates his personality  
*his quality of command* impress those in his charge  
and to exercise personal leadership.

World War veterans have told me that the battlefields of France were the world's loneliest spots; that the most impressive characteristic of "No Man's Land" was its complete emptiness. The necessity for concealment gave rise to a problem of control of units on the front lines which was the cause of incessant concern to commanders. On the date of the Armistice, The Western Front approximated four hundred miles. Along that front millions of hostile men faced each other. If in those comparatively cramped combat quarters the exercise of control and leadership proved a task insurmountable of accomplishment by many junior leaders and superior commanders, then how much more essential will be the exercise of the highest possible degree of leadership in far more open and far more mobile warfare.

Hand in hand with the necessity for the development of qualities of leadership will be the necessity for exercise of intelligent discipline. The compact phalanx has passed into history as has any form of close-order in attack or defense. With further dispersion or individuals arises greater need for dis-

cipline in the individual and within the unit of which he is a member. It is axiomatic that teamwork by supporting individuals hundreds of yards apart is far more essential than the cooperation of individuals fighting in close proximity to one another.

As the advent of the machine manifoldly increases the complexity of tactics, so it augments to an onerous extent the responsibilities of the commanders. The more technical warfare becomes, the greater will be the demand for high standards of leadership and discipline. It is well, therefore, that in the West Point curriculum leadership and discipline continue to be stressed as military attributes of vital importance.

General J. F. Harbord

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT  
At the Graduation Exercises  
of the United States Military Academy  
West Point, New York  
June 12, 1939, 11.48 A.M.

(MR.) SUPERINTENDENT BENEDICT, FELLOW OFFICERS, MEMBERS OF THE CLASS  
OF 1939:

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Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

1200 AM

police and at hospitals as we go along at intervals over 1

police this has been done, but like me, many more are to  
arrive now to take the messages to each house till all the news  
is given to everyone and then all gathered together will be  
told as has already been done, that certain persons are  
not here and are not available for anything but their daily work and

it is evident because of the great number of cases that  
there will be a long time in order to have everyone to know  
from where and what the exact information is that has been given  
has been given between now and now with many other important and  
desirable and it may, according to him, be difficult to give  
and even your doubts immediately now regarding him, some of which

understand or appreciate exactly one  
subject in, otherwise not much can be said but in this  
one particular cannot be added more or added and if there is no  
doubt of particular mode, this incident rests at least made  
the opinion and belief of head of changed since his disappearance  
in  
this of course that always established after  
failure of, although at different times and in case  
of course and failure of of real existing mode, particularly in the  
especially no reason, because to any language and most often

(This) That is sound Army work too; for the military strength of a country can be no greater than its internal economic and moral solidarity, and the task of national defense must concern itself with civilian problems at home, quite as much as with armed forces in the field.

The alteration of economic life in (the) this past generation has almost completely changed the task which you assume today. Your predecessors, commissioned Second Lieutenants as short a time back as ten years ago, would find many of your problems unfamiliar.

For technical developments have transformed methods of warfare. They have required revision of tables of organization of armies, as aviation, motorization and mechanization have (became) become the military necessities of the day. The individual fighting plane of yesterday, of the World War period, has been supplanted by the cohesive squadron; the motor vehicle rumbles where once trod the weary feet of marching men; the infantry tank and cavalry combat car clatter where formerly the dismounted soldier engaged in personal combat.

Yes, the machine age has laid its (iron) grip upon the world's armies heavily; and technical developments have demanded the modernization of our military establishments, a program which has been prosecuted vigorously during the past six years. During recent months international political considerations have required still greater emphasis upon the vitalization of our defense, for we have had dramatic illustrations of the fate of undefended nations. I hardly need to be more specific than that. We seek peace by honorable and pacific conduct of our international relations; but that

desire for peace must never, will never be mistaken for weakness on the part of the United States.

Yet experts tell us that though technical change has transformed modern warfare, the coming of the machine does not mean that we shall ever have a robot war, a robot war from which the primary human elements, courage, heroism, intelligence and morale will have departed. So far from submerging men, the modern developments emphasize (their) the responsibilities of man.

Recent conflicts in Europe, the Far East and Africa bear witness to the fact that the individual soldier remains still the controlling factor. The tactics of the future intensify, rather than diminish, the necessity for high qualities of individual leadership. The object of developing aviation, motorization, and mechanization is to attain the highest possible degree of mobility.

And for us especially this is essential; the vast expense of territory of a nation as large as the United States renders economically impracticable the maintenance of fixed defensive installations at all vital strategic centers, even were these desirable as a matter of military policy. Yet this greater mobility in turn means that units, whether platoon, or regiment, or division, may be widely dispersed -- the units being broken down to the point where the individual is "on his own."

During campaigns units are increasingly scattered, as we know; in actual battle, they may be widely apart. The strain upon those (in) who command (of) the individual units calls for qualities of leadership perhaps never before required in military history. Though the day of the individual champion may have passed into history, the day of the

leader of small and large units is still young.

Yes, and leadership has meaning only as it brings about cooperation. When men are working upon a great problem, but must work by themselves, or in small groups without close contact, there is danger that they may not pull in the same direction. Cooperation, therefore, means discipline, not the meticulous though unthinking obedience to guardroom technique alone, nor blind mass cooperation of a Macedonian phalanx or the close order attack. Discipline is the well-tempered working together of many minds and wills, each preserving independent judgment, but all prepared to sink individual differences and egotisms to attain an objective (which) that is accepted and understood. When men are taken far apart by mechanics and specialization, teamwork is far more essential than when they are close together; the work (for it) must be teamwork of the mind as well as of the body.

Some of you, no doubt, in fullness of time will find yourselves with responsibilities even greater than those of bringing about the cooperation of military units. When the supreme test of war comes -- and I hope it never will -- an army, to be effective, must command the cooperation of others, the cooperation of all elements in national life. The men then charged with the national defense, from the Commander in Chief, in his capacity as Commander in Chief, and the same man in his capacity as President of the United States, down to the youngest Second Lieutenant in the Army, and down to the most recently recruited private, they must be able to bring into harmonious action the civilian instruments of production, (and) of transport, and of finance; they must deal with labor, with industry, with management, with agriculture, and with costs.

To do(this) that requires sympathetic knowledge of how other men's minds work and of processes by which non-military life operates. There is no greater quality of discipline than the ability to recognize different techniques and different processes, and by persuasion and reason to bring these divergent forces into fruitful cooperation.

You have seen the problem in its smaller aspects here at West Point; let me commend to you in your Army careers a continuous study of problems outside as well as inside the military field, as the necessary preparation for the greatest success in your chosen work.

These qualities of cooperation, discipline and the self-restraint and self-reliance (which) that make them useful, they are the very fabric of modern life. If it can be developed internationally as well as nationally, we shall be materially nearer to a realization of our hopes (of) for peace.

Recently (we have) our Nation has had the pleasure of a visit from King George VI, as a courteous recognition of the cordiality and the good will (which) that prevails between two great nations. Its significance lay in the fact that friendship could exist between the two countries (since) because both nations were without fear. Without fear of any act of aggression of the one against the other. To achieve that result, strength is needed: Strength which comes, not from arms alone, but from restraint, from understanding and from cooperation which in turn are the product of trained and disciplined minds.

I am very sure the lessons you have learned at West Point

will be of use in peace, no less than war; and that in you the Nation will take the same pride, maintain the same confidence, as, through all the generations the Nation (it) has held for the officers of the Armies of the United States.

Gentlemen of the Graduating Class, I congratulate you upon the finishing of your course at the Military Academy, and I wish for you in the days to come all the good luck in the world.

Mr. Kaunee -  
I have finished with  
this. MBP

STATEMENTS FILE

JUNE 11, 1939.  
HOLD FOR RELEASE  
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FOR THE PRESS —

CONFIDENTIAL - HOLD FOR RELEASE

The following address by the President, to be delivered at the graduation exercises of the United States Military Academy at West Point is for release in newspapers appearing on the streets not earlier than 11:45 A.M. Eastern DAYLIGHT Saving Time, Monday, June 12, 1939.

PLEASE SAFEGUARD AGAINST PREMATURE RELEASE.

STEPHEN EARLY,  
Secretary to the President.

*Handwritten*  
MR. SUPERINTENDENT, FELLOW OFFICERS, Members of the Class of 1939:

I take pleasure in greeting you as colleagues in the service of the United States. You will find, as I have, that that service never ends — in the sense that it engages the best of your ability and the best of your imagination in the endless adventure of keeping the United States safe, strong and at peace.

You will find that the technique you acquired can be used in many ways, for the Army of the United States has a record of achievement in peace as well as in war. It is a little-appreciated fact that its constructive activities have saved more lives through its peace time work and have created more wealth and well-being through its technical operations, than it has destroyed during its wars, hard-fought and victorious though they have been, *and that's something to remember.*

With us the army does not stand for aggression, domination, or fear. It has become a corps d'elite of highly trained men whose talents great technical skill, whose training is highly cooperative, and whose capacity is used to defend the country with force when affairs require that force be used.

But it has also been made available to organize, to assist, and to construct, *when battles have to be waged against the more impersonal forces of disaster, disease, or distress.*

That is sound army work; for the military strength of a country can be no greater than its internal economic and moral solidarity, and the task of national defense must concern itself with civilian problems at home, quite as much as with armed forces in the field.

The alteration of economic life in the past generation has almost completely changed the task which you assume today. Your predecessors, commissioned Second Lieutenants as short a time back as ten years ago, would find many of your problems unfamiliar.

Today Technical developments have transformed methods of warfare. They have required revision of tables of organization of armies, as aviation, motorization and mechanization, *become* the military necessities of the day. The individual fighting plane of yesterday has *now* been supplanted by the cohesive squadron; the motor vehicle rumbles *where* once trod the weary feet of marching men; the infantry tank and cavalry combat car clatter where formerly the dismounted soldier engaged in personal combat.

Yes, The machine age has laid its iron grip upon the world's armies, *heavily;* and technical developments have demanded the modernization of our military establishments, a program which has been prosecuted vigorously during the past six years. During recent months international political considerations have required still greater emphasis upon the vitalization of our defense, for we have had *so hardly* dramatic illustrations of the fate of undefended nations. *We seek now* *the* *relations;* *but* *that* *desire* *for* *peace* *must* *never* *be* *mistaken* *for* *weakness* *on* *the* *part* *of* *the* *United* *States.*

22

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Recent conflicts in Europe, the Far East and Africa bear witness to the fact that the individual soldier remains still the controlling factor. The tactics of the future intensify, rather than diminish, the necessity for high qualities of individual leadership. The object of developing aviation, motorization, and mechanization is to attain the highest possible degree of mobility.

*especially*  
And for us, this is essential; the vast expanse of territory of a nation as large as the United States renders economically impracticable the maintenance of fixed defensive installations at all vital strategic centers, even were these desirable as a matter of policy. Yet this greater mobility in turn means that units, whether platoon, regiment, or division, may be widely dispersed — the units being broken down to the point where the individual is "on his own."

During campaigns units are increasingly scattered, ~~as we know~~ in actual battle, they may be widely apart. The strain upon those in command of the individual units calls for qualities of leadership perhaps never before required in military history. Though the day of the individual champion may have passed into history, the day of the leader of small and large units is still young.

*Yes, and* Leadership has meaning only as it brings about cooperation. When men are working upon a great problem, but must work by themselves, or in small groups without close contact, there is danger that they may not pull in the same direction. Cooperation means discipline, not the meticulous though unthinking obedience to guard-room techniques, nor blind mass cooperation of a Macedonian phalanx or the close order attack. Discipline is the well tempered working together of many minds and wills, each preserving independent judgment, but all prepared to sink individual differences and egotisms to attain an objective which is accepted and understood. When men are taken far apart by mechanics and specialization, teamwork is far more essential than when they are close together; ~~the work~~ ~~for~~ must be teamwork of the mind as well as of the body.

Some of you, no doubt, in fullness of time will find yourselves with responsibilities even greater than those of bringing about the cooperation of military units. When the supreme test of war comes — and I hope it never will — an army, to be effective, must command the cooperation of all elements in national life. The men <sup>from the Com-</sup> then charged with the national defense <sup>and</sup> ~~must~~ be able to <sup>in his capacity as</sup> bring into harmonious action the civilian instruments of <sup>Commander in</sup> production, <sup>and</sup> ~~of~~ transport, and of finance; they must <sup>chief and the same</sup> deal with labor, with industry, with management, with <sup>men in this capacity as</sup> agriculture, and with costs.

To do that requires sympathetic knowledge of how other men's minds work and of processes by which non-military life operates. There is no greater quality of discipline and the ability to recognize different techniques and different processes, and by persuasion and reason to bring <sup>and down to</sup> <sup>President of the United States</sup> <sup>down to the young</sup> <sup>and second lieutenant in the Army</sup> <sup>and down to</sup> <sup>the most recently recruited friend</sup> these divergent forces into fruitful cooperation.

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Recently ~~we have~~ had the pleasure of a visit from King George VI, as a courteous recognition of the cordiality and good will ~~which~~ prevails between two great nations. Its significance lay in the fact that friendship could exist between the two countries ~~whose~~ both <sup>were</sup> without fear. To achieve that result, strength is needed: Strength which comes not from arms alone, but from restraint, understanding and cooperation which in turn are the product of trained and disciplined minds.

I am ~~sure~~ the lessons you have learned at West Point will be of use in peace, no less than war; and that in you the nation will take the same pride, maintain the same confidence, as through the generations ~~it~~ has held for the officers of the Armies of the United States.

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Gentlemen of the Graduating Class I congratulate you upon the finishing of your course at the Military Academy, and I wish you for you in the days to come all the good luck in the world.