

Georgia Governor Speaks at Armor BOLC Graduation

by Vince Little, *The Bayonet*

The Armor Basic Officer Leader Course's inaugural class at Fort Benning had a special guest at its graduation Thursday.

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal delivered the commencement speech and handed certificates to 76 lieutenants during the hour-long ceremony at Derby Auditorium inside McGinnis-Wickam Hall. The group of Armor and Cavalry officers included three international students from Uruguay, Uganda and Jordan. The rest were U.S. Army lieutenants.

Deal landed in a helicopter on York Field and was greeted by MG Robert Brown and CSM Chris Hardy, the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE) and Fort Benning command team. They led him into the \$155 million, newly dedicated MCoE headquarters.

"It's certainly nice to see this building. This is a gorgeous facility and appropriately named for two Medal of Honor winners," the governor said.

"Fort Benning has changed a lot since the Armor School has made its presence known here. It is good for this community (and) for the state of Georgia. We certainly welcome this expansion.

"Certainly, Fort Benning is one of the most important military facilities in our entire country. With the augmentation of the Armor School here, it makes it even more significant in the overall picture. We think the transition has gone very well from the military and civilian side."

Deal served as a captain in the Army before launching his career in public service. He was a nine-term congressman and spent 23 years in a private law practice before winning the state's governorship last fall.

In Summer 1963, he attended an Army ROTC summer camp at Fort Benning as a member of the cadet corps at Mercer University in Macon.

"It was interesting. I have dug my share of foxholes on Sand Hill," he joked.

Class 11-005 began the 19-week Armor BOLC on June 9. Assigned to Troop L, 2nd Squadron, 16th Cavalry Regiment, 316th Cavalry Brigade, it's the first to graduate at Fort Benning since the Armor School's move from Fort Knox, KY.

"Now it feels like we're at home," said LTC Sean Barnes, the 2-16 Cav commander. "It's a very special occasion and milestone in these officers' careers, the Armor School, Fort Benning and the Columbus community. We maximized every opportunity to train here. As a result, the Armor force and its leaders will remain the most agile and creative leaders on any battlefield."

Unit officials said the course is designed to groom platoon leaders by teaching the lieutenants how to shoot, move and communicate from mounted and dismounted platforms. Armor BOLC provides the Army with confident, agile Armor and Cavalry officers capable of conducting full-spectrum operations as part of a combined-arms team. The training combines classroom, small group and practical exercise instruction to hone leadership skills and the warrior ethos.

"This is a great day and big accomplishment," said MAJ Roman Izzo, executive officer for 2-16 Cav. "It took a lot to get this together, moving all the pieces to Fort Benning. It took a lot of effort from a lot of people to get this up and running."

Deal praised the "sophisticated modern equipment" used here in training and the tactics imparted to the lieutenants by instructors.

"You have absorbed some of the most powerful ideals that make the United States military great," he told the graduates. "You've continued to build on something that was already inside you – a spirit of selfless service and a commitment to your fellow citizens in this country."

“In the military, people will follow you because of your rank. But when they know and see that you are the first in line for the most difficult tasks, that’s when you get a unit concept, and that is when you get the most out of those that you ask to follow.”

The lieutenants are prepared to win on the battlefield of today and tomorrow, the governor added.

“Ultimately, the freedom of our security lies in your hands, and the hands of men and women like you all throughout our nation,” he said. “You are trained not to be weak and not to be timid. We will remain free as long as the next generation of Americans rises to meet the duty and high calling of military service, one that you have already answered. Your sense of service epitomizes the best of our nation.”

2LT Joseph Ombrello, 30, the Draper Leadership Award winner, said the first graduating class sets a “new precedent on the grounds at Fort Benning,” and the group appreciates Deal supporting the Soldiers.

Ombrello is now headed to Fort Polk, LA, to become platoon leader of an opposition force at the Joint Readiness Training Center.

“I definitely feel the course helped me become an Armor leader, especially with the tactics taught here,” Ombrello said.

Armor BOLC leaders said 10 cycles a year are scheduled on Harmony Church. Four classes are underway, while another starts in November.

*First published in Fort Benning’s newspaper, **The Bayonet**, Oct. 11, 2011.*