

# Wartime Setting Marks Aldridge's First Address to a DAU Graduating Class

## Sanctioning the Status Quo Not an Option

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September 11 is now the “elephant in the drawing room” for DoD’s leaders. Whether it be a change of command, a promotion ceremony, an awards ceremony, a conference presentation, a graduation—no matter what the occasion, all roads lead back to 9/11 and the cowardly terrorist attacks that shook the nation.

E.C. Pete Aldridge Jr., the USD(AT&L), didn’t ignore the “elephant” as he addressed 235 graduates of DAU’s Advanced Program Management Course (Class 01-3) on Dec. 14. Indeed, he stated in no uncertain terms his wartime expectations of the first “PMs in waiting” to graduate since the Sept. 11 attacks.

### Think Anew and Act Anew

“I will expect you to think anew and act anew when you report for work. In a word, I expect innovation...I will expect you to scrub our initiatives and programs to identify all those activities or practices that slow the process.”

Aldridge told the graduates that perhaps they will find that DoD is wasting too much time and resources with redundant documentation, unnecessary meetings, superfluous systems capabilities, convoluted oversight, or excessive coordination.

“If you spend the next 30 years in acquisition,” he encouraged them, “there may never be a better chance to translate this particular sentiment into reality.”

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Aldridge said that within AT&L, the war will either prove a “springboard to transformation or it will sanction the status quo.” He predicted it would not be the latter result.

Acknowledging that DoD’s problems in Defense acquisition programs are many, he cited cost overruns, long cycle times, an ever-shrinking workforce, and a defense industrial base that has little incentive to do business with DoD. He spoke of a paralyzing focus on the hundred percent solution in systems development; weapons and infrastructure priorities that cannot seem to join DoD in the post-Cold War world; and a wartime need for high-tech research and development from a community that has suffered years of neglect, under-resourcing, and brain-drain.

### Complacency Kills

Reflecting back to Sept. 10—one day prior to the attacks—Aldridge mentioned the speech he was delivering at an Acquisition and Logistics Excellence Week kickoff ceremony. He had cautioned the AT&L workforce that day against *complacency*, pointing out that three of our nation’s last five major wars came as surprises.

He could never have imagined his words would prove so prophetic. The next day he found himself amending those numbers to four of six.

“Each of you,” he told the graduates, “will soon take your place behind one of the many oars that propel this massive ship toward its destination. Take care not to endanger our ship and crew

Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics) Edward C. “Pete” Aldridge Jr. addresses the graduates of APMC 01-3, Dec. 14, 2001, at Scott Hall, Fort Belvoir, Va.



to the *complacency* that often accompanies a desk-bound job.”

### **Sizable Challenges**

An effective leader, he said, will build initiative and creativity in subordinates by assigning objectives, and then abstaining from micromanaging the solutions. Putting his words into action, he threw out some sizable challenges for the graduates to reflect on between now and when they report to work:

### **Take Care of Your People**

Aldridge told the graduating class to be “ferocious” in the standards by which they take care of their people. “Government service will never compete with private industry paycheck to paycheck, but there are many young people out there for whom material reward is not life’s alpha and omega. You are probably among them.”

### **Paralysis by Analysis**

Aldridge agrees with the President’s assertion that the conflict in Afghanistan has taught the nation more about the future of the military than a decade of blue ribbon panels and think-tank symposiums. “It just may mean an end,” he said, “to the kind of ‘paralysis by analysis’ that has vexed the introduction of so many promising systems, concepts, and technologies over the years.”

### **Hard Decisions**

Every Service and every constituency of the nation’s military, he told the graduates, must be willing to sacrifice some of their own pet projects. Aldridge, as does the President, believes that our war on terror cannot be used to justify obsolete bases, obsolete programs, or obsolete weapon systems.

### **Asymmetric, Technology-Dependent War**

“If ever there was an asymmetric, technology-dependent war, the one we are currently waging is certainly it... When the nation’s enemies are all around us, even within our own borders, leverage and force multiplication are no longer luxuries—they are requirements,” Aldridge stated.

The key to achieving leverage and force multiplication, he believes, is technology. “Keep your eyes on the prize,” he emphasized. “We seek nothing less than the redefinition of war on our terms.”

### **Interoperability**

Aldridge urged the graduating class to watch carefully for opportunities to initiate or enhance interoperability. “I will be looking to you to pursue networks rather than autonomous systems. What opportunities can you think of to purchase services instead of hardware? I expect you to more closely approximate available technology to mission needs. And I expect you to bring requirements ‘creep’ under control in systems development and acquisition.”

### **Metrics**

“You cannot manage what you cannot measure,” Aldridge stated. Explaining that DoD will soon have in place a set of metrics, he anticipates that these metrics will be tremendously helpful in measuring the Department’s progress toward his five goals and the AT&L community’s overall standard of *Acquisition and Logistics Excellence*.

Exercise innovation, creativity, and risk, he counseled. “The pressure is on—results, not promises, will provide the benchmarks. I’m open to any new ideas

that you may have about how we can improve the process.”

### **Risk Management**

Reject risk aversion in favor of risk management, Aldridge said. “I challenge you to show both taxpayer and appropriator alike just what war-winning technologies we can produce for their sons and daughters.

“If we are not going to take these risks now—then when? If we are not going to transform now—then when? Our leaders—and the free people they serve—demand that this war not sanction the status quo.”

### **Our Clarion Call**

“*No fair fights* is our clarion call,” Aldridge said. “Our premise is that parity means casualties.” He reminded the graduating class that, no matter what their specific task—from hard science to records maintenance—we all are in the same business. And though during times of peace we may sometimes believe we are in the *technology* business, current circumstances demonstrate that we are not.

“We are no more in the technology business that a paramedic is in the ambulance business,” he emphasized. “News reports remind us on a daily basis that we—every one of us—are in the *victory* business.”

Wars, Aldridge said, have a nasty but reliable habit of taking on lives of their own. They dart this way and that, turn at 90-degree angles, and change character and tone like a chameleon.

“This is what makes overconfidence and complacency so dangerous,” he warned the graduates. By extension, this is what makes the work you are about to begin so imperative. I know that every one of you is up to the task.

**Editor’s Note:** Download the entire text of Aldridge’s Dec. 14, 2001, speech to the graduates of APMC 01-3 from ACQWeb, the USD(AT&L) Web Site, at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/usd/index.html>.

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**—E.C. “Pete” Aldridge Jr.  
USD(AT&L)**