

The 1958 Class Gift: The First Class Club

by Anthony A. "Tony" Smith

Early in 1986, Dale Hruby accepted the challenge of leading the efforts of the Class to identify a suitable gift to our Alma Mater and then to see it through to fruition (truth be known, he got classmated). Dale assembled such stalwarts as Butch Ordway, John Schroeder, Joe Luman, Dusty Rhodes, George Robertson, Paul Johnson and George Lawton to help him (it's a small miracle anything got done with this bunch!). As they began to think about an appropriate gift, they set their sights on finding a contribution that would directly benefit cadets, that cadets could use and enjoy, and that would enhance their experience at West Point.

This was no easy quest. The Association of Graduates gave the Class their book of recommended gifts, all of which were projects approved by the Superintendent, but none met the criteria of direct involvement and enjoyment by cadets that the Class desired. A number of ideas – such as a walkway between the old East and West Academic Buildings and renovating a building near the Cemetery for use by the bereaved – were proposed and discarded. Finally, it was the Cadet Hostess who brought to our attention the need for a place where the members of the graduating class could gather, relax and escape temporarily the pressures of their hectic lives. In other words, a club for the exclusive use of the First Class. After consultation with many Firsties who welcomed the idea enthusiastically, the Class resolved to offer West Point a First Class Club. The next question was: how to do it?

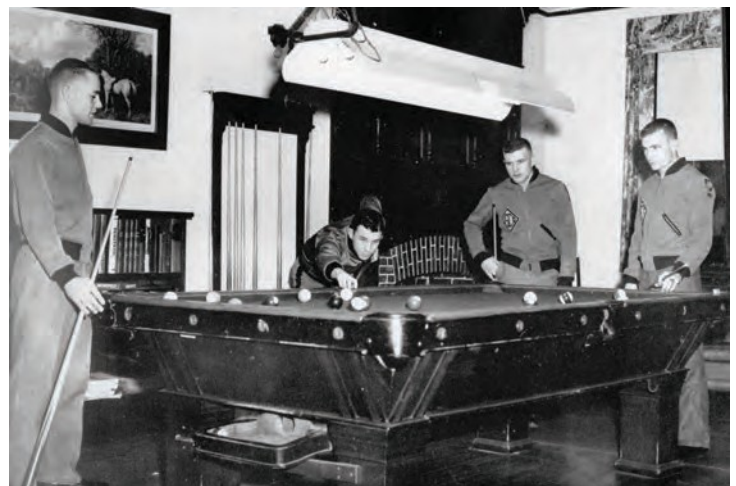
To begin with, we had to this point raised precious little money to support a significant gift. This problem began to find a solution with the "Nadal \$500 challenge" that was launched at the class meeting at the 30th Reunion, when Tony, with his typical Latin flair for drama, leaped to his feet and pledged \$500 on the spot, triggering a spontaneous (actually, pre-arranged) follow-on number of pledges from

other classmates. With funds coming in, Dale and his team turned to where and how to develop the First Class Club.



In 1958, just days prior to graduation, the Superintendent had provided the graduating class with the use of part of the Ordnance Compound below Trophy Point. The Compound had been a classroom and lab exploring the intricacies of engines, artillery and other weaponry. Who could forget trooping down to the Ordnance Compound to study Automotive Engineering? (This location replaced our former "First Class Club," a little-used room over a sally port in North Area, equipped with pool table, black-and-white TV and a few sofas and chairs.) The Club in the Ordnance Compound was abandoned in the 1980's, when all cadet recreational facilities were brought into the newly-built Eisenhower Hall.

Fortunately, a few classmates recalled that the Ordnance Compound had actually served, however briefly, as a First Class Club. It was vacant and unused, all the weaponry and equipment having been moved to classrooms closer to the barracks. This could provide a venue. Now the question was: how to make it a place that the First Class would enjoy and really use, unlike its predecessors?



The "very old" First Class Club was located above one of the sallyports. To judge from this staid picture it lacked both excitement and environment. In this picture a crowd from D-2 play pool; left to right: Larry Perreault, Dan Yarr, Paul Ruud, and Joe Keyes.



The Supe, Gar Davidson, turns over keys to the Ordnance Compound First Class Club during our First Class Year. L to R: Linda Robinson (Waskowicz), Tom Claffey, the Supe, and Bill Shepard. It was abandoned in the 80s.



After speaking with cadets, it was decided that the new First Class Club should be fitted out as a sports bar. Butch Ordway drew on years of experience in sports bars (no surprise there!) to put us in touch with a specialist in their design. The group decided to celebrate the theme, "Every cadet an athlete," to be portrayed through art work and photographs that depicted not only Army legends competing in the major sports, but also minor sports and even intramurals. To give this concrete expression, a few dedicated '58ers found that the National War College Library contained *Howitzers* going back to the early 20th Century, and many hours were spent at the Fort McNair Officers' Club going through *Howitzers* to select appropriate photos, posters and other art work.

Visitors who enter the Club today are invariably impressed with the breadth and variety of the several hundred framed pieces (Dale and Butch hauled them to West Point in a memorable rented van trip) that give life to the importance of athletics at West Point. Selfless to a man, our intrepid classmates also spent many hours researching sports bars in the Washington area to better understand the culture and gain insights into their decor. "All for the Corps!"

The newly fitted out First Class Club opened for use in the fall of 1993. It was an immediate hit with cadets. Now



The Ordnance Compound .

they had a location for their exclusive use, separate and apart from other cadet recreational facilities. Over the years, the Club's usage has grown. Firsties throng to the Club, especially on Thursday nights, when it is not uncommon to find cadets two and three deep at the bar waiting for a pitcher of beer. In addition, other groups at West Point use the Club for events at times when it is not needed by the First Class. In fact, the First Class Club has become so successful that its revenue exceeds operating costs, and the surplus helps fund many cadet activities that depend on non-appropriated funds for their existence.

One photo that decorates the First Class Club commemorates a little-known athletic contest involving the Class of '58. Perhaps carried away by the sports bar theme, '58 put together a baseball team to challenge the Army varsity during the 1993 Graduation Week. They started practice with 17 classmates months before the game, using a field at the CIA. (Apparently, they did not want to be scouted.) At game time, exactly nine classmates had survived the practices. Two of the self-proclaimed "Dream Team" were hurt during the pre-game warm-up, but were patched up enough to play.

The class of '58 retains a strong "parental" interest in



Dale Hruby makes opening remarks at our 35th Reunion in 1993, when the First Class Club was officially turned over to the first class. George Lawton and Tom Claffey look on.

Jack Bradshaw makes the formal presentation to First Captain Howard Hooge. Also shown are George Sibert, Garry Roosma, Bin Barta, Bill Tuttle, and Pete Kullavanijaya. The plaque reads:

First Class Club
Dedicated to the United
States Military Academy
By the Class of 1958

At Its 35th Reunion

October 1993

Duty Honor Country





Several photos of the annual "turnover" ceremony to the new First Class. Top, 1999, left t right: Bob Pointer, Bob Mellot, Chuck Hansult, Bill Shepard, Branch Worsham, and Garry Roosma. Below, re-enactment of Andy's speech about our great support of the FCC just as the brass railing he was leaning on came off. Others in the photo are Tony Smith, Will Roosma, Bob Pointer, and Chuck Hansult. °

the First Class Club. Over the years, Butch Ordway, Brad Johnson and Will Roosma have made regular visits to the Club to oversee its operation and stay in touch with management. (Some guys will go to extraordinary lengths for free beer!) Every August when the new First Class returns to the post for their final year, a small group of classmates gathers at West Point to participate in a handover ceremony, organized by Bob Pointer, at which they inform the new First Class of the Club's history and charge the new Firsties with responsibility for keeping it in good condition to pass on to their successors. In addition, our class has been generous over the years in paying for enhancements to the Club, such as the air conditioning that was added five years ago. As the class of '58 approaches our 50th Reunion, we are raising funds to pay for a major renovation so that when we gather to celebrate our cadet days a half-century later, we can take pride in having provided our Alma Mater with a First Class Club that is truly first-class.

The upgrades are almost complete now, and drawing rave notices, this letter to Tony Smith from the Director of Cadet Activities:

"Mon General,

"Well, I wish you would have been with me Sat night. The Comdt took all privileges from the Cows and Firsties for the



Major upgrades were accomplished in 2007. New (Black and gold) furniture), bathrooms, etc.

wkend. Therefore, the FCC was jammed packed like an all cheese diet (French Cheese of course). I walked in around 2100 hrs through the back entrance where the new furniture is located.

"This was the first time the Firsties had seen the new stuff! They all stood and cheered yelling "DCA Rocks!". Felt like a rock star walking in there - they all wanted to thank me - I told them the Class of 1958 was responsible!

"You would have been very proud. The back room was loaded with cadets and the room door was closed (making it very private and separate from the pool room) - the second shuffle board we bought in the back room was loaded, the



dart board was being used and there wasn't a new piece furniture available. We broke the previous record for sales in the FCC. What a night. It was the perfect storm! Pls pass on my sincere thanks to your class."