

Dick Schonberger and I attended the Class of 1967 Leadership Conference at West Point, August 13-16 2014.

As a preface, let me say that our takeaway experience was very much the same as others that have attended the conference. Real anxiety that “the Corps has...” melding into an admission that we might not be up to meeting today’s West Point expectations. To oversimplify somewhat, when we were cadets, we were 2,400 strong — very rigidly governed, in a setting that prescribed everything we had to do. Fixed meal schedules. Fixed class routines. Fixed curriculum. Fixed bedtimes. Very few electives. First leadership assignments (maybe) as Cow Corporals.

Today, the situation is markedly different. Some 4,800 cadets. Each choosing any of a great variety of majors. 160+ clubs. Diverse summer assignments. Interns with Government Agencies (DARPA, NSA). Research at prestigious labs. 3<sup>rd</sup> Lieutenant assignment in the US and overseas. Flexible meals choices. No lights out. Extensive electives. Leadership assignments beginning as Yearlings.

And the cadets are doing great!! Little wonder that West Point is rated the #1 or #2 public educational institution in both liberal arts and engineering by Forbes, US News and others.

Well, here’s what we did.

### **Wednesday 13 August**

Skipped golf, but got in late on the 13<sup>th</sup> and registered at the Hebert Center— AOG headquarters. Drinks and nice assortment of foods were provided. Met with and talked with numerous others there for the conference. We met Vince McDermott [Director of Academy Advancement??, retired, former offensive guard for Army football], who oversees AOG construction efforts. He and wife are graduates. Dick explained that we’d like to gather what we could about the status of the First Class Club and the lacrosse facility. He arranged for us to meet Col Batchelder, the Cadet Activities Officer, at the First Class Club on Thursday afternoon. He also advised us that construction of the lacrosse facility on hold in order to rethink the the internal layout to accommodate womens’ lacrosse which has recently been added as a Corps Squad sport.

Checked into the Thayer. Met Gen (Ret) Lou Wagner at the outdoor bar. He lamented the “5 star” rating given to the Thayer – no glasses in rooms. His USMA 54 class had its 60-year reunion at the Thayer. His view was that AOG support was terrific, but the hotel didn’t live up to its billing. He told us that Frank Hart (USMA 54) has an after action report on their reunion, which Dick will get. Interestingly, we talked with [Gen] Bill Richardson on Thursday. He was very complimentary about both the AOG and the Thayer. His class (USMA 51) also has an after action report which Dick did receive and has forwarded to Garry Roosma for consideration.

## Thursday 14 August

Early on Thursday morning, breakfasted at the Thayer – bacon and eggs off the menu were quite good. Then a bus to Thayer Hall for a full morning of presentations in the Robinson Auditorium on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor. First up was Bob McClure (USMA 76, President and CEO of the AOG). Speaks well and represents AOG well. Not a lot of detailed information but a steady flow of interesting talking points about AOG. Larry Jordan (USMA 68, Chairman of AOG Board of Directors) also spoke. We were advised that the “For Us All” fund drive had exceeded its goal of \$350-million and would continue through the Fall, broken out as follows:

- \$200M: For the Cadets (Clubs, labs, academy centers....)
- \$70M: For West point, the Landmark (Lacrosse center, Arvin Annex...)
- \$40M: For Our Today (Unrestricted)
- \$20M: For the Nation – Centers of Excellence
- \$20M: For the Long Gray Line – Fallen Graduates Memorial Scholarship

Kim Campbell, USMA 76, Director and Chair of the Alumni Support Committee introduced the Superintendent, LTG Robert Caslen, USMA 75.

The Superintendent spoke to us for an hour or so. His #1 priorities are “honorable living” [live according to the spirit of honor, not the definable legal concept of honor], developing a culture of winning, and diversity – becoming more representative of the nation at a time when the gap between the military and civilian worlds are growing. General Caslen was soft spoken, earnest, deliberate and detailed about his topics. Trustworthy. He indicated that a new cyber branch was being added to officer career fields. Eight slots would be allocated to cadets this year. Many are already at work at NSA and other sensitive locations. Not surprisingly, they are unable to share what they are doing with the Supt.

He cited extremely strong support by the Army Chief of Staff who does not want West Point touched significantly in the on-going budget drill. The CSA considers leadership development to be the Army’s most important goal. To underscore this support, several very large construction projects (\$250M) are underway and virtually untouched in the reductions being assessed.

The slides the Superintendent — and all other presenters — used have been posted on the AOG web site. Note from Jim Johnston ’73, the Vice President for Alumni Support, follows.

*Conference presentations are now linked under the “slides” tab on our conference website [www.westpointaog.org/WPAOG-LeadersConference](http://www.westpointaog.org/WPAOG-LeadersConference), or by clicking [here](#). Please note you must be logged into [WestPointAOG.org](http://WestPointAOG.org) in order to view the presentations.*

The Superintendent was followed by Jack Miller, a consultant on alumni organization and giving. He provided a series of thoughts that tended to highlight the uniqueness of the AOG and local societies.

At noon we lunched at the West Point Club – the old Officers Club. Lunch was sponsored by the Military Officers Association of America. The talk was given by VADM Norbert R. Ryan, USN Retired, President and CEO of MOAA who discussed ramifications of the \$50+B reduction to the Defense Budget this year and next. The Admiral discussed the need to keep faith with the 1% of Americans who are putting their lives on the line for the other 99% of uninvolved Americans by not reducing pay or benefits. In particular he honed in on the current suggestion that pay raises for retirees below the age of 65 be reduced by 1%. He converted this into lifetime reductions of \$85K in income for a senior NCO and over \$125K for an officer. He argued that we should await on-going study on compensation. He expressed the view that people are the most important component of defense --- weapons change, bases change, but people are constant.

We sat with a parents group from San Antonio Texas. The father next to me was an enlisted man with Army engineers at Chu Lai with the Americal Division, 70-71. He has two sons at West Point – one graduating this year. This commitment was refreshing as he indicated that his time in Vietnam was disturbing because of rampant drug use and racial issues. Obviously this did not deter their enthusiastic support of West Point.

Thursday afternoon was spent in discussions about AOG, its organization and services. Really impressive group. Marie Lewis, USMA 04, the primary POC for class activities directs traffic. Topics were WPAOG Update, death notification system, Class Reunion support, gift shop overview, travel and brick and paver programs, Memorial articles, and TAPS magazine.

Good discussion on the ring donation program initiated by Ron Turner. Miniatures are not included in the program as they are not official West Point items. They have 17 on hand and are trying to determine what to do with them. The program got rave notices from all grads. Donors are invited to the ring melt and to ring weekend. Very emotional. They are trying to determine how to handle tax of these gifts in kind.

Some complaints about notification of funerals at West Point. Some indicated that they were at West Point at the same time that classmates were being interred, but had no idea that the funerals were occurring. Kudos to Shelisa Baskerville who coordinates funeral details. She directed Vic Gongola's funeral and did an excellent job.

Dick and I met Colonel Batchelder at the First Class Club. A real mess. Took many pictures. The First Class will share use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Club in Eisenhower Hall – turnover tonight –variously called the Class of 1963 Club, Benny Havens, or the Cow

Bar. We made clear that Tony Smith was the class contact; we just wanted to get some insight about the magnitude of damage. Just below is a panorama from the rear door of the club.



Here's a photo of the billiards room where the warped floor brought attention to the water problem.



[Tony is in dialogue with WP and you'll be hearing more as matters take shape.]

Hawaiian Luau on Thursday evening at Hebert Hall. Excellent pulled pork, corn, etc. Sat with father from Pennsylvania – also had been an enlisted man – in Germany in 1958. Has two sons at West Point. One graduating this year.

### Friday, 15 August

Friday. Continued Class Breakout. Three topics. 1. Academy Engagement and 2. USMA Admissions.



(Photo of Dick and Frank before the “temporary” First Class Club in Eisenhower Hall.)

Opportunities for grads to engage cadets were discussed by LTC Eric Weiss and CPT Robert Graves. They welcome offers by grads and will do their best to find “fits” that contribute to the program. They indicated that grads are perfectly welcome to walk into any classroom. Normally, the instructor will ask them to sign in and introduce themselves. A panel of Tactical Officers – one a woman – talked about their interaction with cadets. There is a real effort to have a mentor for every cadet, and it was suggested that asking cadets about their mentors would be interesting. I did ask a

female cadet, and she was enthusiastic about her choice.



For those who have not been involved with West Point, the evolution in preparing cadets for that first assignment after graduation in a period of armed conflict is remarkable. Ethics, leadership and “officership” has been integrated into the curriculum at every level that undoubtedly helps prepare graduates to assume the responsibility expected of the new graduate with proficiency and confidence beyond anything we experienced.

USMA Admissions was an excellent and interesting presentation. At one time the Academy’s recruiting effort was well served by over 400 MALOs (Reserve Officers who sign on as Military Academy Liaison Officers). Working hand in hand with local Active Duty personnel, local West Point societies, and West Point Parents Clubs, Admissions could send MALOs anywhere in the country to aid recruiting efforts. And their costs were borne by the Army, not USMA. For a variety of reasons, the MALO community shrunk to only 8 (that’s right EIGHT!) – for a variety of reasons. There is a conscious effort today to resuscitate the MALO ranks.

Diversity is a really hot button. Only 8% of the incoming Class are African American, and competition for qualified candidates is high. The Academy has a number of programs to reach into inner cities to develop and nurture potential minority candidates.

Late in the afternoon we toured the Memorial Room in Cullum Hall

which lists the names of all West Pointers killed in combat.

Friday evening was the big dinner. Speaker was Gen David Perkins '80, TRADOC Commander . Excellent entertaining talk. Focused on the question he said he is asked most often: "What are the Army's plans for the future?" He didn't answer it directly, but used that as a launch point to talk about how very difficult prediction is. He segued that into a detailed description of leadership on the battlefield. His point was that regardless of the future, leaders produced by West Point are the factor that is most important for the future — enormous flexibility and initiative!

Sat with several female cadets. Interesting discussions on women in the military, branch choices, and honor code.

### **Saturday 16 August**

Saturday morning there was a continental breakfast and conference wrap-up, here AOG fed back to us the issues they had heard raised in various breakout sessions.



The Acceptance Day Parade followed. The Corps does not march well. Nonetheless, the ceremony was really impressive. The Corps marched onto the Plain, followed by the Plebes, who faced the Corps and then marched into the Corps formation.



Photo above of the Plebes marching on. And below of them in formation before marching across the Plain into the Corps.

After the pass in review, the cadet parachute club put on a striking demonstration – 5 cadets landing perfectly and directly in front of the Superintendent after jumping from 4,500 feet. Most striking to Dick was the fact that each of the jumpers had more than 300 jumps and they make stand-up landings. He lamented that we were not permitted to jump as cadets.



Photo is of Dick with one of the parachute club members.

Frank Waskowicz