

# The Brigadier General Jim Ramsden Award

## Presented to the Cadet Demonstrating the Highest Academic Excellence in Chemistry and Chemical Engineering

by Edward J. "Jack" Downing

This annual award is given to the graduating cadet majoring in Chemistry or Chemical Engineering with the highest overall average and consists of a check or voucher for \$250 to buy books for future study. It was established in memory of James H. Ramsden (I-2), the only member of the USMA Class of 1958 to become a permanent professor at West Point. It was first presented to a cadet on 29 May in the auditorium of the Chemistry Department, where Jim first lectured as an instructor over 36 years before. In the words of the



Department Head, Colonel David Allbee:

*"This has always been the keystone of our Departmental presentations during Graduation Week. The reception and presentation always are there to honor Brigadier General Ramsden and the very wonderful Class of 1958."*

The award is perpetually endowed through the AOG. Members of the Class of 1958, Jim's friends and family, and the Chemical Corps Regimental Association (CCRA) contributed the funds for the endowment. In addition to the book award, each winner has his or her name engraved on a metal plate that is attached to a plaque honoring Jim Ramsden and the award winners. It is suitably displayed in the area of what is now the Department of Chemistry and Life Science. There are 48 metal plates on the plaque for the winners. In 2051, when the plaque is full, we hope that some other group, perhaps our descendants, the PEF, or the Class of 2008, will buy an extension.

Jim had an exciting and fruitful life. As an Army "brat," he lived in Mississippi, Maryland, Turkey and Fort Meade and met his future wife, Rae, in high school at St. Mary's in Annapolis, Maryland. Jim followed his brother John (1957, H-2) to West Point. He sang in the Glee Club, excelled in lacrosse and academics and stood 19th in the Class at graduation. He joined the Field Artillery and was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg. Following that he became aide de Camp to the Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group in Cambodia,

operations officer of the First Cavalry Division in Vietnam, executive officer of the 1/21 Arty and then attended Command & General Staff College. After transferring to the Chemical Corps, he became Director of Technical Support of the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Agency, Edgewood Arsenal. Between these assignments, Jim earned a Master's degree in Chemistry from Johns Hopkins University, attended the Army War College, and, with Rae of course, had four children.

Jim was selected for a permanent position in the Department of Chemistry at West Point. He returned to John's Hopkins and completed a doctorate in two years. From 1980 to 1988, he served as Deputy Head of the Department. In 1988 Jim was selected as USMA professor and Head, Department of Chemistry. Jim's contribution touched every facet of cadet life—academic, military, athletic and moral development. Jim and Rae had a direct impact on hundreds of cadets. He was instrumental in initiating a Chemical Engineering curriculum in the department, and he mentored his former student, Dave Allbee, the deputy department head who would become the future department head.

In 1990, Jim was diagnosed with incurable bone cancer with five years to live. He was promoted to brigadier general and medically retired. Jim and Rae faced the challenge with determination and hope. Jim underwent experimental bone marrow transplant and developed a holistic approach based on his knowledge of chemistry, extensive research, and his strong faith. In his illness he continued to help other cancer victims by organizing support groups, counseling others and writing an article published in *Army* magazine. Jim lived for eight years after the diagnosis, dying 13 August 1998 at St. Augustine, Florida. He is interred at West Point.

