

March Back with the Class of 2015

Sitting at home recovering from ... uhh ... reflecting upon the **2015 March Back**, I read Bob Frank's excellent email summary of the event. I feel that I might add a few words from my own perspective. Aging memory since the march coupled with bouts of blind exhaustion during the climb may have altered my current recollections. I will do my best to convey my experience.

Generally through the years I have ignored the opportunities to relive Ranger School – type experiences. This year being the fiftieth since the Class of 1965 March Back I decided to sign up as part of our Affiliation with 2015. My primary motive was, however, personal. Back in 1961 I had been incapacitated by a sprained, strained and otherwise collapsing left ankle and was unable to march back with our Class. This year would be my opportunity to “close the circle” on an event that had taken on, for many, mythic proportions at reunions and discussions. This had been the single Class experience that I missed and now hoped to achieve. Well, I missed wearing academic stars also but let's be real.

The DAA at the Academy (DAA – Directorate of Academy Advancement [now, how many knew what DAA meant?]) sent out great materials for prospective participants before the march. Of particular note was the poop sheet suggesting a program of physical training to prepare for what they said would be a demanding march. I am not sure, however, whether I would have adjusted my own preparation had I read it sooner than the week prior to the march. After a few weeks of walking I did work up to a six mile effort on hills in the neighborhood carrying a 20 pound backpack five days before the March. I strongly recommend to anyone considering this march in the future to read and follow the DAA suggested prep or take on P90X, SWAT, Ranger, Seal or continuous running of the indoor obstacle course.

Ross Wollen and Reg Dryzga kindly provided me transport to West Point and were prepared to claim my remains. Ross had forgotten to replace his auto registration decal which caused a young guard at the gate understandably at first to refuse entry of the car. After my own 30 years in the practice of criminal law, I recognized one of those young, macho, bad-cop attitudes being directed against three 70ish grads but did not want to physically exert myself before the march. And the Thayer Hotel is not what it used to be but let's get back to the March Back.

At Herbert Hall I stood in the “F” line for registration when one assistant at another section asked my name hoping to help me. When I told her my last name she smiled and said that she couldn't help and that I should stay in the “F” line. Ms Camarda, the young lady in charge of us “F's,” I found out, had been practicing my name in the office for days! I walked up to her and said my name was Roger, she smiled and nailed the pronunciation. All the assistants laughed as she did a fist pulling “Yes!” All here was efficient and boards posted a lot of information about the march. It was a great time to greet Classmates and other marchers and family members. At about 1630 hrs those who were to go to Buckner for the 2015 Talent Show and, for some of us, an overnight, boarded the buses.

For a briefing and the Show, the threat of rain kept us in the same hot, steamy building we occupied at times for lectures back in '62 at Buckner. The command decision to stay dry and limited seating kept a large number of 2015 from the Show. This was very unfortunate since 2015 new cadets put on a heck of a great show that I am confident the whole class was looking forward to seeing. The rain did come and moved on so the evening was clear and pleasant. Those of us who were staying the night moved to

Barth Hall (the dance and ping pong building), collected an incomplete cot (no end cross bars) and bedding, mulled and mingled and checked equipment. I assume to build our confidence and carbs they served prodigious amounts of cake, cookies and ice cream.

Lights out at 2200 hrs was appropriate since breakfast would be served at 0300 hrs. Note that I said 2200 hrs was appropriate under the circumstances. Breakfast at 0300 hrs, though also appropriate, is obnoxious now under all circumstances. The food was good and plentiful though I wasn't certain how much I should take in before the 12 miles. Grads were assigned to platoons and the companies left under a staggered schedule beginning at 0330 hrs. I was assigned to 2nd Platoon of Charlie Company along with Gene Manghi and Emory Plyant. We crossed the LOD at about 0430 hrs after a brief intro to the platoon/company leadership. Now before I discuss the pain and agony I want to praise the upper class leadership of Charlie Company. They took care of the new cadets and exercised firm, appropriate leadership. The Company CO, a Firstie, moved up and back along the march and had all under control. She also had a great smile.

The route had been diagramed and described for us but the joy of the encounter with that first hill still gave me a special warm feeling. There were the usual steady up hills that at West Point never go down hill. Yet, honestly, the steep down hills were the killers driving the toes through the front of the boot. [Hint: do not turn abruptly uphill while moving downhill on a 60 degree + slope unless having recently practiced shoulder rolls.] Two short breaks were welcomed by the pack and rifle carrying new cadets and your three classmates. The trek was tough but I stayed up and with my platoon and had some nice conversations with new cadets about their lives and ambitions. I was very impressed with each one I spoke with. Their physical strength was obvious and their attitude was positive and appropriate as they were about to enter the Corps. As we know, a West Point class develops a unique character that maintains it and manifests itself in the attitude and conduct of the members individually and collectively. I believe 2015 has the capacity to become a great class and one that we will have been proud to affiliate with. As I pointed out to many, their lineage from the Classes of 1915 and 1965 carries a unique strength within The Long Gray Line.

Once the march moved across the highway (9W) and the golf course was almost within sight I think we all felt the sense of relief that the end was near. By this time, however, to me the rolling hills of the course became a treadmill with a route seemingly never ending. Accordingly, I do not expect to ever voluntarily enter unto a golf course again – cart or no cart. The new cadets spotted a building with golfers and assumed it was the end point. I am not a golfer but recognized it as a watering hole in the middle of the course. I could sense a groan as we moved past it. Finally, at the ski slope we, Gene, Emory, other classmates who had marched the 12 with other units and I, were joined by grads just making the final parade through the Academy grounds. We delayed here as we waited for all the new cadet companies to arrive. Fresh fruit, drinks and cakes were set out for grads but the wait started to tighten up the muscles and I wanted to get moving again. 2015 would not have to run up the ski slope but Charlie Company did have to march half way up to reach their terminal point. When all had arrived the grads and new cadets assembled in their respective areas, we by the lodge and they on the ski slope, for group photos.

As we began assembling for the final push the attitude among our Class was jovial and encouraging to 2015 as they marched past. We took up our position at the end of the parade and, while proudly trying to stay in step with the drum beat, waived to the mostly young crowd along the street. The hand prepared signs and happy attitude of parents and family members of 2015 and Post personnel was really contagious and uplifting. Our class even had a few cheerleaders. MaryJo Ammon deserves special

mention for her exuberance but the kiss on Steve's cheek caused him to become out of step and was distracting to many of us. The showers at Arvin were cold but welcome and the lunch assembly at Ike Hall was well done. The Supe gave some excellent remarks. I recognized him as the officer in a t-shirt that I had sat across from and spoke with casually at the ski slope. As he spoke at the final luncheon I tried to recall if I had properly restrained my comments to him earlier. All said and done, I was tired but very happy to have completed the March Back – for the first time.

Roger W. Frydrychowski
Class of 1965