

Dutch Hostler Remarks at the Dedication of the Class of 1968 Rotunda in Thomas Jefferson Hall

Judge Thomas, General & Mrs. Wojdakowski, General & Mrs. Finnegan, General & Mrs. Linnington, Honored Guests, Family, Friends . . . my Brothers of the Class of 1968.

This is a glorious day for the Class, and for the Academy - - and it has been many years in the making.

A little over 44 years ago, we passed through a sally port and into the rigors of Cadet life – and began the process of bonding into a close brotherhood.

A little over 40 years ago, we sailed our white hats high into a cloudless Summer sky and set off on 706 separate paths in life - but the bonds of brotherhood remained strong - and are still strong today.

A little over 8 years ago, a small group of classmates living in the West Point area met in Dan and Kathryn Kaufmans' quarters, just across the Plain, and decided to revitalize and refocus our Class Gift effort. Recognizing that it is easier to get where you're going once you've picked a particular destination, we set about the task of identifying a short list of gifts that we as a class might want to give – and that the Academy might be willing to accept.

Just over 5 years ago, we were able to announce the Class had decided through an open ballot that the Rotunda of the new library would be our Class Gift.

The work of the ad hoc Class Gift Selection Committee was done, but the work of delivering our Class Gift had just begun.

We formed a Class Gift Committee to take up the torch – and that small group soon realized that we needed someone to head-up and drive our fund-raising effort. We picked the right man for that task in Paul DeCoursey, who, remembering lessons learned at the Academy about delegation, promptly tapped a team of 32 “right men” to serve as company reps canvassing the class in support of our gift effort - - and they collectively have done an outstanding job.

But they weren't alone in the fund-raising effort. Various grass roots initiatives surfaced - - like Gordie Tillery and the DC area classmates who passed the hat in support of the class gift following their periodic luncheons, and Chuck Jones and the classmates who gathered and passed the hat in Colorado at a tailgate party before the Army Air Force football game, and Jim Greenberg who hosted crabfests and passed the hat in Maryland, and Nick Kurilko who canvassed his football teammates, and Joe Fowler who canvassed his baseball teammates and John Hedley, who took on the formidable task of tracking down and reaching out to classmates that had fallen out of touch, and the Actual and Virtual Marchers who, in conjunction with the annual old grad march back events, collaborated to raise more than a quarter of a million dollars over the course of 8 years . . . and many other initiatives and classmate-to-classmate encouragements.

And when the time came to focus on class recognition in the rotunda, we picked the “right man” for that task as well in Pres Miller, who put together a group that added Joe Fowler's talents to the Class Gift team as we worked through the intricacies of the class memorialization process with the Academy.

And most importantly, you, our classmates responded - - and you responded generously. We raised the necessary funds and we did the necessary work. And we did it all “in time”. And that brings us to today - - to the dedication of our Class Gift.

But just what is our Class Gift? And just who are the recipients?

Some people might be inclined to say that our Class Gift was a large amount of money that we provided to the Academy in exchange for the right to associate our name with a large round room and two long rectangular hallways. And that would be technically true - - as far as it goes. We have indeed provided a substantial amount of money - - we raised and delivered the full \$2.5M of our commitment - - on time - - and with sufficient funds to spare to cover all the ancillary expenses associated with our Class Gift. But that answer, in my view, deserves at best only partial credit - - because there is more.

Some people - - especially those who have explored the new library building and seen the Academy crest inlaid in the terrazzo marble floor of the rotunda . . . and the Class of '68 crests inlaid in the terrazzo marble floors of the adjacent main hallways . . . and the balustrades and appointments . . . and the magnificent bronze sculpture of Thomas Jefferson crafted by internationally renowned artist James Nathan Muir . . . and the bronze plaques soon to be mounted on the wall recognizing our gift and remembering our classmates who fell, in the full flower of youth, so many years ago in service to the nation . . . those people, especially, may be inclined to say that we have given our alma mater a world-class entryway to a magnificent facility. And that answer, too, would be correct - - as far as it goes. But that answer, too, deserves only partial credit - - because there is more.

In my mind, as our gift we have provided to the Corps of Cadets, to the Academy, to the Long Gray Line, and to the Nation that West Point so nobly serves, an **extraordinary portal**.

It is a **portal, of course, to the new library and learning center**. But there is more.

It is **also a portal to the past** . . . to our past, to be sure, with bronze plaques acknowledging our gift and remembering our fallen friends . . . but also a portal further into the past . . . to the very founding of our alma mater . . . for standing a silent vigil in the rotunda is a bronze sculpture, soon to be unveiled, depicting a giant in American history and in world history . . . Thomas Jefferson . . . a man of great courage, high principles and heroic stature . . . a founding father of our Nation . . . the principal author and a signer of our Declaration of Independence . . . our Nation's 3rd President . . . with the Act of Congress establishing the Academy in one hand . . . and a quill pen in the other . . . poised on the brink of bringing our alma mater into being. Our gift is most certainly a portal to the past. But there is more.

Our gift is **also a portal to the future**. For through this space will pass generations of the Long Gray Line yet unborn to acquire the knowledge necessary for them to become “leaders of character” for our Army and for the Nation . . . in fulfillment of West Point's very reason for being. And that alone fully justifies the personal financial sacrifices made by so many to deliver our gift. But there is more.

For with our Class Gift, we, the members of the Class of 1968 also give a multi-dimensional gift to ourselves . . . and to each other.

We give to ourselves and to each other **a place** . . . a physical place to mark our figurative place in the Long Gray Line . . . a place to permanently remember and publically honor our 20 classmates who gave the last full measure of devotion . . . long ago . . . in a far away land. A place to contemplate . . . a place to reflect . . . a place to remember . . . and when we are gone . . . a place to be remembered. But there is more.

For with this gift, we also give to ourselves and to each other **a reach** . . . for the Class of 1968 Rotunda will stand long after the very last of us has gone to his reward . . . and generations of young aspiring leaders yet to come will pass through this place . . . and as they pass . . . some of them just may feel the grip of **our** far off hold . . . and **if** they do, **their service** will extend **our reach**. But there is more.

For with this gift, we also give to ourselves and to each other **a validation** . . . another in a long line of validations strung through time, around the globe and across the broad spectrum of professional endeavors . . . another validation of our Class motto: No Task Too Great for '68. For our gift . . . this extraordinary portal . . . is, by any measure, truly a **great** gift . . . and delivering it, as we have done, on time and with style, was truly a **great task** . . . but **not** . . . **too** great a task . . . because . . . my classmates . . . my brothers . . . **we did this great task** . . . **together**.

So, General Finnegan, the West Point Class of 1968 is pleased and proud to tender to the Corps, the Academy, the Long Gray Line and the Nation . . . the Class of 1968 Rotunda in Thomas Jefferson Hall. We dedicate our gift **to Duty, to Honor, to Country** . . . **in the spirit of No Task Too Great** . . . **and in the name of our 20 classmates who fell in Vietnam** . . . **they mark our place in the Long Gray Line.**