

West Point Update (Jun 08)

Last Updated Saturday, 21 June 2008

The following from Larry Smith '62 is a very informative and recent update about what is going on at West Point. Larry Smith is from the Northern California West Point Society.

1. There has just been a change of the Commandant at USMA. Robert Caslan '75, the former Commandant, has been promoted to Major General and has departed USMA to take command of the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. His replacement, as of 6 May 2008, is Brigadier General Mike Linnington '80. General Linnington comes to West Point from his previous position as a Special Assistant to the Army Vice Chief of Staff in Washington, DC. BG Linnington is the 71st Commandant of Cadets at USMA.

2. This summer much has changed for cadets at West Point. The formal academic year has been reduced by two weeks commencing next August and the summer training period has been expanded to twelve weeks, further broken down into three four week sessions. Cadets are required to take a minimum of 15 days of leave during the summer but, otherwise, they may fill up the remaining time on individualized schedules. This change was made to allow more individual scheduling for cadets during the summer, recognizing that some of the cadets were being forced to repeat mundane subject matter training that they had already experienced either in actual combat or in the military before coming to West Point.

Camp Buckner training for new Yearlings has been reduced to four weeks and the "Best Summer of your life" has become much more of a military exercise with no free time for anything else. In fact, the place is now designated as "FOB Buckner". FOB in today's army speak means "Forward Operating Base". Cadets are required to have their individual weapons with them at all times and there is a constant cadet guard detail securing the FOB, just as you would find at an actual FOB. There are even IED's planted along the roadways that cadets drive over that are set off randomly giving cadets the experience of a sudden attack. There is still a lot of small unit training and exposure to various branches of service but it's not as long as in the past. Also, 180 ROTC cadets are being brought to FOB Buckner to train with the Yearlings. It's to give the ROTC cadets some valuable summer training and to give both groups (ROTC and West Point cadets) some cross cultural acceptance to each other.

With the additional time in the summer schedule and with a shortened Buckner experience Yearlings are now able to take part in military training at Army military schools such as Airborne, Air Assault, Sapper, etc. during the remainder of their summer. Remember that when Buckner took up the entire summer this was not the case.

Firsties will see the biggest change during summer training. In an effort to give them some military training closer to graduation there is, starting this summer, a four week mini-ranger type field training exercise for them. The Firsties will stay in the field that entire time, except for coming in to the post for one night to reorganize and go back out again. This is an extended field training experience to prepare them for small unit leadership. The training is set to mirror the conditions being experienced by the Army in Iraq and Afghanistan. FOB's will be set up, Arabic language actors (some tending goats) are on hand to provide "civilian" experiences, and in general the environment is set to offer a mirror into the life of units in contact in the Middle East today.

3. The Dean scratched his head trying to figure out how to teach all the same academic subject material in two less weeks and came up with a couple of answers. First, shorten Re-organization Week to three days, ending Wednesday evening. Use the Thursday and Friday of that week for academic classes. Second, eliminate some of the holiday time off during the year. Classes are now going to be in session on Columbus Day, Veterans Day, and Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday. Third, eliminate the Re-Orgy week that used to take place in January so that classes can be substituted there instead. Finally, Plebe Parent Weekend, which used to disrupt a portion of one of the Academic Weeks in October has been moved to the beginning of Spring Break in March and Plebes must stay on post over the first weekend of Spring Break, while the upper classes are permitted to leave on Saturday, to host their parents through the following Monday for the new Plebe Parent Weekend. Then Plebes will be permitted to take a shortened Spring Break. By adding a few minutes here or there to the schedule over the academic year the Dean has managed to cram all the same material into two semesters that are two weeks shorter. We knew the Dean was smart. Now, he has proven it.

4. Football. Two big changes for football this year. Recognizing that we were playing teams well beyond our level the academy bought out three teams that were already scheduled for the upcoming 2008 season and replaced them with teams against which we may be able to play competitively. Gone from this years schedule are Ohio State, Georgia Tech, and Tulsa. In their place are New Hampshire, Eastern Michigan, and Buffalo. The opening game this season is Friday 29 August 2008, against Temple University. Second, be prepared to see the Option Offense again. For the past 10 years we have been running a Pro offense called the "West Coast Offense". It's pretty obvious that this will not work with our team so the coaching staff is going back to the Option and we'll see it later this year in our next season. Cross your fingers, and wish for a little luck!

5. The Superintendent has decided that we need to capitalize on our brand name, "West Point." Most of the literature, T-shirts, and other paraphernalia from USMA will now feature the name West Point prominently on it. I think we all realize that the name "Army" or the letters "USMA" do not really tell most Americans who we are but, mention the name "West Point" and a light goes off in their heads. That's what's driving this change. "West Point" is our brand.

6. The program, begun five years ago, to offer graduating cadets either the first post of their choice, the branch of their choice, or guaranteed graduate schooling after eight years of service has been effective. In the Class of 2007 37% of the class elected to add three years of additional active duty service, for a total of eight years active, to receive one of these three choices.

7. The cadet overseas experience is expanding. You are probably aware that West Point exchanges some cadets with the Air Force and Naval Academies for a full semester during Cow year. Well, semester exchanging has expanded to a semester abroad in other countries institutions. This academic year there were 144 cadets serving a semester abroad somewhere. This is a major increase in this program (up from 4 cadets four years ago) and intended to give cadets a broader world view and appreciation for other cultures and languages.

8. It gets even better. This past Spring Break 60 cadets gave up their leave to experience a shortened experience at military academies in other countries. This is a voluntary program and, oversubscribed. And finally, 500 cadets have some sort of travel abroad experience during the summer training periods. Again, the army wants our future officers to understand other cultures.

9. Some other tidbits of cadet life.

a. The Indoor Obstacle Course (IOCT)(still run in the old Hays Gym part of the new Arvin Gym) is not an army wide test. But, cadets are expected to pass this test. If a cadet fails, no privileges.

b. To give cadets live fire weapons training the rifle ranges on post are open now on Fridays. Cadets can draw weapons and ammunition (M-16, M-4 carbine, pistols) and go out to the range and practice shooting.

c. USMA offered Firsties a two weekend course in Combat Life Saving this semester. 200 Firsties gave up these two weekends to take the course. In fact, this course was oversubscribed and sign-ups had to be cut off after 200 cadets were enrolled.

d. Here and interesting one. Demerits are back! I wonder if you knew they were even gone? Anyway, for the past few years Article 10's were the punishment of choice for cadets and demerits had been eliminated. This seemed to be too difficult a punishment to administer and too severe for very minor things. Now, cadets and Tac's can again issue demerits for minor infractions. But, as many of us know, get too many demerits and it no longer is minor.

e. Every cadet will now eat Breakfast with his cadet company and this includes the Corps Squad athletes. Part of a desire to integrate more closely into the Corps these athletes who, in the past, were effectively isolated on Corps Squad tables elsewhere in the Mess Hall.

f. Every Monday, at Lunch formation, a mini-parade takes place on the Plain. Cadets were just not marching in enough

parades to maintain march discipline and look good. The Corps forms up for lunch on Monday, marches onto the Plain from two directions (1st and 2nd regiments in one group and 3rd and 4th regiments in the other) and passes in review. And this includes all the Corps Squad athletes. It's an attempt to put a little march discipline back into the cadets with every cadet walking in at least one parade a week.

g. Speaking of the Mess Hall there is another major change. When food comes to the table it is passed first to the Plebes who take their food and pass it to the upper classes, from junior to more senior. Firsties receive their food last. Take care of your soldiers first is what is taught to officers at West Point and it now starts in the Mess Hall with the Firsties eating last, similar to the philosophy of officers in the Army eating after their men are served.

h. That old staple of Plebe year, Survival Swimming, has been moved to Cow year.

i. SAMI's (Saturday AM Inspections of the cadet rooms) have been moved to Wednesday and are now called WAMI's (pronounced a Wammy). Why? Because too many athletes were getting out of Saturday room inspections due to athletic contests. Now the room inspections involve all cadets. And, if they fail (as one did recently) they can repeat the process on Thursday (generating a TAMI). You'll have to figure out the pronunciation of this one. I guess if this keeps going until Monday we would have a MAMI. Go figure.

j. Honor. Cadets now lock their room doors at 2330 hours. This is required. They can lock their doors and sign in electronically prior to 2330 and go to sleep, but if they don't do this the Cadet in Charge of Quarters (CCQ) has to go around at 2330 and check all company rooms that have not already been logged into the system as being locked, to insure that they are locked. The CCQ will check to see that the doors are locked but will not seek to enter the cadet room.

k. The scramble is back. For the past four years cadets have been in the same cadet company for their entire four year experience at USMA. The next Academic Year (starting with Re-Orgy week in August) will see the new Cow class scrambled and put into a different cadet company for the last two years of their cadet life.

10. Facilities.

a. The new library, Jefferson Hall, is almost completed. It will be open for the next academic year starting in August.

b. The move of the Prep School to West Point is still planned for 2011 but there is some discussion going on at the moment about the extent of facilities that need to be built to accommodate them. As you know, the last Base Realignment and Closing Round authorized by Congress required the closing of Fort Monmouth by 2011 (that's where the Prep School is currently located) and the re-location of the Prep School to USMA at the same time. No physical construction has started so decisions will have to be made soon or there is going to be somewhat of a problem in meeting the 2011 deadline.

c. The old Boodlers, building 720, was demolished two years ago. It's an empty lot at the moment. Current thought is that a new set of cadet barracks will be built there starting in 2010. The existing cadet barracks are beginning to show their age and all need to be renovated. Once the new barracks are built the plan is to take one set of older barracks off line at a time and renovate them, rotating through the entire group of cadet barracks buildings. One wild card in all this is the recent revelation at Fort Bragg where soldiers of the 82nd Airborne returning from overseas experienced less than satisfactory conditions in some of the barracks that they were sent to use. As a result of this well noticed problem the Army conducted an Army wide inventory of barracks to determine if other posts have sub-standard barracks buildings. Well, the list of posts being given some supplemental barracks upgrade money was just announced this past week and West Point was one of those posts set to receive some money for this purpose. If that translates into additional dollars for cadet barracks maintenance or construction remains yet to be seen. Remember, there are other army units on post with barracks as well.

d. Housing. The old Gray Ghost housing units are set to be demolished this year. In their place new quarters will be constructed. The only problem with this is that the new quarters will have 100 fewer sets of quarters than before. Because of this the old Gray Ghost quarters are being emptied as personnel leave and there will be no housing draw for personnel this summer. Post housing facilities are as tight as can be for incoming personnel. At least the local civilian housing market has some depressed housing prices (compared to several years ago) so that option is more available now than in the past.

That's the word from West Point for the moment.