

Reunion Reminiscing and Echos...

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(The following was submitted by Mike Lee '83 who attended his 25th Reunion during the third weekend of September...with all apologies to LTG(R) Lennox, his old English P!)

The Class of 83 celebrated it's 25th this past weekend. Some thoughts and memories...

- Woops has perfected it's own version of the Fountain of Youth. For a little over three days, we were all 22 again. In spirit, if not in body.
- Although there have been many changes (physical as well as fundamental), the place really is timeless. But ultimately, it's not about the place - how it's changed or remained the same. It's about the core of our shared experiences. And there are far more things that bind us than separate us.
- The memorial service was overwhelmingly sad, but also comforting. And I can't help but think the list of names will start growing rapidly soon.
- There are far too many fresh graves in the cemetery.
- The beauty of the place remains stunning. And four near-perfect early fall days only complemented its majesty.
- The IOCT was set up in the recently renovated gym and a bunch of us (with our spouses) stopped by to take a look. Bad mistake. 20 more years of therapy.
- There is something incredibly ironic, if not a bit sad (in a "Death of a Salesman" sort of way) in seeing each one of us fail to make it onto the ledge and then have a 5' 0" female cadet scamper up like it was nothing.
- We had a couple of DPE P's who were kind enough to give Billy K. a "high zero" on his leap over the vault.
- The Comm/ Dean's briefing was both enlightening & comforting. Cadets have so much more opportunities these days. And the military training is ratcheting up. I can't help but wonder if I would have been accepted these days - much less survive 4 years and graduate.
- The dinner Friday night was a blur, but followed a general pattern: see someone you have not seen in years; handshakes & hugs; reminisce; exchange contact info; move on after far too short of a time.
- Our women classmates shared center stage for a photo and I couldn't help but think about what they had to endure to get to that spot. I'm in awe.
- The natural instinctive response of myself and my classmates as we were told to "form up behind section G" for Saturday's review - until we all collectively realized that "forming up" was at best an optimistic notion. More appropriate would have been "Gaggle formation, move!"
- As we waited for the review to start, the lone irreverent voice heard above the hum of our class: "If you're taller than the man in front of you, move-up!"
- The actual double-regimental review was... comforting & familiar. No real noticeable differences (except for the smaller size of the Corps).
- The President of El Salvador, Bobby Knight, and the Class of 83: sharing the plain on the same day.
- Our Rifle Drill Team performed before the review. I'm not a big fan. I think it takes away from what follows.
- We had our own personal fly-by at the start of "Pass-in-Review". A perfect formation of 4 geese flew over our class at low altitude just as the band started playing.

- Terrible, awful, horrendously bad chow for lunch in the Mess Hall. I hope it's not indicative of what cadets are having to endure now.
- Highland Falls eating establishments delivering food to the cadet area? Say it ain't so, Joe. One of the premier bonding activities between classes was "You fly, I buy." This great tradition has now gone the way of gray sweaters, star-days, Saturday classes, and boodlers.
- The wreath I made of old chipwich wrappers and rocky-road ice cream lids was laid at the base of what used to be Boodlers. Of all the changes, this was by far the hardest to bear.
- The new library is magnificent. But a coffee shop? Go figure.
- Myself and my two roommates from last semester Firstie year (along with our spouses) visiting our old room. The CQ was a bit overwhelmed and not sure what to do, but had the common sense to let us old farts have our moment.
- The room itself was a pig sty. Now, don't get me wrong. I was never the Strac-est of cadets, and me and my roommates were always getting written up for some room infraction. But even at 2200 on a weekend, our room never looked that bad - much less on a Football Saturday. Even I was shocked.
- Futon's in Firstie rooms? Refrigerators?
- I was standing in line waiting to get into Michie stadium (is it really necessary to wand grads?), and asked the Yearling behind me (who was all but making out with his date) if the President of El Salvador had granted amnesty. He looked at me as if I had grown a third eye. When I explained the tradition, he told me "that must have been how it was back then, but things have changed a lot over the years." It was all I could do to hold myself back and not rip into the BJ yearling.
- Feeling totally and completely smug as the President of El Salvador announced amnesty during the football game.
- The football game itself was pitiful. But no one really cared. We were all too busy continuing our catching up.
- I spent a good part of the third quarter chatting with COL Billy Don Farris, a classmate and company mate (Go Bandits!). For those of you who may not be aware, Billy Don was severely wounded in Iraq while Commanding a Brigade from the 82nd. He spent 4 months in the hospital and then returned to his command in Iraq to finish his tour. My heart overflows with love for this man and the many like him who stand in harm's way.
- A small group of my company mates and room mates went to dinner Saturday night. It was one of the most enjoyable moments in my life. The sheer joy of the evening was indescribable.
- Parting was achingly painful. But as my wife wiped a few tears from my face, I realized I had been blessed. I may not be particularly special, but I knew & served with very special men.

Proud to Be.

-Mike