

## The Class of 1960's Historic Room in Nininger Hall

### The Old 1<sup>st</sup> Division of Barracks in Central Area

The 60's Era room that our class decorated and dedicated to three of our classmates who fell in the Vietnam War is no more. It was dedicated at our 25th Reunion in 1985 in honor of Dick Boyd, Chuck Titus and Lyell King who represented all of our classmates who died in that war. It was furnished with care with photos and artifacts donated by members of their families and other classmates who had items saved from our days as cadets. Many of us visited the room over the years to reflect and to remember. It was a real treasure to us all.

Sadly, it has been removed to make way for additional office space for the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic in Nininger Hall. We, as a class, were not notified that the change was about to start nor offered a chance to reclaim the room contents before work started. One of our classmates took family members to see the room in the summer of 2019 and discovered that it was gone. This is the sad story:

1. At some time in the past (read that before the current incumbents at Simon Center or the Supe's chair), a decision was made to take down the three historic rooms and make way for additional office space for the growth of the Simon Center staff. My guess is that it was probably 5 or 6 years ago.
2. No one contacted us to talk about the start date of the work or the disposition of the artifacts in the rooms. I have no idea why.
3. At some point before the work began, all the uniforms and artifacts in the room were removed, inventoried, boxed, and stored in a room in the sinks of the 1st division. I am not sure if the same procedure was used to empty the other two historic rooms on that third-floor hallway; but many of the artifacts in those other two rooms apparently came from the museum, and the museum may have reclaimed them.

4. In June of 2019, Bob Totten took family members on one of the “Grad Tours” offered by the West Point AOG. When he asked to visit the 60’s era room in Nininger Hall, the guide told him the historic rooms had been converted to office space and were no longer open to the public. Bob alerted me to the issue shortly after he learned about it. I made an inquiry to the Superintendent’s office, and after a couple of months received the attached letter of apology from LTG Williams in early October. As you will see in the letter, he told me to expect a call from COL Virgil of the Simon Center to discuss the artifacts and their disposition after they were damaged by a leaky steam pipe in the basement of Nininger Hall.

5. When I contacted COL Virgil, I learned that the leaky pipe had ruined much of the boxed material and led to a mold presence that had to be addressed by people in hazmat suits. Much of the clothing was destroyed after removal in hazmat bags. COL Virgil was the Simon Center leader at that time; and he saw this happen and subsequently told me about it. What could be salvaged was placed in new boxes and they remain in the basement of 1st Division. I had been initially told that everything was trashed, but subsequent calls with COL Virgil indicated that some things were saved and are still there.

6. In January, 2020, John Denton made a trip to WP to speak with the reunion coordinator and to attend the ring melt. I asked him to stop by the Simon Center and look at what remained and he did so. COL Virgil was very helpful in facilitating John's visit and making the salvaged artifacts readily accessible. John took pictures of everything, and the pictures are attached to this memo. I see typewriters in the pictures, but little else of obvious value other than sentimental.

7. COL Virgil and I had talked about the plaque in the hall outside the room and I told him we definitely wanted to recover it. John's pictures made it obvious that Virgil and I were talking about two different things. I was talking about the shadow box with the pictures of our three classmates in it. Virgil was talking about a bronze plaque that was installed at some point where our original plaque had been. You will see it in the pictures.

8. I asked COL Virgil to see if anyone in the Simon Center might know what happened to our original plaque. He promised to query the folks who had been in the Center for a number of years. Later, he called to tell me he had recovered the original plaque, but sent me a picture that shows what was inside the shadow box, but no trace of the glassed box itself. That picture is included with the ones that John Denton took. I asked him to check further and he promised to do so. I also asked him if he would facilitate the movement of the boxed artifacts to the Thayer Hotel before our reunion in June of last year so that original donors might recover any of the things they donated. He agreed to help do that. The cancelled reunion delayed that operation.

9. As our rescheduled reunion this year morphed into a reunion via Zoom, I checked again with COL Virgil and found that the artifacts are still there in the Simon Center and that we may arrange to recover them whenever we choose to do so.

So, that is where we stand at this moment. It is regrettable that the USMA authorities did not consult me or anyone else in the class before removing the items and "Re-purposing the room". It is equally regrettable that they allowed all the things to be stored in an unsafe place with the result that some of it was ruined and had to be thrown away. Moving forward, we need to recover whatever remains of worth from the donated goods and offer the donors the opportunity to get the items back if they so desire. COL Virgil is not to blame and is still sincerely apologetic. He has promised to help when we are ready to recover the artifacts.

The Superintendent's letter to me from 30 September 2020 is attached in this file as are the pictures taken by John Denton of the salvaged artifacts.

Charles P. Otstott  
President, Class of 1960  
8 June 2021