

THE ROMAN SMITH SOCIETY OF WEST POINT

By Henry Kelley of Massachusetts



Inaugural Dinner, Spring 1965. L-R: Roger Griffin '65, Bruce Andrise '66, John Gonzalez '68, Randy Guenther '65, CW4 Roman A. Smith, Larry Wiest '65, Mike Lapolla '65, William Nash '68, and John Redmond '66. Photo by Henry Kelley '65.



Gabriel "Skip" Dziadik of Peekskill, NY – and 1924 Model T Ford.

The Society originated the second semester of our senior year (Company I-1, Class of 1965), born of the fertile imagination of Larry Wiest (of Army). It was the product of boredom and a seemingly pointless discussion of who was really running things at the academy.

The Superintendent and Commandant operated in a rarefied atmosphere and didn't really seem to have much impact on the day to day routine of cadet life. The tactical department often worked at cross-purposes, was the object of fear and loathing, and was widely suspected of demonic possession.

But Larry pointed out that nearly every official document that affected cadet life bore the signature of ... CW4 Roman A. Smith. Our branch selections, our first duty assignments, and, significantly, all punishment tours all bore the signature block of Roman A. Smith. Clearly this guy had some juice. If you wanted to get anything done or authorized, Roman Smith was the go-to guy, someone who really knew the way things worked in the Army. In other words, someone worth listening to.

By this time in our cadet careers, all of us had some experience with punishment tours or confinements (or both) sent down under the signature of Roman A. Smith, so a natural constituency was already formed, just waiting to be named. And so it came to be. I don't know exactly who all made up the membership. Some of us proudly identified ourselves in the yearbook, listing the society as one

of our cadet activities. I lack the ambition to wade through the yearbook and cull all the names of those listing the society. But it's safe to say that anyone who came under the baleful glance of the tactical department was a member in heart, if not in deed. Needless to say there was no official list published under the signature of ... Roman A. Smith.

Also about this time, for some inexplicable reason, Firsties were granted the privilege of inviting guests to dine in the mess hall at the evening meal.

And so it was that CW4 Roman A. Smith graced our table (see photo above) as our guest at the inauguration of the society that bore his name. As I recall we spent a pleasant time listening as he talked about his military career and his time at West Point.

Our second guest was Mike Lapolla's uncle Gabriel "Skip" Dziadik of nearby Peekskill. He arrived driving his ancient automobile (1924 Ford Model T) and wearing his trademark Amish hat. We got special permission for him to park on the road outside Washington Hall. His arrival attracted attention. After the meal he gave some of us a ride in the car. It actually worked.

There may have been other guests, but I don't recall any that matched the degree of celebrity of our first two.

Our time at West Point was growing short; all of a sudden June Week was upon us, and it was time for the Society members to go our separate ways, sent off with official orders signed by ... Roman A. Smith.

You may have noticed in the photo of the Roman Smith Society that the fourth classmen were "fallen out." It was a policy of the Society to grant fallouts at most every meal. This did not go down well in certain quarters. But it was felt that mealtime should be devoted to eating food and not for the petty harassment of future officers. At our 50th I was pleased to see that the Academy has come around to this view. The Roman Smith Society was ahead of its time.

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Gabriel "Skip" Dziadik of Peekskill, NY – and 1924 Model T Ford.

Ah, where to start.

The origin of the Roman Smith Society is shrouded in the mist of time (how's that for an opening line?)

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Looking at the picture, I can confirm that the gent in the green suit sitting next to Larry (Wiest of Army) is in fact Roman Smith. Also of note, the shadowy figure sitting next to you is the infamous John Redmond who was a key player in the plot to get my brother George into the graduation parade. John, too, was a member of the Roman Smith Society. He came to the attention of the tactical department when (among other sins) he was accused by a classmate on a semiannual cadet evaluation form of being a communist because of his lax enforcement of the Fourth Class System. (I believe the term for this was poop sheeting in the curious cadet usage of the time.) At the end of the table the two freshmen are, I believe, Gonzales and Nash.

Hidden behind Gonzales I believe is Bruce Andrise, roommate of John Redmond and on that account a target of the Wrath of Fletcher. Next to him looks to be Roger Griffin. And at the head of the table sits brooding, Randy in his persona of Ragnar Ironpants, Viking scourge of the North. Randy at times exhibited multiple personalities, fortunately none of them violent.

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I took the picture. And that is my recollection of the Roman Smith Society. Hope it helps.