

August 15, 2014

CHAPTER 6  
CONCLUSION

Fifty years after our graduation from West Point, we take great pride in the lives we have led, goals we have accomplished, and ideals we have nourished and maintained. As soldiers we faced many complex challenges around the world and served in difficult times (Vietnam, Cold War, post-Cold War, Gulf wars). Those of us who remained in the service had a significant role in transforming the U.S. Army from a broken, hollow force in the post-Vietnam era to the finest army in the world by the late 1980s. We also played a significant role in transforming the Army after the Cold War into a much leaner and more agile force and in leading the Army through an era of remarkable change in technology and international politics. And at West Point we contributed to improving the curriculum and faculty, enhancing cadets' development, and reshaping the "footprint" of the facilities and buildings. Those of us who left the service, whether after four years in uniform or many more, contributed to the nation in a similarly impressive manner. As civilians we excelled in business, finance, law, science, medicine, and numerous other fields, and we demonstrated a capacity and capability to get the tough job done right and exhibited as much patriotism and "Strength and Drive" as we did in the military. Whether in uniform or not, we served our communities and our nation, and we never lost sight of the meaning of our motto "Duty, Honor, Country."

As we sought to make a difference, we remained a close and active class. A Vietnam POW for 62 months, Bob Jones had a special appreciation for our class. In March 2013 he wrote: "I will forever be thankful for the thoughts, prayers, and support I received during my time in prison and after repatriation, especially from our class. Many times during the darkest days of captivity I thought about West Point, the many graduates who had and still served with honor and courage, and especially the unity and brotherhood of the class of 1965. This gave me the strength and fortitude to endure and believe that someday I would come home. It's very fitting that our class motto is 'Strength and Drive'. Now it's hard for me to believe that 40 years has gone by since that wonderful day. I'm sure all of us are amazed at how fast the years seem to come and go. One thing for sure though, we are and will always be united and bound together as a 'Band of Brothers'. Thank you all for giving me the inner strength, perseverance, and conviction to never give up and to once again live in the best country on earth."<sup>1</sup>

We enjoyed being with our classmates not only at our reunions but also at our formal and informal get-togethers and special moments such as when Bob returned to the United States. We laughed, we partied, we played golf together, we told and retold the same stories again and again, and we remembered our friends no longer with us. We will never forget their achievements and sacrifices and always will have time to reminisce about the good times we had with them. Harry Dermody, the "old man," once said, "Our Class is unique." After telling a funny story about two classmates who had "streaked" naked across the Plain as cadets, he said, "Throughout the years the Class has never been boring. Great people. I can't think of another group that I would want to serve with or have as friends. They have always been there and have never refused when asked."<sup>2</sup>

As we lived our lives, our paths often crossed those of other classmates who received or gave encouragement and assistance. Dave Bodde wrote: "I recall especially my first semester in Nuclear Engineering [at Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. By October of that year, things were not going at all well. Amazingly, I had won a highly prized fellowship from the Atomic Energy Commission, but it required maintaining an adequate grade point average--and by mid-semester, I doubt that my combined test scores had reached double digits. I recall a worried conversation with Ken Yoshitani, who said that this happens to everybody who comes back to school after 5 years 'in the trenches.' Ken said to just keep working at it, that the Nuclear Engineering Department would be merciful, and that it would all come together in the second semester. I took that excellent advice, and Ken was right. I gained much peace of mind from that wise counsel, and I recall and appreciate it to this day."<sup>3</sup>

Our lives were enriched and our character strengthened by wonderful women who shared their lives, love, joy, and favors with us. They were our wives, the mother of our children, and our best friends. Bob Anderson spoke for many of us when he talked about Barbara, his wife of 46 years. "I met my sweetheart at Grant Hall 51 years ago on a blind date. What a blessing."<sup>4</sup> Our wives also helped us in our careers, whether civilian or military. Joe DeFrancisco, who obviously had his wife Lynne in mind, described the "critical role" of "Army spouses." He wrote: "Their contributions have always been critical but in the era of the all-volunteer force they are even more important. Using their own leadership skills, personality and hard work they get important things done without the benefits of rank or command authority. They provide oversight or direct leadership to important support organizations like the

Red Cross, Commissary Board, Hospital Advisory Board, Thrift Shop, Family Support Groups and many others. They also provide the social fabric that strengthens the ties between both individuals and units."<sup>5</sup>

Many of our wives had distinguished careers. Jean Bennett, the wife of Larry Bennett, had a career of over 30 years of government service and was selected for the Senior Intelligence Executive Service and for the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame. Her most significant contributions pertained to the enhancement of the Army's military intelligence capabilities after September 11, 2001. Her citation for the MI Hall of Fame reads: "Ms. Bennett facilitated the establishment of the Army Senior Intelligence Officer, the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-2, as the integrator for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) within the Army. She assisted the G-2's role as the ISR Integrator by effectively coordinating resource activities totaling \$4 billion annually and over 50,000 personnel in intelligence career fields or units. The result is that a core team is engaged at all echelons of the Army, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Intelligence community to communicate and further develop ISR capabilities for the Army's and the Nation's future. Ms. Bennett's career of over 30 years of loyal government service led to the significant enhancement of the Army's Intelligence capabilities and contributed immensely to the Intelligence Community's success."<sup>6</sup>

We took great pride in our families. Jim Stephenson wrote: "We have three children grown and launched (a lawyer married to a lawyer, a doctor married to a doctor and a real estate professional married to an investment banker), but just one grandchild as our children did not arrive until we were in our late thirties. We are hoping for more grandchildren."<sup>7</sup> Barrie Zais wrote: "Our two sons attended the USMA Prep School and graduated from West Point in the Class of 1997. Both commanded companies in the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq and are currently lieutenant colonels stationed in Washington, DC. Mark just earned his Ph.D. while Matthew taught in the Department of Social Sciences and should finish his Ph.D. in a few months."<sup>8</sup> In Denny Coll's history of our Class, he listed 52 of our "offspring" who had enrolled at the Military Academy and another six who had enrolled at the Air Force or Naval academies.<sup>9</sup>

We were especially pleased when we could participate in special moments in our children's lives. Fred Laughlin sacrificed his mustache, and some of his dignity, to take part in the cadet Recognition Ceremony when his son Ryan was a plebe in the Class of 1995. Assisted by a yearling in F-2, his son's company, and wearing items of clothing from six cadets, he infiltrated into the ranks of F-2 without a hat and with his

hair the color of "club soda with a splash of grenadine." Fred remembered how to stand at attention and do "Dress right, dress," and accompanied the F-2 yearlings when they passed down the line of plebes and shook their hands. As expected, his son's "jaw dropped" when he saw his father. Fred wrote: "With that expression he gave a whole new meaning to the word *recognition*." Ryan's Tactical Officer later presented Fred with a Form 2-1 for "Failure to comply w/written, oral, regulations, or instructions w/minor effect (i.e., infiltrated Company F-2 ranks during Recognition Ceremony." Fred thanked the Tactical Officer for his "balance of duty and sensitivity--to say nothing of his good humor." Fred wrote: "He not only allowed me my moment; he gave me comfort that the Corps, tactical officers included, was still ready and worthy of our salute--bareheaded though we may be."<sup>10</sup>

The passing of the years slowed but did not stop us. In 2001 Jim McEliece scaled Mount of the Holy Cross, one of 55 14,000 feet mountains in Colorado.<sup>11</sup> And in 2002 Ralph Asplund ran his 19th Boston Marathon in 3:56.<sup>12</sup> Ken Slutzky wrote: "On my 62nd birthday, I did 22 pull-ups; that's the number required to get a maximum score on the cadet physical fitness test."<sup>13</sup> Beginning as a cadet, Chris Needels remained a skydiver his whole life and in 2014 was inducted into the Skydiving Hall of Fame.<sup>14</sup> Dick Williams started with the West Point skydiving team and won second in the National Collegiate Championships in 1964 and 1965. In the Army he continued competing and won the 1972 Far Western Championship, 1974 California State Championship, and 1978 Korean National Championship. Because of the demands of his job, however, he stopped skydiving in the early 1980s and did not return for 27 years. In 2009 he returned to skydiving and later wrote: "I have made 401 jumps since the resurrection jump in 2009 and now have a total of 2070 jumps. I competed in the 2013 U.S. Nationals and plan to enter again this year. It's still a challenge and great fun."<sup>15</sup>

We enjoyed life and never stopped traveling. After Ron and Janice Walter finally sold their business and retired, they traveled to Assisi, Italy, and later to Turkey and the Aegean Islands. Then in 2010 they went to the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany and took a cruise on the Danube, followed by visits to Salzburg, Austria; Budapest, Hungary; and Bratislava, Slovakia. Between trips to Europe they found time to visit family in Arizona and North Carolina.<sup>16</sup> In 2012 Tony Gamboa and his wife took a trip to Peru and visited several cities and ancient Inca sites. Tony reported visiting one particularly interesting Inca site: "Our hike started at Kilometer 104 on the railroad between Ollantaytambo and Aguas Calientes (the town on the Urubamba River below Machu Picchu). We got off the train

and went straight up for three hours and then leveled off a bit, but still with many ups and downs. Most challenging were the narrow, uneven Inca steps along the various Inca agricultural terraces that we had to climb...."<sup>17</sup>

As the years accumulated, we created special challenges for ourselves. Steve Sperry planned a 15,000 mile trek in July 2012 on a motorcycle from his home in Springfield, Virginia, to Prudhoe Bay and back by a different route. Unfortunately for him, considerable mechanical and health problems forced him to abort his trip after about 6,000 miles. The adventure lasted just short of a month but, instead of quenching his spirit and desire for adventure, increased it. He told one classmate, "Whenever I undertake a personal challenge I recite William Ernest Henley's 'Invictus' to myself. The final two lines are what I live by and are what drive me to push onward when I run into adversity...." Those lines are: "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."<sup>18</sup>

As part of his "Bucket List," Gordy Larson sought to play a golf course in each of the 50 states. Beginning in the fall and winter of 2007-2008, he played 60 rounds of golf in 17 different states across the West, Midwest and South. In September 2008 he played 10 different courses in six states in New England. In 2010 he spent five months playing in 15 different states and drove 17,000 miles across the Northwest and Alaska to continue his quest. This trip included playing golf at midnight of the summer solstice on North Star Golf Course, the northern-most golf course in the United States. With only Hawaii missing from his list of states, Gordy traveled to Hawaii in November 2013 not only to play golf but also to watch Army play Hawaii.<sup>19</sup> Three rounds on Kauai completed his goal of playing in all 50 states.<sup>20</sup>

And we enjoyed some quests simply because of the challenge. Jon Thompson became involved in a ten-year effort to locate the remains of Amelia Earhart and her airplane. He filled his two-story garage with artifacts dealing with Amelia Earhart and laid the groundwork for a huge exhibit in Memphis if her plane was found. He said: "I want to open that exhibition right here in Memphis, Tennessee, at our new river front. We expect to find her leather jacket. We know what jewelry she was wearing." He added, "We like to say that it's the greatest mystery of the last century, the greatest unsolved mystery of the last century."<sup>21</sup>

Our retirement did not signal the end of our serving our communities and nation. After retiring, Ed Knauf continued serving the nation by helping veterans suffering from multiple myeloma, a cancer caused by an overproduction of certain proteins from white blood cells. The cancer is characterized by

plasma cell tumors in bones in multiple parts of the body. Veterans who develop multiple myeloma and were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during their military service do not have to prove a connection between their disease and military service. Ed raised the funds necessary to launch a research program in the Veterans Administration to provide high-level care to veterans suffering from multiple myeloma and to find solutions to improve significantly the quality of life for the VA multiple myeloma group. Former Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson said, "He answered the call for help when help was needed, and the results will materially benefit our aging veterans for years to come."<sup>22</sup>

Many of us continued to serve veterans. Bob Frey was justifiably proud of his involvement in two organizations that provide Montana fly-fishing events for disabled veterans. In 2007 he and several Vietnam-era veterans founded "Warriors and Quiet Waters, Inc." in Bozeman. That organization offered six-day events annually for theater-injured veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Concerned about being able to sustain that program, he began organizing events for "Project Healing Waters, Inc.," a much larger, well-established national organization that had over 100 ongoing programs throughout the country co-located with VA and military medical facilities. He organized about five events annually for Project Healing Waters, each for five or six-days with four participants per event. The non-competitive events included fishing on the Bighorn River in eastern Montana and horseback back-country fishing trips to Yellowstone Park. Bob wrote: "The participants are extremely appreciative of these events, it is a tremendous boost to their rehabilitation to discover a new lifetime skill they can accomplish, and many go on to become expert anglers despite their disabilities. Frankly, I, and the rest of the volunteers, get as much out of it as the participants."<sup>23</sup>

We also continued to serve those on active duty. Mary Kay Salomone contributed to our troops overseas by forming "Operation Support our Troops." With her husband John having served in Vietnam and two of her four sons having served as Army officers in Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, etc., she was accustomed to sending care packages to her loved ones. After recognizing that the need for personal items of American soldiers serving overseas far exceeded her ability to meet that need, she obtained the Pentagon's approval in February 2002 for a much larger effort. When she first formed Operation Support our Troops, strict rules established by the Pentagon constrained her efforts and encouraged her to focus on West Point graduates and parents of West Point graduates, but her operation quickly expanded exponentially to providing care packages for all our

troops serving overseas. Over the next nine years she and Operation Support our Troops shipped some two million pounds of goods. In 2005 she added "Wheels for Warriors" to Operation Support Our Troops and provided 21 vans to wounded warriors requiring special adaptive vans to meet their transportation needs.<sup>24</sup>

In October 2011, after Operation Support our Troops ran short of funds to cover the cost of shipping some 155 boxes to troops in Afghanistan, the Class's leaders contributed \$1,000 from the Class's admin fund, and members of the Class contributed another \$5,500. In a letter to the Class, Mary Kay wrote: "Your generosity, both collectively as well as individually, not only covered the postage costs, but the extra funds were deposited into the Wheels for Warriors account to be used toward the purchase of our 26th adaptive vehicle for a severely injured troop. I smiled when I added up the donations from the class and the total came to just a few dollars above \$6500. Gotta love the numbers '65'!"<sup>25</sup> As this is being written, she remains the President of the Board of Directors of Operation Support our Troops, and the slogan of the organization remains, "We will be here as long as they are there."

Despite the hurly-burly frustrations of daily life, we remained committed to high ideals. Sonny Arkangel carried the Olympic Torch through the historic district of old San Antonio for the 2002 Winter Olympic Games.<sup>26</sup> Those behind the Olympics chose the theme of "Inspire" and sought nominations of outstanding people who inspired others. Sonny was one of some 12,000 torch bearers who carried the Olympic flame across a 13,500 mile route.<sup>27</sup> Nate Kantor served as a Director on the Board of the USO in New York City, and he and his wife, Etta, built a "green" home in New Canaan, Connecticut. Their home had solar panels for electricity, a solar thermal system to back up the heating system, a compost toilet, and a system for collecting rain and storing it in an underground cistern. With these and other features, their home was ranked third in a state-wide competition to be the most energy-efficient home in Connecticut.

Most especially, we enjoyed having great fun with great people. In the latter part of the 80's Jon Plaas worked for Marion Laboratories and was charged with setting up a tax code section 936 manufacturing company in Puerto Rico. Section 936 exempts U.S. corporations from paying federal income tax on profits generated by a qualified Puerto Rican subsidiary. Jon wrote: "The Puerto Rican Business Development Authority at that time sponsored the final Senior Professional Golfers' Association/Ladies Professional Golf Association Tournament of the year--a 12 team 2 person best ball. As President of the

Puerto Rican subsidiary, I was invited to play, and did so for several years. This got me involved with the PGA, and when they launched a Senior Tour event here in Kansas City, I was asked to get involved selling sponsorships and ticket packages, which I did. Selling my quota also got me a play spot in the Pro-Am, which I greatly enjoyed (and the opportunity to play with Lee Trevino in his final full year on the senior tour). The underwriting charity was a children's center (part of a local hospital) that still exists and I continue to support that hospital foundation. Great fun! Playing with Chi Chi [Rodriguez] on his home course in Puerto Rico was amazing!"<sup>28</sup>

None of us went quietly into retirement. Steve Darrah wrote: "When I retired 11 years ago, I decided to take care of a Bucket List item and bought a new 2001 Ferrari 550 Maranello. Shortly afterwards, I wanted to drive the car on a race track to see what the car could really do performance wise. Living fairly close to Virginia International Raceway, I signed up with my son for a two-day track event sponsored by the Ferrari Club of America.... [W]hen we were done, I realized I had no idea how to drive a high performance car at speed on a race track. Thanks to a Pro racer who was a friend of mine, I signed up for Bertil Roos' Five Day Race School. The School's cars are single seat, F-2000 Indy style race cars, open wheel, open cockpit. I got hooked. I entered Roos' F-2000 Race Series the next year, which is a very competitive wheel-to-wheel race series using the Roos cars. I have been competing in this Series for eight years now. I am the oldest driver in the Series, 'affectionately' known as Big Daddy, and although I haven't won a race as yet, I have been able to finish in the Top Ten final point standings for five years." He concluded, "Good fun with some great people."<sup>29</sup>

As we approach our 50th reunion and reflect on our lives, we remember having "good fun with great people" but we take special pride in knowing that we made a difference, that we were leaders of character. Bernie Kistler was one of our classmates who died in Vietnam and who believed he, and we, could "make a difference." Bernie's obituary stated: "Bernie was truly a romantic. He believed to the depth of his soul that he could make the difference--right the world's wrongs, uplift the downtrodden and make straight the crooked paths of those he touched. We who were close to him recall vividly the numerous 'philosophy sessions'--many all-nighters--where he would lead us in deep discussions of who we were and why we were. Bernie made no apology for life as it was and regretted nothing about the full life he had led."<sup>30</sup> Like Bernie, we make no apologies for having high ideals and high standards and take great pride in



the lives we and our classmates have lived. We not only mouthed the words "Duty, Honor, Country," we lived them.

To paraphrase what Douglas MacArthur said in his famous speech in the Mess Hall in May 1962: "The shadows are lengthening for us. The twilight is here." In the twilight of our lives, we are grateful for many things, including our being "sons of the greatest generation." Our parents raised us, shaped us, and sent us off in a quest to be "the best that we could be." We also are grateful to be members of the Class of 1965. Since our first day in cadet gray, we have experienced the richness of life with our classmates. We faced the challenge of West Point, experienced the Vietnam War at different times and places, and served together in a variety of assignments around the world. As we went our separate ways in our military and civilian careers, we shared a pride in our classmates' service and accomplishments and treasured their counsel, encouragement, and friendship. We are not brothers by birth but we are brothers in terms of our life's experiences and in our shared service and sacrifice.

As General Wheeler advised us at our graduation ceremony, we remained "unawed by problems" and "receptive to progress." Above all, the "fire" of "duty, honor, country" has never died on our lips or in our hearts.

May that fire always burn brightly in The Long Gray Line.  
Strength and Drive!

- 
1. Rick Bunn, E-mail (Bob Jones), 16 March 2013.
  2. Harry Dermody, Class History Form, p. 3.
  3. Dave Bodde, Class History Form, p. 6.
  4. Rick Bunn, E-mail, 1 October 2012.
  
  5. Joe DeFrancisco, E-mail, 3 November 2011.
  6. [https://www.ikn.army.mil/apps/IKNWMS/IKN\\_Websites/USAICoE/MI%20Corps%20Hall%20of%20Fame/Bennett,%20Jean.htm](https://www.ikn.army.mil/apps/IKNWMS/IKN_Websites/USAICoE/MI%20Corps%20Hall%20of%20Fame/Bennett,%20Jean.htm)
  7. Jim Stephenson, E-mail, 24 April 2012.
  8. Barrie Zais, E-mail, 18 July 2014.
  9. Dennis Coll, "Strength and Drive," A History of the Class of 1965 (January 13, 2003), p. 25.
  10. Fred Laughlin, "Mission: Infiltrate Ranks," Assembly (March-April 1997), pp. 22-23.
  11. Class Notes, Assembly, January/February 2002, p. 114.
  12. Class Notes, Assembly, September/October 2002, p. 116.
  13. Ken Slutzky, Letter, 28 February 2011.
  14. Rick Bunn, E-mail, 3 March 2014.

- 
15. Dick Williams, E-mail, 19 May 2014.
  16. Class Notes, Assembly, 2012, No. 1 (March).
  17. Rick Bunn, E-mail, 12 June 2013.
  18. Rick Bunn, E-mail, 17 July 2012.
  19. Rick Bunn, E-mail, 20 July 2012; Gordy Larson, E-mail, 25 July 2012.
  20. Gordy Larson, E-mail, 21 December 2013.
  21. Jon Thompson, E-mail, Attachment, 18 February 2012.
  22. Ed Knauf Packet, Narrative and Letter from Secretary Nicholson.
  23. Bob Frey, E-mail, 23 January 2012.
  24. Class Notes, Assembly, November/December 2003, p. 107;  
<http://osotinc.org/about/history.php>
  25. Mary Kay Salomone, Letter, 22 January 2012; Rick Bunn, E-mail (Mary Kay Salomone), 29 November 2011.
  26. Class Notes, Assembly, May/June 2002, p. 116.
  
  27.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002\\_Winter\\_Olympics\\_torch\\_relay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002_Winter_Olympics_torch_relay)
  28. Jon Plaas, E-mail, 22 February 2011.
  29. Steve Darrah, Class History Form, pp. 1-2; Steve Darrah, E-mail, 11 March 2011.
  30. Bernard Francis Kistler, Assembly, April 1988, p. 162.