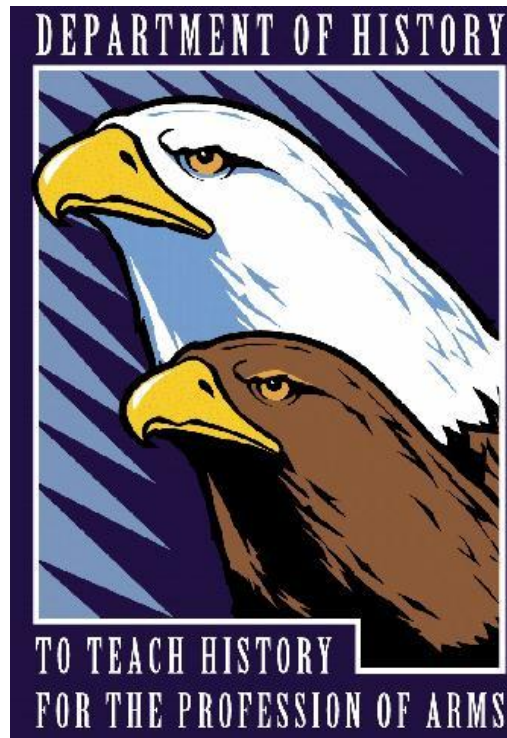


**THE FIFTIETH
HARMON MEMORIAL LECTURE
IN MILITARY HISTORY**



**Matching Mountains and Fulfilling Missions: One Grad's
Assessment of USAFA's True Value
Mark Clodfelter
United States Air Force Academy
2007**

**MATCHING MOUNTAINS AND
FULFILLING MISSIONS:
ONE GRAD'S ASSESSMENT OF
USAFA'S TRUE VALUE**

MARK CLODFELTER

**THE HARMON MEMORIAL
LECTURES IN MILITARY HISTORY**

NUMBER FIFTY

United States Air Force Academy
Colorado
2007

THE HARMON LECTURES IN MILITARY HISTORY

The oldest and most prestigious lecture series at the Air Force Academy, the Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History originated with Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon, the Academy's first superintendent (1954-1956) and a serious student of military history. General Harmon believed that history should play a vital role in the new Air Force Academy curriculum. Meeting with the History Department on one occasion, he described General George S. Patton, Jr.'s visit to the West Point library before departing for the North African campaign. In a flurry of activity Patton and the librarians combed the West Point holdings for historical works that might be useful to him in the coming months. Impressed by Patton's regard for history and personally convinced of history's great value, General Harmon believed that cadets should study the subject during each of their four years at the Academy.

General Harmon fell ill with cancer soon after launching the Air Force Academy at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver in 1954. He died in February 1957. He had completed a monumental task over the preceding decade as the chief planner for the new service academy and as its first superintendent. Because of his leadership and the tensions of the cold war, Congress strongly supported the development of a first-rate school and allotted generous appropriations to build and staff the institution.

The Academy's leadership felt greatly indebted to General Harmon and sought to honor his accomplishments in some way. The Department of History considered launching a lecture series to commemorate his efforts, and in 1959 the Harmon Memorial Lecture Series in Military History was born.

The Harmon Lecture series supports two goals: to encourage the interest in contemporary military history and to stimulate in cadets a lifelong interest in the study of the history of the military profession. The lectures are published and distributed to interested individuals and organizations throughout the world and many are used in courses at the Academy. In this way, we continue to honor the memory of General Harmon, who during his lifetime developed a keen interest in military history and greatly contributed to establishing the United States Air Force Academy.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL HUBERT REILLY HARMON

Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon was one of several distinguished Army officers to come from the Harmon family. His father graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1880 and later served as Commandant of Cadets at the Pennsylvania Military Academy. Two older brothers, Kenneth and Millard, were members of the West Point class of 1910 and 1912, respectively. The former served as Chief of the San Francisco Ordnance District during World War II; the latter reached flag rank and was lost over the Pacific during World War II while serving as Commander of the Pacific Area Army Air Forces. Hubert Harmon, born on April 3, 1882, in Chester, Pennsylvania, followed in their footsteps and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1915. Dwight D. Eisenhower also graduated in this class, and nearly forty years later the two worked together to create the new United States Air Force Academy.

Harmon left West Point with a commission in the Coast Artillery Corps, but he was able to enter the new Army air branch the following year. He won his pilot's wings in 1917 at the Army flying school in San Diego. After several training assignments, he went to France in September 1918 as a pursuit pilot. Between World Wars I and II, Harmon, who was a Major during most of this time, was among that small group of Army air officers who urged Americans to develop a modern, strong air arm.

At the outbreak of World War II, Brigadier General Hubert Harmon was commanding the Gulf Coast Training Center at Randolph Field, Texas. In late 1942 he became a Major General and head of the 6th Air Force in the Caribbean. The following year General Harmon was appointed Deputy Commander for Air in the South Pacific under General Douglas MacArthur, and in January 1944 he assumed command of the 13th Air Force fighting in that theater. After the war General Harmon held several top positions with the Air Force and was promoted to Lieutenant General in 1948.

In December 1949 the Air Force established the Office of Special Assistant for Air Force Academy Matters and appointed General Harmon its head. For more than four years Harmon directed all efforts at securing legislative approval for a U.S. Air Force Academy, planned its building and operation, and served on two commissions that finally selected Colorado Springs, Colorado, as the site for the new institution. On August 14, 1954, he was appointed first Superintendent of the Air Force Academy.

Upon General Harmon's retirement on July 31, 1956, the Secretary of the Air Force presented him with his third Distinguished Service Medal for his work in planning and launching the new service academy and setting its high standards. In a moving, informal talk to the cadets before leaving the Academy, General Harmon told the young airmen that the most important requirements for success in their military careers are integrity and loyalty to subordinates and superiors. "Take your duties seriously, but not yourself," he told the cadets.

General Harmon passed away on February 22, 1957, just a few months before his son Kendrick graduated from West Point. The general's ashes were interred at the Air Force Academy's cemetery on September 2, 1958. On May 31, 1959, the Academy's new administration building was named Harmon Hall in his memory. In commemoration of the Academy's 50th Anniversary, the Secretary of the Air Force, Dr. James G. Roche, designated General Harmon "The Father of the Air Force Academy" on April 1, 2004.

MARK CLODFELTER

Dr. Mark Clodfelter Joined the Faculty of the National War College in July 1997. Mark “Clod” Clodfelter is a former Air Force officer who was a ground radar officer by trade. After serving radar tours at Myrtle Beach and South Korea, he spent the remainder of his career in military academia. That service has included two teaching tours in the Air Force Academy's History Department, one at the Air Force's School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS) at Maxwell AFB, and one as Air Force ROTC Professor of Aerospace Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He holds a BS from the US Air Force Academy, an MA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (Free Press, 1989) and numerous articles and book chapters dealing with the American military experience. His area of expertise is American military history, with a special emphasis on air power and the Vietnam War.

MATCHING MOUNTAINS AND FULFILLING MISSIONS: ONE GRAD'S ASSESSMENT OF USAFA'S TRUE VALUE

Mark Clodfelter

I must begin my remarks to you by saying that there are a multitude of thoughts swirling around in my head right now—and I'll elaborate on them in just a minute. Yet I'm guessing that for most of you sitting in Arnold Hall, you've probably got only one thought on your mind, and it goes something like this: "Is this guy on stage going to say anything worthwhile, because I've got *a lot* of other stuff that I could be doing right now?" Yes, I still remember what it was like to sit in this building, some 30 years ago, listening to a guest speaker drone on while knowing that if I didn't get my butt back to the dorm to study for a Mech GR I had the next day, I was a dead man.

But those thoughts, indeed, were 30-odd years ago—and the fact that they were is one of the notions that's now swirling around in my head. This year marks my 30th Class Reunion, and I can assure you that 30 years ago I never thought that I would be giving the Harmon Memorial Lecture at the Air Force Academy. Thirty years ago I rarely thought farther ahead than the next weekend, much less what I'd be doing several years down the road. And rarely—if ever—did I think about what the value of the Academy experience might be to my subsequent "career development"—I wasn't even sure I was going to have a career, especially a career as an Air Force officer. The passage of time, however, tends to make you reflective. And thirty years is a significant chunk of time in most people's lives.

It's also a nice "round" figure. As my father-in-law pointed out, we Americans tend to focus on those anniversaries ending in "zero," such as a tenth reunion or a fortieth birthday.¹ My father-in-law is David MacIsaac—who was one of my instructors here when I was a cadet, and who also presented the Harmon Memorial Lecture, in 1987—*twenty* years ago this year—and that's another thought that's swirling around in my head. In his lecture, he noted that in August 1907—now *100* years ago—the Army's Signal Corps created its Aeronautical Division, and that division ultimately evolved into the United States Air Force in September 1947—which for us today is an even *sixty* years ago. He also said that what transpired during those first 40 "formative" years laid the groundwork for the "modern" Air Force, and that the people who played a significant role in the creation of the new service—men such as Hap Arnold, Carl Spaatz, and Ira Eaker—were profoundly affected by what they did as junior officers. Thus, in his lecture, he chose to examine the early careers of Arnold, Spaatz, and Eaker, and he offered this quote from historian Russell Weigley as justification for that focus:

What we believe and what we do today is governed at least as much by the habits of mind we formed in the relatively remote past as by what we did and thought [only] yesterday. The relatively remote past is apt to constrain our thought and

In addition to USAFA classmates, colleagues at the National War College, and others mentioned in the lecture/notes, the author is grateful to the following individuals for their helpful suggestions: Peter Maslowski, David Tretler, and Roy Stafford. The author claims full credit, however, for any mistakes or inaccuracies, and notes that his work represents his views alone and not those of the National War College, US Air Force, or Department of Defense.

¹ David MacIsaac, "Leadership in the Old Air Force: A Post-Graduate Assignment," *Harmon Memorial Lecture Number 30* (US Air Force Academy, CO: 1987): 1.

actions more, because we understand it less well than we do our recent past, or at least recall it less clearly, and it has cut deeper grooves of custom in our minds.²

I agree with Weigley's assertion regarding the impact of "the relatively remote past," and I'd like to use it as a focal point in my remarks to you tonight. Like my father-in-law, I aim to test it by going back in time, but my focus on the past is going to be a bit different than his. First of all, I'm going to restrict my examination to only a four-year span in the lives of a particular group of young people—the four years spent as an Air Force Academy cadet. Secondly, I'm going to focus on the group of cadets that I know best—the members of the Class of 1977. My goal is to determine if the Air Force Academy succeeded in accomplishing its mission for my class—and, by implication, for other classes that the Academy has produced. My tentative answer is "yes"; however, the "yes" requires a bit of explanation because, as with many aspects of the Academy experience, there are a fair amount of "but's" involved (please pardon the pun).

Determining whether the Academy fulfilled its mission first requires a definition of it. I'll provide that by citing the greatest source for Academy "knowledge" known to exist: *Contrails*. Here's how '77's version defined it: "The mission of the Air Force Academy is to provide instruction and experience to each cadet so that he graduates with the knowledge and character essential to leadership and the motivation to become a career officer in the United States Air Force."³ It *seems* straightforward, doesn't it? And yet, I wonder about its validity as the Academy's driving goal. *How* do you determine success or failure? The Air Force has often resorted to quantification to evaluate the effectiveness of many activities—to include the use of air power—and that approach is *one* way to evaluate USAFA. The stated mission emphasizes the production of superb leaders who become career officers, and those elements provide ready data points. Focusing on the "leadership" aspect of the mission yields a percentage of the Air Force's general officers who are Academy grads. Focusing on the "career" aspect reveals how long the typical Academy graduate stays on active duty compared to officers produced by ROTC or OTS.⁴

The Air Force does indeed highlight both of those factors. The service's personnel center notes that 150 of the Air Force's 290 general officers currently on active duty—52 percent—are Academy graduates.⁵ From the year 1977, 2.1 percent of USAFA's graduates with Air Force commissions became generals, compared to 0.5 percent of ROTC graduates and 0.3 percent from

² *Ibid.*, 2, quoted in Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War* (New York: MacMillan, 1973), xx.

³ *Contrails: The Air Force Cadet Handbook, Volume 20: 1974-75* (US Air Force Academy, CO: 1974), 173.

⁴ ROTC is an acronym for Reserve Officers Training Corps, the Air Force's commissioning program located on many college campuses in the United States. OTS is an acronym for Officer Training School, a commissioning program of approximately three months administered at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, for college graduates who did not participate in ROTC and who wish to become Air Force officers.

⁵ Data provided by Mr. Dennis Davis at the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Texas (AFPC/DPAPDT) on 23 August 2007; the information is current as of 31 July 2007. The commissioning sources for the remainder of the Air Force's active duty general officer corps are as follows: 95 from ROTC, 32 from OTS, 2 from West Point, and 11 from direct appointment. In a 22 August 2007 email to the author, Ms. Elizabeth Wilson at USAFA's Office of Institutional Research (USAFA/XPR) notes that of the Air Force's 12 four-star generals, 5 are USAFA graduates; of the Air Force's 37 lieutenant generals, 16 are USAFA graduates. A comparison with Army general officers comes courtesy of Sergeant Michael Frank at the Army's General Officer Management Office. He stated in a 21 August 2007 telephone conversation that of 307 active duty Army general officer billets, 144 (47 percent) are currently filled by West Point graduates. Of those totals, 3 of 12 four-star generals, and 26 of 52 lieutenant generals, are West Point graduates.

OTS.⁶ Over time, though, an Air Force officer's commissioning source has not proved a significant determinant of whether the officer will make general. Data from 1980-2002 show that specific career fields and particular job assignments provide greater indicators of making general, with pilots having the highest probability, and jobs such as a general's aide producing a large boost to one's own chances of wearing stars.⁷ In terms of retention, USAFA's Class of '77 compared favorably to its ROTC and OTS counterparts, with 37 percent of its graduates still on active duty at the 20-year point, compared to 32 percent of 1977 ROTC graduates and 20 percent of those from OTS.⁸ For the first seven years of the span 1980-2002, the retention rate of USAFA graduates easily surpassed that of ROTC and OTS grads; but from 1987-2002 the Academy's retention advantage slipped considerably, and in several years during that period both ROTC and OTS graduates had a higher retention percentage than Academy grads.⁹

Officer retention would not, however, have appeared at the top of Billy Mitchell's list for evaluating Academy success. For Mitchell and those who followed closely in his footsteps, the vision of an "Air Academy" was an institution that produced aeronautical engineers and pilots.¹⁰ Mitchell saw West Point as "largely a waste of time" for airmen who had different concerns from their counterparts on the ground.¹¹ Indeed, I still recall hearing as a cadet that the *real* mission of the Air Force was "to fly and fight," and the cadets in '77 received extensive encouragement to become pilots. Undergraduate pilot training—UPT—became the great goal for many, and I well remember the battle cry of "2.0 and Go!" as a warped justification of why we should not take academics too seriously. Until 1992, USAFA had unlimited UPT slots for medically qualified candidates who had the requisite 2.0 cumulative GPA at graduation.¹² Since then, the Academy

⁶ Data provided by Ms. Elizabeth Wilson in USAFA/XPXR via emails to the author on 17 and 23 July 2007. As of 23 July 2007, 18 of the 851 USAFA graduates commissioned into the Air Force from the Class of 1977 had become generals.

⁷ See Colonel Brian Collins, USAF (USAFA '82), *The United States Air Force and Profession: Why Sixty Percent of Air Force General Officers Are Still Pilots When Pilots Comprise Just Twenty Percent of the Officer Corps*, PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 25 August 2006, 1-3; 392-405; 578-581.

⁸ Information compiled by Mr. Dennis Davis at Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Texas (AFPC/DPAPDT) and sent to the author via email on 22 August 2007; the retention percentages for officers commissioned in 1977 were as of 1 January 1997. Mr. Steven J. Tulo, Contractor and THRMIS Project Manager for AF/AIPFS, provided similar information based on a twenty-year retention date of 30 September 1997. Those percentages for officers commissioned in 1977 and still on active duty were: USAFA graduates, 31 percent; ROTC graduates, 27 percent; OTS graduates, 17 percent. Email from Mr. Tulo to the author, 22 August 2007.

⁹ Data on officer accessions collected by Colonel Brian Collins from Analysis and Reports Branch, Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC/DPSAR) and graciously shared with the author. The number of USAFA graduates who remained on active duty compared to officers from other commissioning sources is affected to some degree by the "regular" commission given all Academy graduates, a distinction reserved for only a very small number of ROTC or OTS graduates, most of whom received "reserve" commissions. In January 2006, the Air Force abolished the "regular vs. reserve" distinction, with all officers commissioned on or after 1 May 2005 being given regular commissions, and the commissions for the remainder of the active duty officer corps with reserve commissions becoming regular by 1 May 2006. Until the January 2006 decree, most ROTC and OTS graduates had to compete for regular commissions during their time on active duty. See "Policy Guidance for Transitioning Reserve Officers on the Active Duty List and Accessing New Officers to All-Regular Status," HQ USAF/DP, 12 January 2006.

¹⁰ Edward A. Miller, Jr., "The Struggle for an Air Force Academy," *Military Affairs* 27 (Winter, 1963-1964), 163-164.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 164.

¹² Email from Dr. Elizabeth A. Muenger, USAFA Command Historian, to author, 21 January 2007. See also Collins, 396n.

has received a quota of UPT slots each year—the same number provided to ROTC graduates.¹³ Yet to the chagrin of Billy Mitchell—and perhaps to others sitting in Arnold Hall tonight—West Point was the model chosen for the Air Force Academy, and an emphasis on flying did not appear in the Academy’s mission statement. The desire from Hubert Harmon, Dwight Eisenhower, and others instrumental in creating USAFA in the aftermath of World War II was an Academy that produced the key leadership core of Air Force officers, much like West Point did for the Army, through a broad-based educational program that stressed not only academics but also military training and athletics.¹⁴

Still, an officer’s aeronautical rating trumps the commissioning source in determining the officer’s likelihood of becoming a general. If the Academy experience and its current \$312,000/copy price tag¹⁵ does not guarantee more generals—as well as more officers who make the service a career—what, then, is the true value of this institution? To answer that question I thought that I’d take the “standard” Air Force approach—and gather more data.

This time, I thought that I’d go right to the source for data collection—to the graduates of USAFA. Furthermore, I thought that I’d rely on the data source that I knew best, given that I am a part of it—the Class of 1977, whose graduates are now 30 years removed from the day that we threw our hats into the air and are officially *old*. Hopefully, though, we’re not completely out of touch with reality, and the thoughts that we have about USAFA and its value to our lives might be useful to you guys who one day—believe it or not—will be gray-haired jokers like us, coming back for football games and reunions, discussing your medical conditions, and talking about how your children are now flying the latest mach-10 fighters that operate on solar power—or perhaps about how they’re flying the same B-52s that your grandfathers flew.... Thus, you might think of what we have to say to you, collectively, as a “preview of coming attractions”!

My data come from an internet survey that I designed—with lots of help¹⁶—and that many of my classmates completed this past spring. Through the generous assistance of the Academy’s Association of Graduates (AOG), which sent survey links to the 435 of us who are AOG members, I received 121 responses, a return rate of almost 28 percent, to 40 questions dealing with the perceived importance of the Academy experience.¹⁷ I requested anonymous responses, though some of my classmates chose to sign their names. Most provided “write-in” responses in addition to answering multiple-choice questions, and many of those responses were detailed—and quite revealing. In reading through them, I had to wonder just how “clueful” I had been during my four years here—a trend that my wife would say has continued for 30 years after graduation.

¹³ *Ibid.*; Conversation with Air Force Colonel Paul A. Price, HQ USAF/A1DO, 2 February 2007. A limited number of UPT slots go to selected OTS graduates.

¹⁴ Miller, 169-173.

¹⁵ Cost of four years at USAFA provided by Headquarters USAFA/DPY, 30 January 2007.

¹⁶ Several classmates, in particular John “Lou” Michels, Armando Costales, George “Barney” Ballinger, Steve Petersen, Carroll “Chip” Lamb, Roger Smith, and Curt Bedke, offered valuable suggestions concerning what types of questions to ask and how best to ask them, though the responsibility for crafting the survey is mine and mine alone. Colonel Richard “Dick” Rauschkolb, (Ret., USAFA ’70) was my link to the USAFA Association of Graduates and provided tremendous assistance for the project. Without the experience and expertise provided by Mrs. Susan Sherwood, Director of Instructional Research and Assessments for National War College, I could not have produced a successful survey. Susan is a master of survey design, and her help was vital in creating a “user friendly” structure that produced excellent results.

¹⁷ The Association of Graduates sent an announcement of the survey, and a link to it, to AOG members from the Class of 1977 in March 2007. Those classmates who completed the survey did so between March-May 2007; the survey results referenced during the remainder of this lecture come from that data.

Before sharing the responses, let me give you some brief background on my class and those members of it who completed the survey. We graduated 867 out of 1461 who arrived as basic cadets, with 851 receiving Air Force commissions. Eighteen remain on active duty as Air Force generals—and given that we are now all past the 30-year point, the only ones who can still be on active duty are indeed general officers. Twenty-one died while on active duty, and, though none were killed in combat, a majority of them died in aircraft accidents.¹⁸ As all USAFA classes are distinctive in some ways, so too were we. We were the first class not to have mandatory chapel attendance on Sundays; we were the first to receive only 30 days of graduation leave rather than the previously granted 60; we were the first to lose the GI Bill benefits given to previous classes; we were the first to enter the Academy after America's war in Vietnam had ended; and we were "Firsties" when women cadets first arrived at the Academy in the summer of 1976. Of the 121 grads completing the survey, 69 percent were pilots, 9 percent were navigators, 21 percent were non-rated or members of another service, and 2 percent were lawyers or doctors. These numbers parallel the overall percentages for the Class of 1977: 63 percent were pilots; 8 percent were navigators; 28 percent were non-rated Air Force officers or members of another service; and 1 percent were flight surgeons.¹⁹ Thirty-five of the 121 had service in either the Guard or Reserves after leaving active duty.

While the bulk of responses reflected favorably on the Academy experience, many also revealed a contradiction in feelings about the value of the institution. For instance, in response to the question—"What impact do you think that the Academy had on the collective perspective of your classmates at graduation?"—60 percent of those completing the survey answered, "Most of my classmates were inclined to see issues as 'shades of gray' rather than in absolute terms by the time they graduated," while 34 percent said the opposite—"most of my classmates were inclined to see issues as 'black and white' absolutes by the time they graduated." When asked, "How do you think that the collective mindset of your classmates evolved during the four-year Academy experience?" 44 percent answered that "as a group, my classmates became more conservative in their thinking," 11 percent said they became more liberal, and 45 percent said they could not be classified "as either more conservative or more liberal." The write-in response of one classmate perhaps best sums up the conflicting data: "Perhaps you could describe 'us' as rigorous liberal thinkers and enthusiastic conservative actors." Another expressed surprise at such questions for the class that had as its unofficial motto, "Just Passin' Through" (we tried to get "JPT" engraved on the outside of our class rings and nearly succeeded), noting that the mindset was "liberal inside the framework of an organization that bombed people for a living, [and] so it had its limitations." Many contended that the military is naturally more conservative, and one who did added this quote from Churchill: "If you're 21 and not a liberal, you have no heart. If you're over 21 and still a liberal, you have no brain!"

The disparity of responses continued when my classmates were asked why they attended the Academy. The top answer would have made Billy Mitchell smile—44 percent of my classmates said, "The desire to pursue a flying career," almost double the 24 percent who listed the mission-oriented goal of becoming "a career Air Force officer" as their top choice. The "desire to receive a superb, 'cost-free' college education garnered the third highest number of votes, with 20 percent of my classmates selecting it. While almost 90 percent of the surveyed grads agreed that the Academy changed the way that they thought and their views of the world, with about 58 percent saying that it significantly expanded their intellectual horizons and 36

¹⁸ Email from USAFA/XPXR to the author, 23 July 2007.

¹⁹ Email from USAFA/XPXR to the author, 17 July 2007.

percent saying that it gave them more insights about the world at large, disagreement was widespread about what aspects of the Academy experience were responsible for their expanded horizons. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, for “Just Passin’ Through,” the top-rated choice was the academic curriculum, selected by 35 percent of the survey group. The “views of classmates and other cadets” was second at 20 percent; the “military training program” was third at 18 percent; “the views of faculty and staff” fourth at 14 percent; and “participation in athletics” was fifth at 5 percent. The remaining 8 percent of my classmates said that the Academy failed to expand their world view.

Disparate responses continued for questions about how organized religious activities and the arrival of women cadets affected the Academy experience. Thirty-three percent of my classmates commented that religious activities had a significant impact on their cadet life, while 28 percent said that they had no impact, and 37 percent said that they had some impact. Regarding the admission of women, 59 percent of my classmates believed at the time that it was the right thing to do, while 41 percent did not. Those attitudes have changed a bit in 30 years. Only 2 percent of my classmates who originally thought that women should have been admitted now think that it was a mistake to do so, while 61 percent of those who thought it was wrong for women to be here 30 years ago now think that they *should* be part of the cadet wing. Still, many ’77 grads remain conflicted on whether women should attend USAFA. When asked if they would be pleased if they had a daughter or niece who attended the Academy, 77 percent said yes, 15 percent said no, and 8 percent said that they were not sure. At least one graduate revealed that his answer was not gender-specific with this write-in response: “If they could get in I would be proud, but I would not necessarily want them to go there—that goes for sons and nephews, too.”

Despite the disagreement that the survey revealed, it also showed quite a bit of consensus regarding the Academy experience and its subsequent value. When asked how attending USAFA affected career development, 96 percent of my classmates thought that their Academy time improved their career prospects, regardless of whether they made the Air Force a career. Fifty-five percent of my classmates said that USAFA was invaluable to the success that they have had, and 41 percent noted it was, in general, a positive contribution. Almost half of my classmates said that the Academy had a significant positive effect on the development of their personal standards; 39 percent acknowledged that USAFA had elevated their standards to some extent. Nine percent said that their standards were set prior to arriving at the Academy. “I came in with high standards,” one of my classmates wrote, “but I left knowing specifically WHAT I believe, and WHY I believe it. I may have been completely different had I attended a ‘normal’ university.” No argument here. . . . Many of my classmates pointed to the Honor Code as a key factor in shaping their personal standards. Twenty-three percent remarked that it was “the dominant element that caused cadets to act with integrity,” while 73 percent said that “it reinforced notions of honor that most cadets already possessed.” Only 4 percent said that it was “ineffective in establishing a sense of integrity that shaped cadet behavior.” My classmates also believed that the Academy played a substantial role in molding their leadership skills. Ninety-two percent said that it had a positive effect, with 57 percent observing that it had a “significant” positive effect, and 35 percent saying that the effect was positive but less dramatic. Of course, learning to be a good leader often means learning what examples *not* to follow. See if any of these write-in comments resonate: “At the Academy I did see many examples of behavior I vowed never to allow myself to repeat”; “the experience I had with my AOC [Air Officer

Commanding²⁰] taught me exactly how NOT to be”; “I learned just as much about what not to do as a leader.”

Such responses indicate that the Class of ‘77 did not always think about USAFA fondly. When asked to relate their *dominant* memories of the Academy, and given several possible response options, 68 percent answered, “Pride tempered by memories of hard times,” while 16 percent said “excitement and enthusiasm.” One grad remarked: “It was a struggle, but I’m glad I graduated,” which likely sums up the feelings that many of us had. Questions regarding our fondest, and most negative, memories of USAFA amplify this view. These questions did not have multiple-choice responses—all of the answers were “write-in’s,” and thus matching answers here have perhaps a greater significance than elsewhere in the survey. For 26 percent of my classmates, their fondest memories of the Academy were shared experiences with other cadets. “Time spent with good friends,” “camaraderie,” and “spirit missions” typified these responses, and many classmates placed an emphasis on bonding with “adversity” lurking in the background. The second-highest response reflected that mindset, but did so more directly: 18 percent listed “graduation” as their fondest memory, which one individual phrased as “surviving to graduate.” Participation in airmanship programs ranked third in terms of fondest memories, written in by 10 percent of the respondents. One classmate typed simply, “I am not being sarcastic here. I don’t have any fond memories”—but all the rest found something positive to say about their four years at USAFA.

Not that they were unable to find anything derogatory to say—comments abounded regarding the most negative Academy memories. Once again, I added together similar write-in responses, and once more found three dominant answers. Basic Cadet Training and the Fourth Class year topped the list, but by only a small margin, with 15 percent of my classmates mentioning some aspect of the “doolie” experience.²¹ “Being written up, chewed out, marching tours, or serving confinements” was a close second, with 14 percent of my classmates providing that response, one of whom noted that he had marched more than 200 tours. Next was “loneliness and the Dark Ages,”²² which garnered votes from 8 percent. Three different categories tied for fourth with 5 percent each, including: a perceived misuse of the Honor Code to enforce regulations, “jerk instructors,” and “jerk AOCs,” with three of the latter zapped for sniffing underwear in laundry bins to guarantee that cadets were not placing clean, unfolded clothes in them.

Two other questions that had “write-in only” responses—no multiple choice questions to select from—provided revealing insights about the perceived value of the institution. When asked what part of the Academy experience for the Class of 1977 should be retained at all costs, the leading response from my classmates (19 percent) was the high degree of emphasis placed on teamwork, bonding, and esprit de corps. Despite the negative memories produced by Basic Cadet Training and the Fourth Class system, 12 percent of my classmates said those programs

²⁰ Each of the 40 cadet squadrons consisted of roughly 120 cadets and had an Air Officer Commanding (usually referred to simply as an “AOC”) assigned to it to monitor the squadron’s military training activities. AOCs were either majors or captains, and worked for the Commandant, a one-star general, who supervised military training activities for the entire Academy.

²¹ “Doolie” is the slang term for an Academy freshman. Its origins supposedly stemmed from the Greek word for “slave.”

²² The “Dark Ages” referenced the 11-week span from the return from Christmas leave to the start of spring break, when cadets left their dorms for morning classes before the sun had risen, and then returned the dorms from afternoon classes after the sun had set. For the Class of 1977, the only holiday during that period was President’s Day.

should endure at USAFA, and indeed, they received the second highest number of votes for retention. One grad highlighted the confidence that came from completing the Fourth Class year: “I learned to work with others under pressure. Even if the situation seems tough, I know I can work my way through it.” Third on the list was the Honor Code, mentioned by 11 percent. Two facets tied for fourth: a broad academic curriculum, and airmanship programs, with each receiving 7 percent of the vote. Two also tied for sixth with 6 percent: the Survival, Escape, Resistance, and Evasion (SERE) program administered at the Academy for the Class of ’77 and which was then a graduation requirement for all cadets, and USAFA’s athletic programs. Yet one of my classmates also said that he would retain *everything* about the Academy experience, or, as he put it, “The whole enchilada—nothing less. If you shrink parts of the Academy,” he insisted, “you slip back to a civilian institution.”

That perspective resonated when my classmates were asked what part of their Academy experience they would change instantly if empowered to do so. The answers given here were more disparate than those provided about what to retain, perhaps indicating that the choice of what to discard was more difficult than the choice of what to keep. Nonetheless, a few dominant responses did emerge, and at the top of the list was the desire by 13 percent to eliminate elements of negative motivation such as tours, doolie hazing at meals, etc. Next, though, 11 percent of my classmates said that they would change *nothing*. One grad summed up his rationale this way: “I believe that AFA was my life shaping event. Once you change history, you change outcomes and I do not want that. So, I think I learned from the good, the bad and the ugly parts. I would not change a thing; they all have gone into who I am.”

For some of my classmates, maintaining the status quo at the Academy equated to maintaining a successful institution, and some contended that factors disrupting stability had an adverse impact on USAFA’s ability to accomplish its mission. For some of those grads, the admission of women was one such disruptive event, and 7 percent of my classmates recommended removing women from the cadet wing. Conversely, another 3 percent of my classmates thought that women cadets should have been part of the wing but that they should have been integrated into it better—women cadets in the Class of 1980 were originally kept segregated on the top floors of Vandenberg Hall and placed in only the first twenty squadrons.²³ My classmates further disagreed on the amount of cadet leadership opportunities made available to them: 4 percent would have added more, and another 4 percent would have provided less. Another 4 percent would have placed more “down time” in the Academy’s schedule.

Yet making USAFA different—or keeping it the same—provided no assurance that the Class of ’77 would ultimately lead the Air Force as general officers. The USAFA experience often included the unexpected, and the same was true following graduation. When asked if they were surprised by any of their classmates making general, almost half of those completing the survey said yes, but several also couched their response: “Not that they couldn’t,” one wrote, while another added, “Almost all grads have the potential.” Others stated that they were more surprised by certain officers who did *not* become generals. One grad remarked, “Most general officers were predictable, but 10-20% were in the category of ‘I never thought they would make it that far!’” An unnamed classmate who had in fact made general put himself in that latter camp, stating that he was surprised to be wearing stars and felt that he was “a computer glitch in the system.”

²³ See Allison Gawlinski, “‘Bring Me Men and Women’: The Integration of Women into the United States Air Force Academy,” *Air Power History* (Summer 2007): 32-45, for a detailed analysis of how the women in the Academy’s Class of 1980 were incorporated into the cadet wing.

Despite an inability to divine future generals, most of my classmates believed that the Academy experience prepared them well to serve as officers. Three out of four rated their Academy background superior to that provided by ROTC or OTS. In addition, 88 percent rated the quality of military training received at USAFA as either “superb” (45 percent) or “adequate” (43 percent) in terms of its preparation for active duty. One grad who cross-commissioned into the Army stated: “Although an Army Officer, I felt I was better prepared than my West Point peers. Officers there do many things that cadets handle at USAFA.” Another grad observed, “I learned how to prioritize, accomplish many things in a short time, and how to succeed. . . . The best lesson I learned was to trust the mid-level and senior NCOs as essential to success as an officer.” Another added: “Although I may not have appreciated most of it at the time, in my old age I see the importance of most of what we went through. Perhaps it should have even been much harder.”

While providing a grudging acknowledgment that some degree of pain was a necessary part of the Academy experience, few of my classmates expressed a desire for more of it. For most, USAFA produced a love/hate relationship that sometimes emphasized both emotions simultaneously. More than 90 percent of my classmates stated that they had returned to the Academy more than once since graduation, and 52 percent had returned more than five times. “The longer I live, the more proud I am of having graduated from there,” one classmate revealed, while another confided, “The longer it’s been since graduation the more I seem to be drawn back.” Yet 52 percent also stated that they do *not* wish to have visited USAFA any more than they have. “I get an uneasy feeling in my gut whenever I see USAFA,” confessed one grad. “Then I calm down and can relax.” Another added, “I still feel vaguely uncomfortable walking across the terrazzo.” Yet another remarked: “I go to AFA football games when they are nearby and I’ll go to the 30th reunion, but that’s enough.” A few classmates rationalized their reluctance to return as the result of a perceived failure to live up to the high standards that they deemed a hallmark of the institution and its graduates. One commented, “I would hate to have to explain all of the ridiculous things I’ve done with my time while others were in NASA or commanding officers.” Another offered this assessment: “Took a girlfriend there after 15 years away; felt very strange. Did not feel like I belonged there anymore since my civilian life was nothing special. . . .”

For many, if not most, of my classmates, the notion that we were “special” by virtue of USAFA’s unique training experiences and distinctive education resonated. We all knew the Academy’s exhortation to “Bring me men to match my mountains,” a reference to the first line of the Samuel Walter Foss poem, “The Coming American,”²⁴ and 30 years after completing the four-year ordeal the belief that we received a special boost on the path to success endured. Eighty-eight percent of my classmates described USAFA’s overall impact as “definitely positive,” while another 8 percent rated it as “slightly positive.” Only 3 percent rated the impact of the USAFA experience as “a wash,” and only one person out of the 121 completing the survey said that the Academy’s overall impact was negative. One graduate offered a pithy summary of USAFA’s value with this comment: “Surviving it gives me a great sense of achievement and a lot of confidence confronting future challenges—but it sucked 24/7.” Such sentiments appeared in responses to the question—“If you could live that part of your life over again, would you attend the Academy?”—and, indeed, those answers may offer the strongest testimony yet to USAFA’s lasting impact. More than four out of five of my classmates—81 percent—said that

²⁴ “Academy Seeks New Slogan,” Air Force Press Release, 19 August 2003, accessed at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_prfr/is_200308/ai_19534504.

they would repeat the Academy experience, even with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight. Only 6 percent said that they would not, and the remaining 13 percent were uncertain. Many of those who would do it all over again, however, acknowledged the love-hate relationship that for them defined the institution. Here's just one example, but it conveys its central point in unvarnished fashion:

The worst day of my life was my first day at USAFA. The worst month of my life was my first month at USAFA. The worst year of my life was my first year at USAFA. The worst 4 years of my life were my 4 years at USAFA. But it got me where I wanted to go. I'm not sure how anyone could shlep through 4 years at the Academy without their final goal in view.

For all of us who "made it" to throw our hats in the air, the Academy experience will likely resonate until our dying days. Given the intensity of that experience in many cases, it could hardly be otherwise. Almost one in five of my classmates reported dreaming that they are back at USAFA as a cadet as often as once or twice a month; more than 50 percent reported dreaming that they are back at the Academy at least once or twice a year. Several classmates said that the dreams occurred when they were stressed out or overworked, and many of the dreams depicted stressful times at the Academy. Apparently, the psyche still remembers that USAFA wasn't a piece of cake.

What, then, does this collection of data show? Well, for one thing it shows what a profound impact the Academy experience had on each of our lives. It also shows that, despite the angst, the vast bulk of us view that experience in a positive light—so much so that most of us would repeat the experience if we were somehow given the opportunity to do so. It does not say that we all had a fun time here, and that we all loved this place—far from it. Yet it does say that we thought USAFA was essential to the way that we subsequently turned out—and that we're pretty happy with those results.

I would contend that what you have in the survey are data points that sum up the value of the Academy experience for a *typical* class of graduates. Though I've been heard to say that '77 was the greatest Academy class ever, in actuality I'm fairly certain that we were "fast, neat, average, friendly, good, good."²⁵ Still, I would also contend that an "average" Academy class is a pretty remarkable group of people, given the high degree of selectivity and the competitive nature of Academy appointments. I would maintain that each class contains individuals who not only make exceptional contributions to the Air Force, but also to the nation as a whole. And I say that not just based on the survey data, but also based on the "data" that I happen to know best—the 19 guys who graduated with me as a part of the Firstie Class in "Tiger Ten."

So, then, let me say "Huzzah!" right from the start. We said it all the time, but I was never quite sure what it meant, and I still have grave doubts that it was the yell given by British commandoes in World War II when they went into combat (and if that was the case, how did it end up as the greeting for a cadet squadron at the *American* Air Force Academy?). The 19 guys I graduated with were typical guys graduating from a typical squadron at USAFA in 1977. In fact, we even had one of our AOCs describe my classmates in Tiger Ten as "mediocre at best" when asked on the eve of June Week to compare us to the other two groups of Firsties he had seen up close and personal during his tour at the Academy. But now, 30 years later, I maintain that the classmates I knew so well in Tiger Ten were anything but "mediocre," and I wanted to highlight

²⁵ The "standard" answers to critiquing a meal in Mitchell Hall on the Cadet Wing Form 0-96.

for you some of my memories of them, and what just a few of them have done in the past three decades since graduation.

Here's a picture of our Tiger Ten's Firsties on the eve of graduation. Bright, eager, and ready to go—well, certainly ready to get away from this place! Yet no sooner had we escaped USAFA than tragedy struck—Steve Morris became the second member of our class to die “on the job”; he was killed in a T-38 accident at UPT. For those of us who needed reminding that our profession was very different than most others, that was an instant clue. When I heard of Steve's death, I remembered thinking back to a gregarious cadet who never failed to help out a classmate needing assistance, a kind-hearted soul who enjoyed playing pranks when he got the chance. And I wonder what he might have accomplished had he made it to our 30th reunion.

As for the other '77 grads from Tiger Ten, I haven't had to wonder. Four of them became generals, and are all now wearing two stars—a pretty impressive achievement for one squadron's senior class. One of those is Kurt Cichowski, who will soon become Vice Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command at Hurlburt Field, Florida. In his previous assignment, he was Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy as a part of the Multi-National Task Force in Baghdad; earlier, he had been wing commander of the 49th Fighter Wing and its stealth fighters at Holloman. Yet I remember him best as the most bow-legged member of the Class of 1977, and it was always a mystery to me as to how he could run as fast as he did, much less march in a straight line! Another Tiger Ten general is Steve Miller—which some might have said was predictable, given that he also served as Cadet Wing Commander his Firstie year. Yet Steve was far more “hyper” when he was a cadet about whether he would be able to meet his girlfriend (and future wife) Teresa on a weekend pass than he was about overseeing drill and ceremonies. Six years after graduation he got the chance to display true grace under pressure when a maintenance problem triggered an in-flight emergency in his F-15. He managed to get the crippled aircraft on the ground without incident—a nifty bit of flying that won him the Aviator's Valor Award that year. He went on to command the famous 94th “Hat in the Ring” Squadron that had produced Eddie Rickenbacker in World War I, and he would later command Langley's 1st Fighter Wing. He currently serves as Commandant of the Air War College.

The final two members of Tiger Ten to make general from '77 were perhaps the yin and yang of our squadron, academically speaking: “Dutch” Remkes and Curt Bedke. Dutch sat on the last row on graduation day, while Curt was a Distinguished Graduate who had only a single “B” for his course work at the Academy—the rest of his grades were all “A's.” It was by the grace of God that I had Curt as a roommate for most of my remaining three years at USAFA, for only he had the ability to explain math and science courses in terms that I could understand—and pass. Dutch, like me, was a history major (yeah!); Curt was a double major in Astro and Math. When we all got our new cars at the end of our “two degree” year, Dutch proudly drove up in a red Ford pickup, which he delighted in cleaning by driving up to a car wash and “hosing out” the inside of the cab. Curt, meanwhile, got a Toyota Celica that he carefully waxed every few months. Yet despite the seeming differences in temperament displayed at the Academy, both took from their experiences here and excelled as officers. Dutch flew F-4s, F-15s, and F-16s, and served for two years in the late 1980s in the demanding job of aide to General Robert Russ, the Commander of Tactical Air Command. As the Commander of the 39th Wing at Incirlik, Turkey, Dutch directed air strikes against Iraq in Operation Desert Fox in December 1998; he later took command of the 3rd Wing at Elmendorf from 2002-2004; and he now serves as the Director of Strategy and Policy Assessments for US European Command in Stuttgart, Germany. Curt, meanwhile, became a B-52 pilot after graduating with a master's in astronautics from

Stanford, and then served as a test pilot at Edwards Air Force Base at the time that Dutch was shepherding General Russ at TAC. After commanding the 31st Test and Evaluation Squadron, Curt returned to B-52s as Commander of the 5th Operations Group at Minot, and later commanded the 2nd Bomb Wing at Barksdale, during which time he also served as US Central Command's senior military representative to Pakistan. He's just finished an assignment as the Commander of the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards and moved to Wright-Paterson AFB to command the Air Force's Research Laboratory. By virtue of his three Edwards assignments, he's amassed 4300 flying hours in 74 different types of aircraft.

You now know about several of my Tiger Ten classmates who went on to do great things in an Air Force uniform, but I'm sure some of you might be thinking, "Wow, that's great, but I don't know if I'm going to make it graduation, much less make the Air Force a career." I can assure you that many—if not most—of us had that same thought when we sat in Arnold Hall as cadets, so I wanted to give you a final snippet about a member of Tiger Ten who indeed left the service after initial commitment for flight training had ended. That guy is Bob McNeal, whom I'll always remember wandering around the squadron after taps dressed in a bed sheet that resembled a Roman toga—and this attire came *before* John Belushi popularized it in the movie *Animal House*. Bob got KC-135s to Griffiss Air Force Base, New York, after graduating from UPT—an assignment that he really wanted because it was close to Syracuse University. While a pilot at Griffiss he enrolled at Syracuse and, during his off-duty time, completed a master's degree in *electrical engineering*. After a stint teaching Physics at USAFA, he left the Air Force and began a civilian career path that proved both personally rewarding and financially lucrative. He worked at an aerospace firm in Los Angeles, got his MBA from the Wharton School, founded several successful companies, worked in high-level jobs for the Census Bureau and Time Warner, and now is Vice Chairman of Interoute, a large company that provides telecommunication services across Europe. He resides in London and typically works 14-hour days despite having "made it" financially. Thirty years later, though, I still remember him wandering around the squadron looking like Julius Caesar....

Well, that's a quick-and-dirty snapshot of one group of cadets who "survived" this place—and I think "survival" is the word we would've used 30 years ago. I wish I had time to talk about each of my Tiger Ten classmates, who are all very successful in a multitude of professions, but I know that you have to get back to the dorm to study that Mech—or to watch *Smallville*! So let me add just a few brief concluding remarks about what I think that my survey data and Tiger Ten examples reveal about the *true* value of this institution.

Is there a correlation between what we endured at USAFA and what we accomplished later in life? Those dots are probably hard to connect directly, and yet I think that a connection is present. To me, the survey data and Tiger Ten success stories show that the true value of USAFA is both enduring and intangible, no matter how hard those in positions of authority might want to rely on numbers to justify the cost of an Academy education. Our mission statement focused on developing career leaders for the Air Force—a worthy goal, to be sure. Yet such emphasis did not adequately acknowledge that simply creating leaders who are intellectually nimble, with high standards of integrity, and committed to serving the nation is in itself a noble goal—and one that the Academy should pride itself in achieving. The mission statement for the Class of 2010—"to educate, train, and inspire men and women to become officers of character, motivated to lead the United States Air Force in service to our nation"²⁶—

²⁶ Mission statement taken from official webpage of the US Air Force Academy, accessed at <http://www.usafa.af.mil/index.cfm?catname=Academy%20Info>.

comes closer to meeting that mark. The mission statement for the class of 2040 is likely to be closer still.

I maintain that the Academy experience not only made us better leaders than we otherwise would have been, it also made us better *people*, regardless of the professions that we ultimately chose. USAFA enhanced our values, our standards, and our overall way of thinking—not just about our nation and its Air Force, but about how we should interact with our fellow human beings. USAFA further gave us a profound understanding that most meaningful achievements require hard work, and a solid foundation for meeting the unknown challenges of the future; as a result of our Academy experience, most of us don't rattle too easily when faced with stress. The story of the Class of 1977 is the combination of hundreds of individual success stories, and the Academy played a significant role in many of those accomplishments. My guess is that would also have been true for the Class of 1959, and that it will be true as well for the Class of 2010—and that it will continue to be the case as long as this Academy exists. The great, enduring value of USAFA cannot be quantified, and yet the value is there—just as certainly as the steel, aluminum, and granite blend together to form the lasting structures of the Cadet Area. The key elements that make up the ethos of USAFA are not physical—and those are the elements that will forever make the graduates of this institution a worthy match for its mountains.

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Views or opinions expressed or implied in this publication are those of the author and are not construed as carrying official sanction of the Department of the Air Force or of the United States Air Force Academy.

We would like to thank the USAFA Associations of Graduates for their continued support of the Harmon Memorial Lecture in Military History.