

REPORT CONCERNING THE WEST POINT ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATES ANNUAL LEADERS CONFERENCE – 13 AUGUST THROUGH 15 AUGUST 2009

As usual, the conference took place during Reorganization Week and over the Acceptance Day weekend. After attending the various meetings and briefings, as well as wandering around the Post, I came away with the following information.

LTG (Ret) Ted Stroup, '62, led off the conference. He gave an overview of his vision for the WPAOG, which remains to be a premier alumni association serving graduates and the most valued partner of USMA. Following Ted members of the West Point Staff and Faculty spoke.

The Superintendent, LTG Franklin L. "Buster" Hagenbeck '71 talked about the current state of affairs at West Point. He stated that:

1. The Class of 2009 graduated 970 new 2nd Lieutenants on 23 May 2009. Infantry was the branch most requested. About 15% of this class elected to serve an additional three years on active duty (for a total of eight) and by doing this were assured of their choice of Branch. Another group of graduates elected to serve an additional three years in return for guaranteed graduate (Masters Degree) schooling after completing eight years of active service. Because of these Active Duty Service Obligation (ADSO) extensions the Army expects that the Class of 2009 will retain at least 60% of the class out to the eight year service mark. That's pretty close to what is expected to be the point where most officers decide that a 20+ year career in the Army is what they want. This is good news for the Army and indicates that the drain of junior officers will start to slow down at some point in the near future. As an aside, I have attended many briefings concerning these ADSO programs and the extension option has been on the table now for at least the last five graduating classes. I believe that the first of these classes (2004) is already serving their additional ADSO time so retention rates for junior officer should be trending up (at least for West Point graduates) very soon.
2. The cultural education programs (semester abroad and AIAD's in the summer (Academic Individual Advance Development) in which cadets go overseas, are really beginning to help the Army. Our graduates are much more culturally aware than they were several years ago and in today's military environment this is very important. The interaction of our junior officer graduates with the local populations in Iraq and Afghanistan is critical to our success in these countries.
3. USMA graduates are being promoted to Major (O-4) at rates exceeding all other sources of commissioning. Normal promotion to Major is less than 10 years of full service time as an officer. I am aware of a below the zone Major from the class of 2001 who made it to Major in eight years.
4. The Class of 2013 entered on R-Day (29 June 2009) with 1,304 New Cadets. There were 18 international students in this total, from countries who send their students to USMA and pay for their education. The average SAT score (Math and Critical Reading – USMA does not use the Critical Writing part of the SAT score in making

candidate evaluations) was 1264 out of a maximum of 1600. 51 of these New Cadets separated from West Point during Beast Barracks.

5. For the first time that anyone can remember the Army was not able to supply an active duty task force unit to train cadets at West Point during the summer. The upper class cadet cadre had to fulfill that role, augmented by officers from the staff and faculty at USMA. USMA is fortunate to have a large pool of junior officer instructors who have returned to their Alma Mater with extensive recent field combat experience. These officers have been right in the thick of things advising and training the cadre. The reports about the performance of the upper class cadets in conducting summer New Cadet and Buckner training was very positive.
6. The rising Firsties are now going through a program named “Cadet Leader Development Training” for approximately three weeks in the summer. This year 2/3 of the Class of 2010 participated. By next summer the entire class of new Firsties will be in this program. You may have heard this training described before as a mini-ranger training session. It’s much more than that. Iraqi Americans are participating in the training. It’s as realistic as USMA can make it so that our soon to graduate cadets begin to appreciate the role they will have when they enter into the Army and are deployed. There is one Army officer or NCO assigned for every five Firstie cadets, so all cadets in the program are constantly being observed. Almost all of the three week session is conducted in the field, living at a Forward Operating Base (FOB). The Department of Military Instruction (DMI) at West Point was in charge of this training.
7. Back to AIAD’s. The Supe mentioned that these summer sessions, which this year included over 500 cadets going abroad for a three week period, and included 138 cadets participating in a semester abroad program during the past academic year, were all funded by private dollars raised by the West Point Association of Graduates. Our donations through the WPAOG on behalf of cadets are having a major impact on the cadet abroad experience.
8. You have probably seen the Forbes report (August 24, 2009 issue) that rated West Point as “America’s Best College”, i.e., #1 in the nation. Less widely reported were some other reports/rankings. The Supe mentioned that the Princeton Review puts our facilities in the top 5% of all colleges in the world. If you have not been back to USMA in several years you are in for a treat when you do return. All the new facilities of the past decade, taken together, will knock your socks off. The latest, of course, is Jefferson Hall, the new Library Building. I’ll comment more about the new library later in this letter.
9. During New Cadet Training (Beast Barracks) two Army Physical Fitness Tests (APFT) are administered. The first test (strictly diagnostic) is given during the first week of Beast. This year 41% of the entering New Cadets failed this first APFT. According to the Supe, that’s just a sign of the times today, with students coming into the academy not completely physically prepared by either their prior schooling or individual effort. However, all that PT (physical training) in the early morning at

Beast does pay off. By the end of Beast, when the New Cadets were given the APFT for record scoring, 95% of the class passed. Be glad you are not in the remaining 5% as they are in for a bit of remedial training with the friendly folks over at the Department of Physical Education (DPE – the “Department with a Heart”) and they will have to pass the APFT to remain as cadets.

10. In discussing other changes on post the Superintendent mentioned the “RCI” or Residential Community Initiative. This is an eight year program that was started last year. Under this Army wide program all Quarters housing at West Point has been privatized. A private company now controls all Quarters facilities and maintains them. New quarters are being constructed in the old Stony Lonesome I Quarters area, which was completely demolished, with the construction of the new buildings there already well underway. Once the new quarters are completed there will be about 140 fewer sets of quarters available on post so that does cause some stress in the staff and faculty coming in during each summer. There are some officers who, along with their families, now have to locate private housing off post. Under RCI the officer gives up their Basic Allowance for Housing (which is paid as rent for the quarters in question) and the private entity does the maintenance of the buildings. I stayed on post during the conference week and can report that the family with whom I stayed was pleased with the change that has taken place. They told me that the private company has taken over the mowing of their front yard and does clear the snow off the sidewalks during the winter, things that were not done before under government ownership. Also, so far, the response to problems requiring maintenance has been quite good.
11. Also mentioned was the Office of the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics (ODIA). The Supe stated that our current Federal Budget problems have impacted our athletic department. ODIA is looking at reducing sports operating costs somehow. Thoughts are to confine our athletic contests to schools that are located in the Northeast US more often so that there is less travel cost involved. Another potential area in which costs may be contained would be by having fewer coaches or assistant coaches for our teams. This is an ongoing evaluation and there will be more to follow on this subject as the year progresses.
12. Finally, the Supe reported that the branding issue of using the words “WEST POINT” vs. “USMA” has been a success. As you know, the web site for West Point is now <http://www.westpoint.edu>. The old site of <http://www.usma.edu> also exists but the academy is using West Point to identify itself as far as possible.

That’s it for the Superintendent. Now on to the Commandant, BG Michael Linnington ‘80

13. The Comm told us that the New Cadets had been moved back to Lake Frederick for their final Beast Barracks encampment this year. The past few years they had been staying at Camp Buckner. This led to an increase in length of the final road march coming back from Beast. This year the road march was 13.5 miles.
14. The Commandant felt that it was best to equip our New Cadets with the latest Army equipment. So, he went to the Department of the Army and stated his case. In the

- past Cadets were armed with M-16 rifles during Beast. This year they were outfitted with the current M-4 carbine and all the other new combat equipment soldiers are using when they are deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. There is nothing the soldiers of the Army are using in small units that our New Cadets have not experienced. They were fully equipped with all the modern stuff used by our field forces.
15. Speaking of rifles, the marksmanship training of the New Cadets this year was taught by upper class cadets. It was a great success. Also, the New Cadets fired hundreds and hundreds of rounds through their weapons. There was both day and night firing. The complete marksmanship training took place over 4-5 days, not the 1 – 2 days that was devoted to this subject in the past. The Comm said that we would not recognize this type of marksmanship training any more. No more “Ready on the right, Ready on the left, Ready on the firing line” commands. These New Cadets are very well qualified with small unit weapons. The training was intense and extensive.
 16. The New Cadets also trained in fundamental army skills. I mentioned Marksmanship but First Aid, Land Navigation, and Communications were also emphasized. Again, cadets taught cadets. A marvelous teaching experience for the upper classes.
 17. This Summer for Cadet Troop Leader Training (CTLT – or AOT for older grads) there were 909 cadets placed with CONUS units and another 62 cadets placed with overseas units.
 18. The Comm added to the Supe’s comments about CTLT (the Firstie field training). He stated that every Firstie cadet had an opportunity to lead, at least 3 to 4 times. Firsties were sent out on intense four day missions in platoon size units. NCO’s from the Army were available to mentor these units. The exercises were designed to get harder and harder for a leader if a leader screwed up during the exercise. Once the four day exercise was over the cadets were brought back to their FOB for a day or two of down time, similar to what our troops are experiencing in combat today.
 19. The Honor and Respect programs were each individually addressed by members of the Commandant’s Staff. With respect to Honor it was mentioned that, on average, about 120 potential honor cases arise each year. About 65 are finally brought to an honor board. The goal is to complete action in each case within 40 days. If a cadet is found guilty of an honor violation the matter is sent to the Superintendent, who can, if he decides to do so, grant discretion and retain the cadet. About 55% of the cases forwarded to the Supe result in discretion being granted, with the “Found Cadet” being mentored over a six month period under the watchful eyes of the academy.
 20. The Department of Military Instruction (DMI) falls under the control of the Commandant. He stated that DMI teaches one semester of military instruction to Plebes, Yearlings, and Cows. This is only taught in one semester, not both. Cadets are taught to solve complex tactical problems that arise at Platoon level. The Commandant has cautioned that there are a couple of principals that must be followed in conducting this training. First, instructors and cadets must say it in English. No jargon. The commandant’s rule for this is to ask: “Could you explain this to your

mother on the telephone.” Second, instructors cannot show or provide an approved solution. If there is an approved solution shown, there must be at least two (or preferably more) solutions given and they must really be very different from each other. The idea is to get the cadets to really think rather than try to outwit the instructor and somehow present a method to reach a canned approved solution.

21. Finally the Commandant stated that the Class of 2012 (presently Yearlings) will scramble as rising Cows. That means they will be reassigned next summer to different cadet companies for the remaining two years of their time at West Point.

Now, on to the Dean, BG Patrick Finnegan '71.

22. The Dean mentioned that the goal of the academic departments is to have roughly a 50-50 split between the Math, Science, Engineering Majors and Humanities/Social Science Majors selected by cadets. We are running close as we presently have 52% Humanities/Social Science (Liberal Arts) vs. 48% Math, Science Engineering. By the way, that's why US News & World Report ranks West Point as the #1 Public Liberal Arts College in the nation. A little over 50% of our graduates have that type of Major, so our institution is placed in that rankings group.
23. The Dean told us that cadets really need Math, Science, Engineering training and used an OC (Officer in Charge) report from 5 August 2009 to help plant this thought in our mind. Generally speaking the OC report went along these lines: “Was called to the Cadet Area in the early evening after a report that an elevator was stuck in one of the buildings. Upon arrival discovered the elevator contained 12 cadets and 10 large pieces of luggage, causing the elevator to be severely overweight, thus causing it to become stuck. Called the maintenance department and arranged for workers to come out and they eventually were able to release the cadets, but the elevator could not be repaired until the next day.” I could not copy the full OC report as it was too much to grasp in such a short time on the screen but the Dean made his point. Cadets have to understand engineering principals and this was a case in point. Don't ask me where you can find an elevator in the cadet barracks but that was the OC report.
24. The Dean brought a panel of Math, Science, and Engineering instructors, 2009 graduates, and current cadets to talk to us. It was outstanding. Complicated, but outstanding. The bottom line is that cadets are now working on projects that have real meaning for our Army. One cadet was deeply involved in a project that could identify, by chemical composition and smell, Improvised Explosive Devices in the field. Another group of cadets has developed a method of allowing a gun turret on an up-armored Hummer to be accurately traversed by the gunner while maintaining his hands on the mounted machine gun. This device/solution has been sent to the Army for immediate fielding in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of the descriptions of projects that are currently being studied were almost beyond comprehension, however, I can say that real world things are now being studied by cadets, not just some old case study in a book somewhere. These are not the academics departments of even a decade ago. You can really appreciate, after listening to the things described, why Forbes has designated West Point as “America's Best College”.

25. The old library will start renovation to become a Laser lab/science facility soon. Start date is in September, 2009, and running through September, 2011. That's the first phase of a multi-phase redevelopment of the building.

Next, the football Coach, Rich Ellerson, spoke to our group. Coach said the following:

26. When he arrived he brought in a good staff. He arrived right in the middle of the recent recruiting season with a whole new game plan. That made for interesting discussions with recruited athletes.
27. The Pac-10 (the area in which he was previously located) does not present an attractive recruiting target for West Point. It's too distant but, moreover, schools out there follow a completely different game plan than we will use and the high school candidates in that area are focused on that game plan.
28. Coach will not recruit a player to play just one position. Multi-position players mean that players can play more often.
29. Coach had to insist that his players sleep so that they could maintain strength. He told them to "turn off the computer, get rid of Facebook", etc. He wants the players to become leaner, stronger, and smarter. He also told them, "It's easier to pass calculus if you can remain awake in class."
30. Coach had to cut some players from the team who just did not fit into the new triple option game plan.
31. During the summer we usually see team members lose speed and strength. This year we reversed that trend and came back stronger and leaner.
32. Coach says we want the following to be true: "When we win, don't let anyone say it's an upset. We play to win every time."
33. Concerning a Quarterback the coach said he really could not yet tell who can get the team up and down the field until he starts playing actual games. We seem to be OK in the QB area as we have a new plebe contending for a starting position, a Cow (Chip Bowden) who ran the offense last season, and Carson Williams (a returning Firstie who has been a starter since his plebe year).
34. We are looking for a different football recruit than other schools. Coach said that: "We'll look funny getting off the bus but, we'll look great getting off the ball." Some coaches think it's great to have a 17 year old player who weighs 300 pounds. Coach does not agree with this.
35. Bottom line is win, and win this season, not next year.

Bob McClure '76, President of the West Point Association of Graduates added these comments:

36. We have 47,481 living graduates of the Long Gray Line.
37. The mid-point of the living graduates is in the Class of 1985.
38. The Long Gray Line Endowment, which supports operations at the Association of Graduates is currently at \$21.3 Million. That's down from slightly over \$30 Million last year, before the stock market took a nose dive. At this size the endowment provides about 1/5 of the annual operating income of your alumni association. We must do better and increase the Long Gray Line Endowment. Stay tuned for more later.

Colonel Craig Flowers, the Director of the Directorate of Cadet Activities (DCA) was our last speaker. He added:

39. DCA supports the cadet extracurricular clubs. There are 116 at the moment. DCA has \$500,000 in monthly salaries to meet. He is the only military person in DCA with 300 civilian employees.
40. Of the 116 clubs, 26 are sports teams. Two of the clubs are a big draw at events and they are the Glee Club and the Sports Parachute Team.
41. 247,000 sandwiches were sold in Grant Hall last year. He controls nine restaurants at West Point, with all profits going to support Cadet Activities.
42. WPAOG supplies approximately 50% of the operating income of DCA through solicited donations. The remaining money is raised through DCA operations.
43. At Eisenhower Hall this year there is a season of eleven different performances. Cadets can select seven of these to attend for free and must pay \$1 each to attend the remaining four.
44. DCA has been able to reduce the Cadet Activities Fee paid by all cadets in the past few years. It stands at \$250 per year at the moment.

Finally, let me add two additional comments of my own.

45. Jefferson Hall, the new library, is just gorgeous, and I really mean that in the sense that it is beautiful. The exterior of the building is truly classy and the interior is stupendous. I took a library sponsored tour and talked to the librarian during the tour. The library was designed to accommodate 800 cadets at any given time. Guess what, it's full every evening. Cadets have to make electronic reservations most evenings to use the place. What a change from previous years during which there were very few cadets in the old library. Frankly, the new library is conducive to studying and that's why cadets use the place so much. Also, there is a coffee bar (almost a Starbucks) in a separate room off the lobby that is very well frequented by cadets. The entire library is wired for all types of computer usage. There are, however, only three hard

wired computers in place (on the second floor by the main desk) which are available for public/cadet usage. Every cadet now has (and has had for a long time) their own wireless laptop and those are used extensively in the library. The Alexander Haig room, on the top floor is the best reception facility that I have seen at West Point. And the view from up there on top is wonderful. During military reviews on the Plain, however, the library is closed to prevent folks from crowding the windows to watch the ceremonies.

46. Of interest to me was the change in summer training. The class of 2009 had its graduation date moved up a week at the beginning of their first class year. That made for interesting scrambling by parents as they revised their graduation week reservations. The purpose of this change was to free up additional time for cadet summer military training. By 2010 the summer will be broken into three sessions of about three weeks each. Modifications to the training schedule have been made each of the past two summers as the academy moves towards this goal. Current military training is the watchword for graduating cadets. The academy is much more actual army oriented than in past years. It shows through in the attitudes of the cadets. They are focused on what they are going to do after graduation.

Your academy is beautiful and vibrant. Cadets are immersed in real world studies that are absolutely first class. The Physical Development program run by the Master of the Sword (I talked to him during my visit) in the new Arvin Gym (a world class facility) is first class. Military subject matter is current Army doctrine and training. West Point has earned the distinction of being “America’s Best College” through hard work of the staff and faculty and the placement of brand new facilities (many of which were privately funded) all over the post. What was being taught at the Academy just ten years ago has gone through a thorough metamorphosis. If you graduated earlier than the class of 2005 or 2006 you would not recognize what cadet life is like today. The changes over the past few years have been astonishing, and have been done with one purpose in mind – Provide the Army with superior 2nd Lieutenants who are leaders of character.

All the best to you.

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