

A History of the Cups of the Class of 1963

In our senior year, John Borling was chair of the Class Committee, which was comprised of one classmate from each of the 24 squadrons. John proposed that we buy silver cups for each of our classmates. The inspiration for this project came from the Doolittle Raider cups. In 1959, the year we entered the Academy, General Doolittle gave the 80 cups—one for each member of the famed WWII mission—to the Air Force Academy for safe keeping, and they were displayed in Arnold Hall. In 2005 the surviving members gave their cups to the Air Force Museum in Dayton, OH.



**John Borling, Chairman (seated third from left and
Jim Diffendorfer, Class President (to his left)**

(For more on the history of the Doolittle cups, including the disappearance of their cognac bottle in 1971, see Appendix A.)

The Fall of 1962 saw some heated discussions over the expense of the cup proposal because each cup was about \$3; however, the proposal passed. In the Spring of '63, John and Marv Odefey, the class treasurer, went to Denver to pick up enough of the three-inch tall, sterling silver cups (Gorham Model 951) for our entire class.



Each cup had been engraved with the initials of a classmate. On June 5, 1963 we graduated 499 men, most of whom went into the Air Force.

For the next 30 years, the cups had a literal “Dark Age.” They were stored in cardboard boxes in the basements of various Academy buildings. One memorable cup story comes from our 10th reunion in 1973. Our classmates, Jerry Driscoll and John Borling—and all the other POWs—had been released in the spring of that year. During the reunion, John, and his wife Myrna, retrieved and polished all of the cups by themselves. For the next 20 years, there were a few, small toasting ceremonies. But, there were no class-wide events as we know them today.

In the 1990’s, our cups had a major renaissance. The committee for the 30th reunion, under the leadership of Jimmie Butler, decided to display all the cups during the banquet.

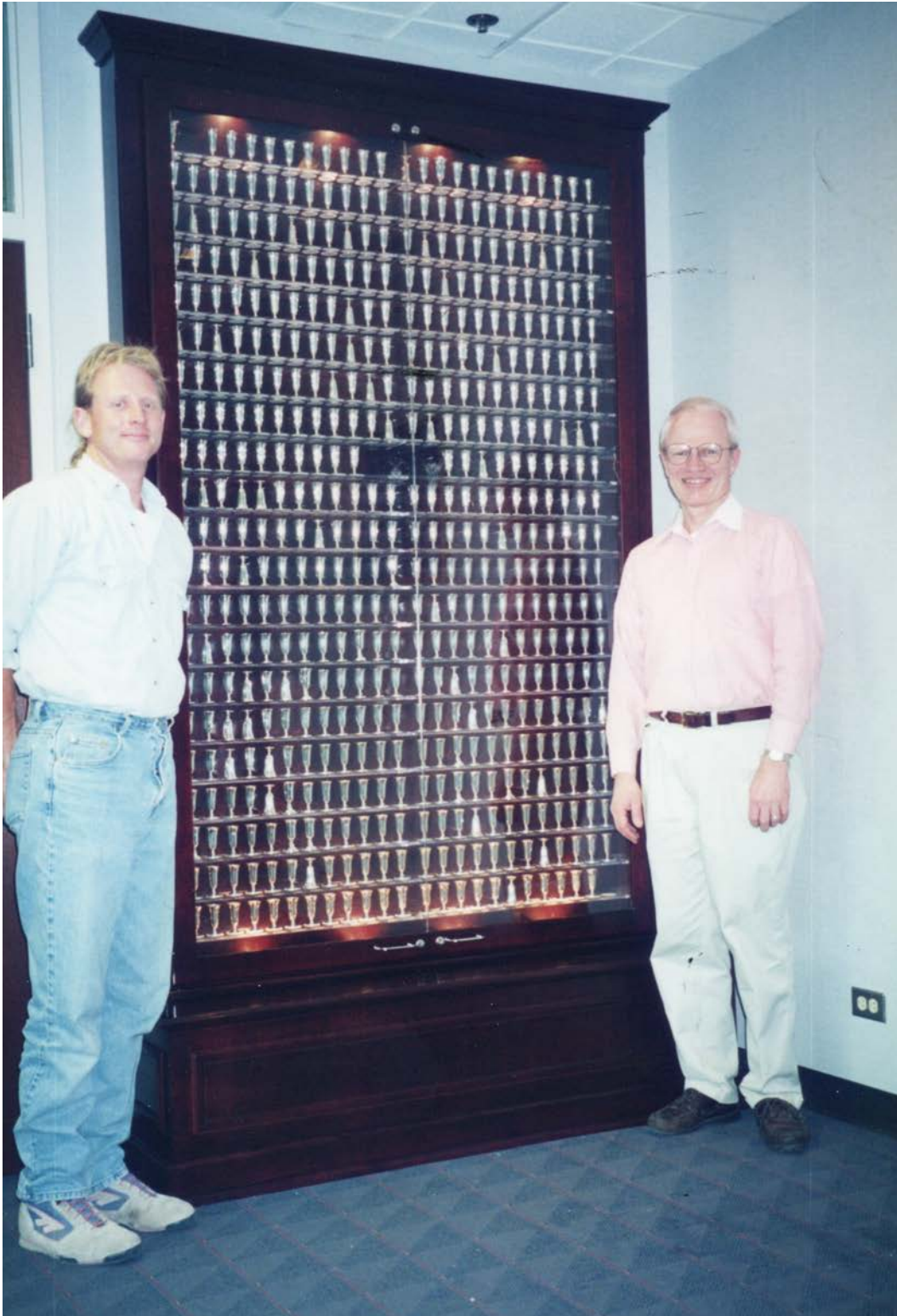
Jim Gaston led the project. He inventoried the cups and found that 22 were missing from the 499 cups of those who had graduated. Then Jim, and his wife Jo, polished the rest, and they were displayed at the banquet. That display in 1993 started a serious discussion about the future of the cups

Two years later, in June of 1995, Jim Diffendorfer, our class president, wrote a letter to the entire class proposing to build a cabinet for the cups. It would be situated in the AOG president's office, in the recently completed Doolittle Hall. For our 30th reunion, we had given a gift of \$50K to the AOG's building fund, so we had leverage for a good location. By August, Diff had enough positive responses, and he authorized Jim Gaston to have the cabinet built.

That December, Jim received a bid from a young, local carpenter named Doug Logue to design, build, and install the cabinet—for slightly less than \$7,500. Only four months later, in April of 1996, the cabinet was installed in Doolittle Hall. The cherry wood cabinet has glass doors etched with the Academy and Class crests.



Cabinet installed in the AOG president's office, 1996



Doug Logue and Jim Gaston in 1996

An eye-level, silver plaque inside the cabinet identifies the Class of 1963 and contains this phrase from the *Air Force Song*: “We drink to those who gave their all of old” In the display, the cups of all living classmates are upright, while the cups of those who have died are inverted. The cups rest on acrylic shelves which are etched, on the front edge, with the name of the cup owner.

For the 35th reunion two years later, the committee of locals, still under Jimmie’s leadership, created the Cup Turning Ceremony (CTC) for major (five-year) reunions as we know them today. It was held in the Cadet Chapel for the first time. The heart of the ceremony is a roll call for the deceased. As each name is called, this answer is given: “Absent, Sir.” Then a classmate turns over the cup of the deceased, steps back, and salutes. At the major reunions, all classmates present toast from their own cups. John Borling wanted to use cognac for the toast in 1998, but Jimmie did not think the Academy would approve using cognac in the chapel. John made it happen, and the Borling’s have donated all the cognac we have used for the CTCs since then.



A Cup Turning Ceremony in the Cadet Chapel. For several reunions, the Cadet Chorale sang hymns, and individual members of the Chorale gave the responses to the roll call.



For the 1998 reunion, Gordon and Dian Bredvik and Stinky and Karen Steinbrink created a team of local classmates and spouses to polish all the cups before the event and to clean them afterwards. They also developed a process to have each classmate in attendance pick up his own cognac-filled cup from a table at the back of the chapel. After the toast, they returned the empty cup to the table. At major reunions we toast all who have died in the past five years. That tradition has continued every five years since then.



Dan Dietz and Drue DeBerry looking for their cups to make the toast at the 50th reunion in 2013

Also, in the early 90's, local classmates started gathering for tailgate parties before football games, and they grew into mini-reunions as out-of-town classmates started joining the weekend.



Pre game tailgate in a Falcon Stadium parking lot

After the cups became readily available in '96, Butch Verdier and Bob Hayes—and others—started Cup Turning Ceremonies during these annual mini-reunions. At these events, we turned the cups of classmates who had died during the previous twelve months.

In 2009, things began to change. After the 45th reunion In 2008, Jim Diffendorfer created the 50th Reunion Gift Committee, chaired by Mick Roth. A major focus of the envisioned gift was “History and Heritage.” As part of that theme, we wanted to ensure a permanent, prominent, and more public place for our cup display. Denny King (then our class VP) and others worked closely with then Superintendent, John Regni, to find the best location. On March 30th, 2009, Lt. Gen Regni suggested two places in Arnold Hall: one near the auditorium steps where portraits of the Superintendents now hang, and the other along the hallway overlooking the ballroom. Mick Roth and John Borling met with the Superintendent, and the latter site was chosen.

An important story from this time involves President John F. Kennedy. He was the first president to speak at an Air Force Academy graduation, and Mick Roth, who had been our Cadet Wing Commander, had presented him with a diploma making him an honorary classmate on June 5, 1963. On June 29th of 2009, the Gift Committee met in the AOG’s president’s office. That summer, Lou Matjasko, our Class Historian, had found a matching Gorham 951 cup

on eBay. At that meeting, Mick placed that unmarked cup in the lower right corner of the cabinet. Later, the cup was engraved with the initials “JFK,” and the president was permanently reunited with our class.



Mick Roth placing President's Kennedy's cup into the cabinet in 2009

The primary purpose of the June meeting was to discuss the mechanics of moving the cup cabinet from the AOG president's office in Doolittle Hall to the new location in Arnold Hall. In addition to moving the cabinet, Doug Logue built a new display case to hold a crystal bottle of Gallo XO brandy, two cups for the final survivors, and another cup for an imaginary classmate named Nino Baldacci (who has still not graduated). An Audubon portrait of a Gyrfalcon, which the class had given to the Academy for our 35th reunion in 1993, was added to the display area.



King, Hayes, Roth, Thompson (AOG president) Borling, Matjasko, DeBerry toasting the agreement to move to Arnold Hall

With those details resolved, the physical move of the cabinet to Arnold Hall was completed three months later—led, again, by Jim Gaston and Doug Logue—with the help of many local classmates. The first cup turning ceremony in this new location was held during the mini reunion of 2010.



The cup display in its new home in Arnold Hall

Over the years, the 22 missing cups identified by Jim Gaston back in 1993 had been replaced by a variety of similar cups, but not the Gorham 951 model. Lou Matjasko volunteered to find more of the original model cups so that the display in the new location would be uniform. After he succeeded, Denny King had them engraved before the move.



Lou Matjasko in Arnold Hall in front of the Brandy cabinet and Gyr Falcon

At the 2010 ceremony, the Academy ring of our classmate, Pat Wynne, was added to a shelf inside the cup cabinet. Pat had been shot down over North Vietnam in 1966, taken in by a Chinese family, and died in their care. They kept his class ring and in 2008 gave it to Herbert Schaffner, an American businessman who, while working in China, married a Chinese woman. She happened to be the niece of a man who had been a small boy in the family that cared for Pat. The ring was returned to Pat's family. At our 50th reunion in 2013, Pat's brother, Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne, made a formal presentation of the ring to our class. (See Appendix B)



Pat Wynne's ring returned 42 years after his death in RVN

From 2010 to 2024, we had two major reunions (50th and 55th) with Cup Turning Ceremonies in the Cadet Chapel. Bob Hayes also organized several annual mini-reunions with CTCs. These usually occurred at the Golf Course Clubhouse—until Covid hit in 2020.

In 2021 and again in 2022, Bill Ball, Gil Merkle, and Vic Thacker organized Zoom CTC gatherings which had classmates and NOKs participating from their homes throughout the country. The format for these Zoom gatherings had many of the features of the CTCs held in the Chapel, including music (recorded, of course). Because the program was on Zoom, Gil could orchestrate an invocation from New York, the roll call from Colorado Springs, the response from Denver, and the cups being turned by Bill Ball in his living room in Colorado Springs. Gil also added squadron breakout rooms after the CTC was over. In them, classmates could “meet” with squadron mates and NOKs to socialize and give eulogies.

Then for the 60th reunion in 2023, we returned to the normal program of events for a major reunion—except that the Chapel was under repair, and the Cup Turning Ceremony was held in the Arnold Hall auditorium.

In 2024, the CTC was once again held in Arnold Hall in front of the cup display; but it was also live streamed to interested classmates and NOKs. This time the Association of Graduates (AOG) helped us with the broadcast.



Phil Tate and Jim Hannam at the 2024 CTC

In 2025 the CTC will again be held at the cup location in Arnold Hall and streamed live. Then in 2026, we will interrupt the normal sequence of events and hold a “major” reunion for the 63rd anniversary of our graduation. The cups will be used not only to honor the deceased during the CTC, but also during the banquet to honor our collective achievements. The plan is to start the first toast at 1963 hours on June 5th.

As for the future starting in 2027, we plan to have a Cup Turning Ceremony every year (with the help of the AOG) until there are only two surviving graduates, who will then open the crystal bottle of Gallo XO Brandy and give a final toast to the class.

In conclusion, of the 66 classes that have graduated from the Air Force Academy, we are the only one that has cups for all of its members. Separately, the value of an individual cup would diminish over time. However, together— in one place—the cups will always represent us, our bond, and 500 men dedicated to serving the country in a myriad of ways.

As Of: January 2024

**Louis S. Matjasko
Class Historian**

**Jimmie H. Butler
Class Photographer**

**Victor L. Thacker, PhD
Class President**

APPENDIX A
(Includes story of a mishap at the Academy in 1971)

How Tucson goblets became Doolittle's Raiders toast

Arizona Daily Star Nov 11, 2013 Updated Apr 18, 2017

A set of 80 engraved silver goblets presented to “Doolittle’s Raiders” at their 17th annual reunion, held here in 1959, has become part of an exhibit at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

Army Lt. Col. James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle led an armada of 16 B-25 bombers on an attack on Tokyo and other Japanese cities on April 18, 1942, taking off from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Hornet.

The retaliatory attack was designed to “bring home” to the Japanese people the effects of World War II following the surprise attack by Japanese planes on Pearl Harbor five months earlier in Hawaii.

Eighty volunteers manned the planes; 73 of them survived the raid and its aftermath. Each year thereafter, they arranged a reunion. In 1959 they selected Tucson as the site for the get-together, in part because of the major roles Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, bomber construction in Tucson and pilot training at Marana played in the war.

In preparation for the gathering, the Tucson Sunshine Climate Club – forerunner of the Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau - decided to present the survivors with a special gift: a set of 80 silver goblets, each engraved with the name of a Doolittle’s Raider.

They were designed to serve as a “last man” memento, survivors each year honoring those who had died until only two remain. At that point, they are to open a bottle of 1896-vintage (Doolittle’s year of birth) Hennessy VSOP Cognac.

Tucsonans directly involved in the goblet project included Climate Club director Chuck Arnold; department store owner Leon Levy, who arranged

procurement of the goblets at cost; and Ben Schermerhorn of Lumber Distributors Inc., who fashioned the wooden case for them.

The veterans group has seen to it that the goblets are shipped wherever their annual reunion is held, and arranged for them to be placed on display at the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colo., when they are not in use.

Unfortunately, in 1971, while the display was at the Academy, someone filched the bottle of cognac. “It’s not the brightest moment in Air Force Academy history,” said Col. Mark Wells, head of the Academy’s history department, in a 2004 Citizen interview.

He added that Doolittle, who died in September 1993 at age 96, took the missing cognac situation in stride, commenting at the time, “If I’d have been a cadet, I’d have probably stolen it, too.”

The 1971 graduating class of cadets replaced the purloined bottle with another of the same vintage, along with a letter of apology to Doolittle.

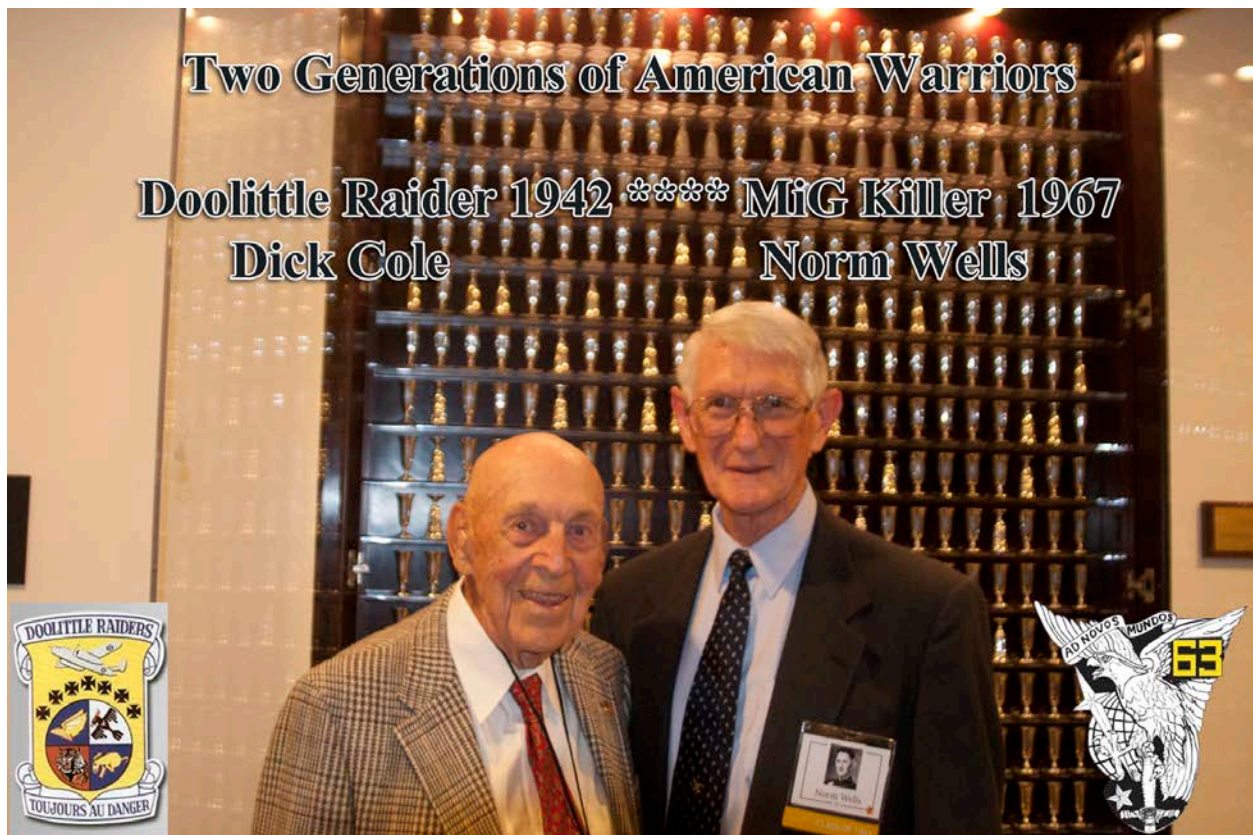
Today, 16 of the 80 raiders survive, and eight of them attended this year’s reunion at Wright-Patterson – the 64th anniversary of the historic raid.

Retired Lt. Col. Dick Cole, Doolittle’s co-pilot during the raid on Japan, made the formal presentation of the goblets to the museum, and quipped during the ceremony, “I’ve been wondering who the other guy is going to be to enjoy the bottle of cognac.”

The goblets will be displayed alongside a B-25 bomber at the museum, where more than 1 million visitors a year will have an opportunity to view them.

Tucson can be proud of having contributed what has become a poignant and lasting memorial to the sacrifice and dedication of a previous generation of American military volunteers.

Lt. Col. Dick Cole and his daughter attended our 50th reunion. She had planned to marry our classmate, Bob Gilchrist, when Bob came home after 100 missions. However, on his 98th sortie Bob was killed in action. She received the wedding rings Bob had purchased in Thailand the day after she received the notification of his being MIA.



Dick Cole with our classmate Norm Wells taken during our 50th reunion in 2013.

APPENDIX B

Story of the return of Pat's Ring

By

Herbert G. Schaffner

The Ring of a Fallen Soldier: Patrick Edward Wynne

Objective/Purpose: To honor the service and memory of Patrick Edward Wynne and to return this personal item to his family.

Background: My name is Herbert G. Schaffner, son of Herbert Joseph Schaffner, a Vietnam vet who resides in Cold Spring, KY. This is my story of how the ring of a fallen American soldier came into my possession.

The company I work for, Consortium Companies, Inc. 1438 Cox Ave, Erlanger, KY 41018, Ph: 859-647-9910 began a Joint-Venture operation in Southern China, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, in 2005.

In August of 2007 I relocated to this Southern China office, serving as Director of Information Technology. While there I met and married a wonderful Chinese woman. We recently attended a family gathering at the family home in the very southern part of China. While there her uncle shared a family story he personally remembered and had discussed within their family many times. This is the story my wife translated to me as her uncle told it.

Story from Chinese Family: Our family lived in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, but we are Chinese citizens. During this time it was too difficult to feed our family as we were farmers. That is the reason we relocated to North Vietnam. During this time the war between South and North Vietnam started, we were all scared.

Sometime in late summer 1966 American jets were flying over our area. There was a fire in the distance which we knew must have been a shot down plane. My father went to investigate and found an American pilot badly injured. My family took the injured pilot back to the village where he was cared for.

We tried to do all we could to save the pilot's life but was not successful. I was only a small boy at this time. Later the North Vietnam military would not allow Chinese to stay in Vietnam. They forced us to march our family back to China.

The pilot had a ring on his finger that was kept by my father. We did not know what to do with the ring, but kept it. My father gave me this ring more than 25 years ago. For years I tried to find out that this ring belonged to, but had no means to do so as we could not speak or read English. I found translator to help me find out the name of the person on this ring; the inscription reads: Patrick Edward Wynne. I then took the ring to the US Consulate in Guangzhou where they would not or could not help me locate any family members.

When my niece married the American man, I asked him if he was able to help. He was more than happy to do all he could. He quickly identified the ring as an Air Force Academy ring with a 1963 graduation date. He kept this ring in a safe place until he was able to travel back to the United States and that is the end of my story.

I wish only the best to the family of Patrick Edward Wynne and hope they find peace and may God Bless them all and the man who helped us get this ring back to his family. Thank you and I have finished my wish.

The Chinese family has asked to remain anonymous.