

Synopsis of a Cadet's Journey Through the USAFA Experience

By Joe Lee Burns, Col, AF, Ret - Class of 1963

* Jun 1959 – Jun 1963

United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, CO

Nominated by Jim Wright Congressman to attend United States Air Force Academy as a 'qualified alternate' and selected by athletic department.

Tough summer. Very homesick. *Missed my baby sisters.* Tough year.

The strict harsh military training was balanced by the sports activities.

In fact, the teamwork and sacrifice of playing sports made 'survival' of the 'boot camp' training MUCH easier.

Jlb5 – During part of the BCT I roomed with Nino Balducci. He seemed un-phased by upperclassmen. Always in trouble and with a big grin on his face. Hey!! Maybe he's the reason you heard a harsh voice in the hallway shout, "MISTER, Wipe that Smile off your face!!" He got moved to a different BCT squadron and I didn't see him much after that. (Legend)

Finally got to come home to Fort Worth in late July 1960 after over a year away from home.

Made freshman football and baseball teams.

The academic classes in math and physics were challenging.

That summer of 1960 I got a dollar or gee whiz 30 minute flight in a T-33 at Peterson Field. *Jlb6 - T-33A "Shooting Star" - a 2 seat trainer version of the F-80 Korean War fighter.*

Summer of 1960 - CONUS field trip – Sister Services and Air Force Major Commands

(SAC/MAC/TAC/SysCom *CONUS - CONTinental United States; SAC - Strategic Air Command (bombers); MAC - Military Airlift Command (cargo haulers); TAC - Tactical Air Command (fighters); AFSC - Air Force Systems Command (research and development, procurement, etc.)* – **Sister Services:** Ft Bragg, NC, Ft Benning, GA, Davis-Monthan AFB, AZ Grave yard for old AF planes, North Island Naval Base, CA (4 days on a destroyer). (We were broken up into 2 or 3 groups to cycle around the CONUS)

Very glad I am **Air Force** and NOT **Army** or **Navy**!!!!!! Somewhere in here, my Mother learned to drive.

*** Jun 12, 1960**

Bethesda, Maryland

AF Systems Command, Bolling AFB, MD - *AFB - Air Force Base*

Gee Whiz stuff in R & D. - *Research and Development*

***Jun 15, 1960**

Ft Bragg, NC

4 days of infantry/airborne training intro, Army Special Ops School intro (Got to load, aim, and fire live M40 Recoilless Rifle at tank target!!)

Night and day artillery/infantry firepower demonstrations – impressive!

***Jun 20, 1960**

Ft Benning, GA

4 days of infantry/armor training intro, leadership obstacle course school, Army Jump School, Army Special Forces intro

Night and day tank/infantry firepower demonstrations – I think I understand what firepower means now!!!!

*** Jun 25, 1960**

Akron, OH

Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio

Great Aviation Museum.

Great 'ghoul pool' story from zoomie visit!! *"ghoul pool" – a collection of money from the cadets awarded to the guy who got the worst partner at the dances held at most of the bases we visited.*

*** Jun 28, 1960**

Belleville, Illinois

MAC Scott AFB, IL

Huge cargo aircraft. (C-121, C-133, C-124, C-54, C-47)

*** Jul 2, 1960**

Phoenix, **AZ**

TAC at Luke AFB, AZ *The F-86 Sabre jet – sweet!!! Shot down many MIGs in Korea.*

(www.acepilots.com/korea_aces.html). F-100 Super Sabre came after Korea, but was great fighter.

My first visit to a Fighter base!!! F-86s and F-100s – prettier than any sports car!!!!

*** Jul 6, 1960**

Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson, AZ

Grave yard for old AF planes – history parked in the desert.

*** Jul 10, 1960**

North Island Naval Base, CA

4 days on a destroyer (BARF, HURL, RALPHHHHH. Everyone got seasick it seems. Good food though, when you could eat it.)

Took 2 hours to learn how to walk on solid ground after debarking the ship!!

Once again, I realized my Dad's wisdom in pointing me away from the Army and Navy toward the Air Force

*** Jul 16, 1960**

Omaha, Nebraska

HQ SAC Offutt AFB, NE

Bomber base – B-47s here. *B-36 Peacemaker – huge with 6 pusher prop engines*

www.cowtown.net/proweb/b36net; B-47 StratoJet – 6 jet engines –; B-52 Strato Fortress (eight jet engines) was replacement for B-47; B-58 Hustler a smaller faster 4 jet engine bomber (prettiest bomber ever made)

Not as pretty an airplane as the B-58 Hustler nor as big as the B-36 (both at Carswell AFB, Ft Worth, TX)

*** Jul 20, 1960**

Colorado Springs, CO

Air Defense Command (ADC), Ent AFB, CO

HQ only – no runway, so no air defense airplanes (F-102/F-106) *F-102 "Delta Dagger" Air Intercept fighter single engine; F-1062 "Delta Dart" Air Intercept fighter single engine follow-on to F-102*

*** Late July 1960**

Most of us went home on leave for the first time in over a year!!!!

Mom & Dad had a GREAT party with Tommy Evans, Rudy Roach, Sharon Watkins from HS and Harry Jo Mussato and Raymond Simpson 'ex Marine' from summer baseball, plus Bob Hall, Jim McMillan, John Goutas, Larry Springs, Willie Parma, Keith Lockhart from the Zoo, and lots of girls. *Norma Mussato Williams was a big hit as the 'older' woman!!! John Goutas almost had a heart attack when she walked into the party!!!! Here's the picture: Very tan and shapely, curly dark hair, huge hoop earrings, white peasant blouse with elastic at shoulders and arms, flowing multicolored skirt and sandals. Mama Mia!!!!*

*** Aug 1960**

3rd Class Cadet (sophomore) USAFA

Still in 8th Cadet Squadron (CS). Didn't go out for football, 'cause I didn't get to play as a freshman, but was the starting catcher on the frosh baseball squad. Boy!! Did I miss football in the fall!!!

Had a 'eureka' experience in finally understanding calculus. My grade "leaped" from low C to middle B!

Half way through the baseball season, I became a starter as catcher. Other sophomores starting - Willie Parma, Larry Day, pitchers Gary Wallace and Larry Backus.

Summer of 1961 (Basic Cadet Summer Detail) Overseas Field Trips (North and South Europe and South America) Mine was a Southern Europe Tour.

*** Jun 12, 1961**

Shannon Airport, Ireland

Enroute to Cadet Summer European Field Trip.

'Red headed, green eyed beauties' with delightful accents in the terminal during our brief layover. (I bought 3 unneeded packs of gum.) We were traveling in a MAC or MATS *MAC - Military Airlift Command; MATS - Military Air Transport Service (title changed sometime about this time)*

Flew back and forth to Europe in a C-121 Super Constellation (seats mounted facing backwards).

*** Jun 14, 1961**

Stopped briefly at **RAF** Mildenhall near London, England, UK *RAF - Royal Air Force; also called Mildenhall AB (Air Base); these are British (UK) bases used primarily by US Forces (in this case US Air Forces in Europe - USAFE). Formal name is Royal Air Force Station Mildenhall.*

*** Jun 14, 1961**

Rhein-Main AB, West Germany

While in Germany saw lots of evidence of WWII battle damage (bullets, rockets, bombs) on buildings in Frankfurt.

Trip to Berlin on train was awesome!! Stopped at checkpoint for search by East German & Russian guards (I swear they knew USAF Cadets were on board). Much more damage is visible here. *Did a bus tour of East Berlin one morning.* East Berlin is like towns in old cowboy movies: two story facade with one story hovel behind it. Hardly anything displayed in store windows. Less than one-tenth the number of vehicles on the road in East Berlin as in West Berlin!!!! *After our scheduled activities were completed one evening, Dick O'Lear and I went for a stroll in Berlin. We walked back to Check Point Charlie and watched vehicles being searched as they entered East Berlin. We wandered around for about 30 minutes and found ourselves looking at the BACK SIDE of Check Point Charlie!! (The "wall" was not up yet!!) We nervously tried to reverse our path and 45 minutes later found that we had successfully returned to the safety of West Berlin!! (All we could think of was the head line "Two USAFA Cadets detained in East Berlin by Soviets".)*

*** Jun 17, 1961**

SHAPE Headquarters, Casteau, Belgium - *SHAPE - Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe; a holdover from post WWII.*

Never saw so many officers in so many different uniforms!!!

*** Jun 18, 1961**

French Air Force Academy

L'Ecole de l'Air near Marseilles. My conversational French class helped considerably.

Had good time in town (**red wine**) and next day flew in a French Magister (Fouga CM.170). Pilot knew I was hung over, offered to show me an 'outside' loop. Macho-me said, 'Sure'. Eyes were blood-shot for two days.

Jlb22 - A small twin engine, 2 place trainer with a "V" tail. <http://www.warbirdalley.com/fouga.htm>. Outside loop: From level flight roll inverted, then push the stick forward to get negative G's. It's a vertical circle flown upside down - negative G's all the way around.

*** Jun 20, 1961**

Italian Air Force Academy

South of Rome near Napoli. **Went to a formal reception at the Italian Commandante's villa. Wow.**

Grappa – see Ouzo below.

Italian cadet took several of us to a beach with beautiful (and HOT) black lava sand.

*** Jun 22, 1961**

Hellenic Air Force Academy, near Athens, Greece

The Hellenic cadets were sharp!!!

The ancient ruins in and around Athens were breathhtaking – made me glad I had read Greek (and Roman) history and mythology.

Ouzo will take the paint off a battleship. *The creation of ouzo is made from a precise combination of pressed grapes and herbs and berries. 40 per cent alcohol. It is usually served as an aperitif. When mixing Ouzo with water it will turn whitish and opaque. (Distant cousin in South America is called "Pisco", according to Willie and Rufe Harris)*

*** Jun 23, 1961**

Torrejon AB, Spain

Madrid, **sangria at La Grotta, red wine and Escargot at Botin** - short stay.

We were 'RTB' (Return To Base literally, going back home to the US of A).

*** Aug 1961**

Cadet 2nd Class (Junior), USAFA

Went out for Cheerleader – made it as the only non-gymnast or diver on the squad. Had a good year as catcher.

Willie Parma made All-American ('62-63) and played on US Pan-American baseball team ('63).

Had pretty good grades – one semester on Group Staff, roomed with Bob Heavner.

Summer of 1962 (Basic Cadet Summer Detail) Operation Third Lieutenant (got farmed out for 3 weeks or so to bases all over the US to work in every day Air Force environments in many different jobs/AFSCs). I posted to Bergstrom AFB, Austin, TX. I worked in KC-135 maintenance control/scheduling office planning flow of tankers in and out of major maintenance. Got invited to the Tri-Delta sorority house at UT.

*** Jul 1962**

Cadet First Class (Senior), USAFA

Tough academics still, but managed Dean's and Supt's List a few times during the last 3 years.

Fun as cheerleader (I was the only one not on the gymnastics or diving team) and catcher/outfielder in baseball.

Separated left shoulder in intramural football and tore rotator cuff in right one in baseball.

*** Jun 1963**

Graduation, **USAFA** –Brand new “Butter Bar” Second Lieutenant, USAF

[Frank Ralston had a little excitement in making it to the ceremony on time.](#)

President Jack Kennedy presided.

Mom and Dad (and my little sisters) were proud as punch. They had moved to Bonnell Street in Fort Worth.

My first car - Maroon Pontiac LeMans.

Married to De Ann Fisher.

On the way to **Reese AFB, TX** for pilot training.