

OUR HERITAGE

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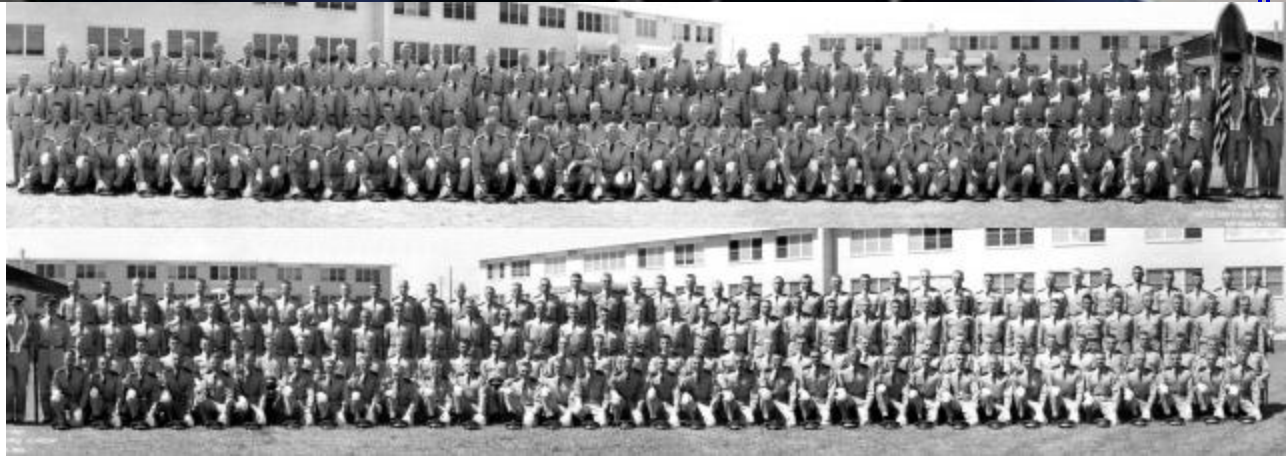
Excerpted from the Class of 1960 50th Reunion Yearbook

The United States Air Force Academy was created by Act of the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on April 1, 1954, a date now known as Founder's Day. The Academy opened in 1955 at temporary quarters called Lowry II on the grounds of Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, CO, and the first class entered July 11, 1955. Meanwhile, construction on the permanent facilities north of Colorado Springs, CO started November 1956 when the first piece of structural steel was being erected. The Academy's first superintendent was a 1915 West Point classmate of President Eisenhower, Lt. Gen. Hubert R. Harmon, who supervised the first two classes and retired on July 27, 1956.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower signs the Air Force Academy Act on April 1, 1954. (Left to right: Secretary of the Air Force, Harold E. Talbott; Representative Carl Vinson; Air Force Chief of Staff, General Nathan F. Twining; President Eisenhower; Representative Dewey Short; Under Secretary James H. Douglas; and Lt. General Hubert R. Harmon).

Our Four Years at the Academy



The year was 1955, and President Eisenhower had just conducted the first-ever televised press conference, Guns n' Smokes was on our small black-and-white television sets, and Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock" topped the charts. Moms stayed in kitchens cooking apple pies, and phones were big black things with long cords. The Dodgers played baseball in Brooklyn, gas was a quarter a gallon and our auto sensation was the '55 T-Bird for \$2895. That was 55 years ago—and we were one of those 29,000 young men who would actively seek an appointment to the US Air Force Academy.

For most of us, our journey began with a letter to a Senator or Congressman; each was authorized to nominate ten candidates following a preliminary medical examination, with those qualified proceeding to further testing. After exhaustive academic examinations, an apportioned number with the highest composite scores from each state allotted by population were appointed by telegram from the Secretary of the Air Force. We were male, 17 and less than 22 years of age, 5'4" but not over 6'4," flight-qualified with leadership potential. We came from every state and large cities and small towns throughout the United States.

300 of us reported on July 09, 1956---23 had prior military service, 16% had one or more years of college and many had been in ROTC (one completed four years AFROTC and turned down a commission to join our Class), another had spent a year at USMA, one wore AF Navigator's Wings and resigned his First Lieutenant Rank, and fifteen had Presidential appointments. The youngest was 17 years and two months, the

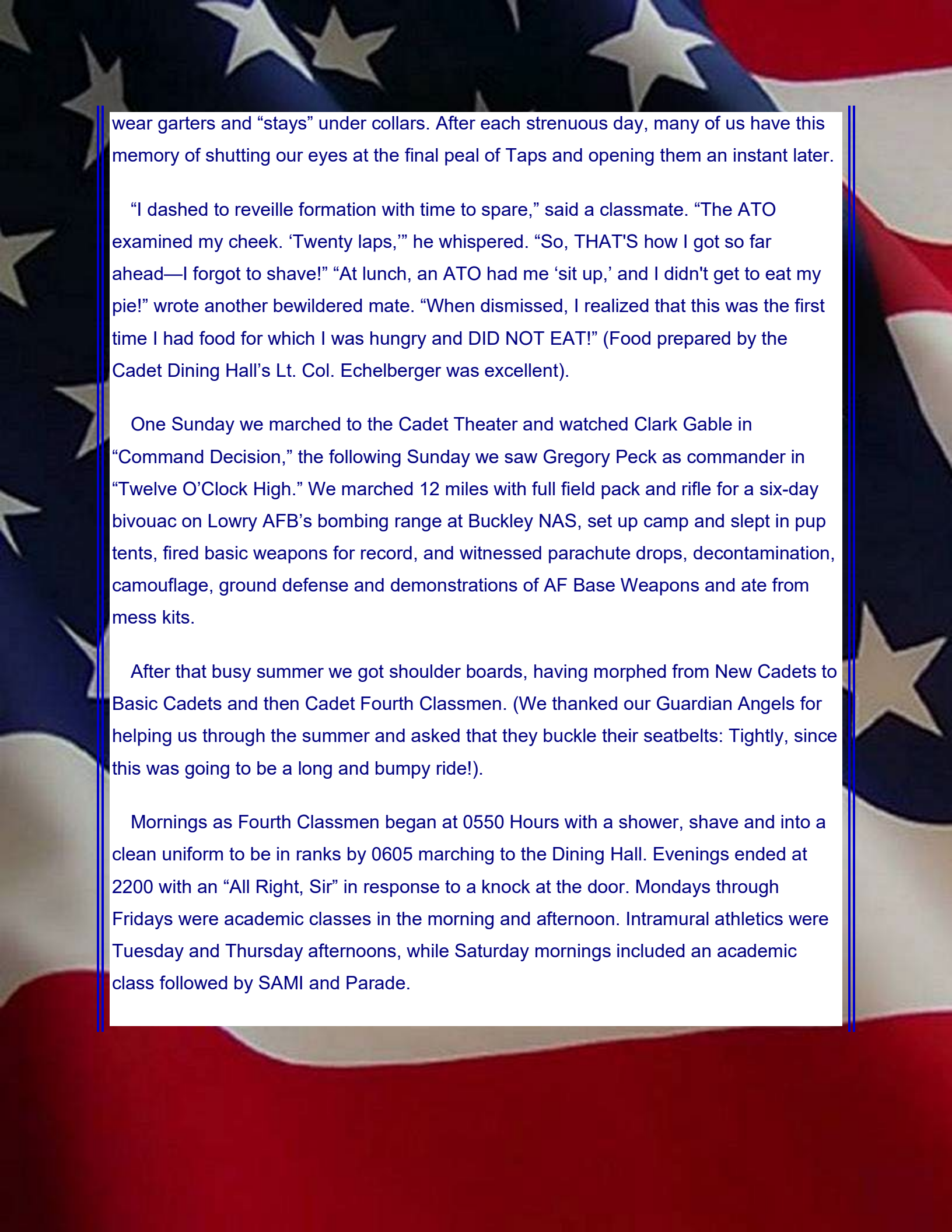
oldest exactly 22, our median age was 18.6 and one had not graduated from high school.

Basic Cadet Training. Our welcome to Lowry AFB-II was this vitriolic volley from an Air Training Officer (ATO): “Drop those bags, Mister!” Again: “I said DROP those bags!” We quickly acquired a polyglot language: “Run that chin in, Dumbsmack.” Double-Time? Brace? ATOs were graduates of West Point, Annapolis, Citadel, VMI, VPI, and universities like Fordham and Clemson, some had ROTC training; several ATOs had been commissioned through the Aviation Cadet program, and some were Korean War veterans—from wherever they came, these ATOs were tougher than any upperclassmen.



That first day we were issued clothing . . . 12 pair of white gloves (that has got to be a mistake!)—received a hair cut, learned to march, were issued uniforms, assigned a roommate and to a barracks. We were sworn in that morning: “I, (_____), having been appointed an Air Force Cadet in the United States Air Force, do solemnly swear...” That afternoon we marched to the Parade Ground and reaffirmed our earlier pledge. By the end of the day, we had a lexicon of four responses with seven acceptable words: “Yes, Sir;” “No, Sir;” “Sir, I do not know;” “No excuse, Sir.” Our reply to a frequently asked question: “Sir, my altitude is 5,280 feet—far, far above that of West Point or Annapolis!”

We did things we never thought we could, contorted our bodies into unnatural positions and never once questioned why. We used an M-1 rifle, learned how to fire a .30 caliber machine gun, .45 caliber pistols and the .38 revolver, enthusiastically participated in bayonet training, ran the Obstacle Course and were called “Doolies.” We learned to spit-shine shoes and cap bills, polish belt buckles and master our “gig-line,” sew on uniform buttons, clean our rooms and make “hospital corners,” field-strip M-1s,

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wear garters and “stays” under collars. After each strenuous day, many of us have this memory of shutting our eyes at the final peal of Taps and opening them an instant later.

“I dashed to reveille formation with time to spare,” said a classmate. “The ATO examined my cheek. ‘Twenty laps,’” he whispered. “So, THAT’S how I got so far ahead—I forgot to shave!” “At lunch, an ATO had me ‘sit up,’ and I didn’t get to eat my pie!” wrote another bewildered mate. “When dismissed, I realized that this was the first time I had food for which I was hungry and DID NOT EAT!” (Food prepared by the Cadet Dining Hall’s Lt. Col. Echelberger was excellent).

One Sunday we marched to the Cadet Theater and watched Clark Gable in “Command Decision,” the following Sunday we saw Gregory Peck as commander in “Twelve O’Clock High.” We marched 12 miles with full field pack and rifle for a six-day bivouac on Lowry AFB’s bombing range at Buckley NAS, set up camp and slept in pup tents, fired basic weapons for record, and witnessed parachute drops, decontamination, camouflage, ground defense and demonstrations of AF Base Weapons and ate from mess kits.

After that busy summer we got shoulder boards, having morphed from New Cadets to Basic Cadets and then Cadet Fourth Classmen. (We thanked our Guardian Angels for helping us through the summer and asked that they buckle their seatbelts: Tightly, since this was going to be a long and bumpy ride!).

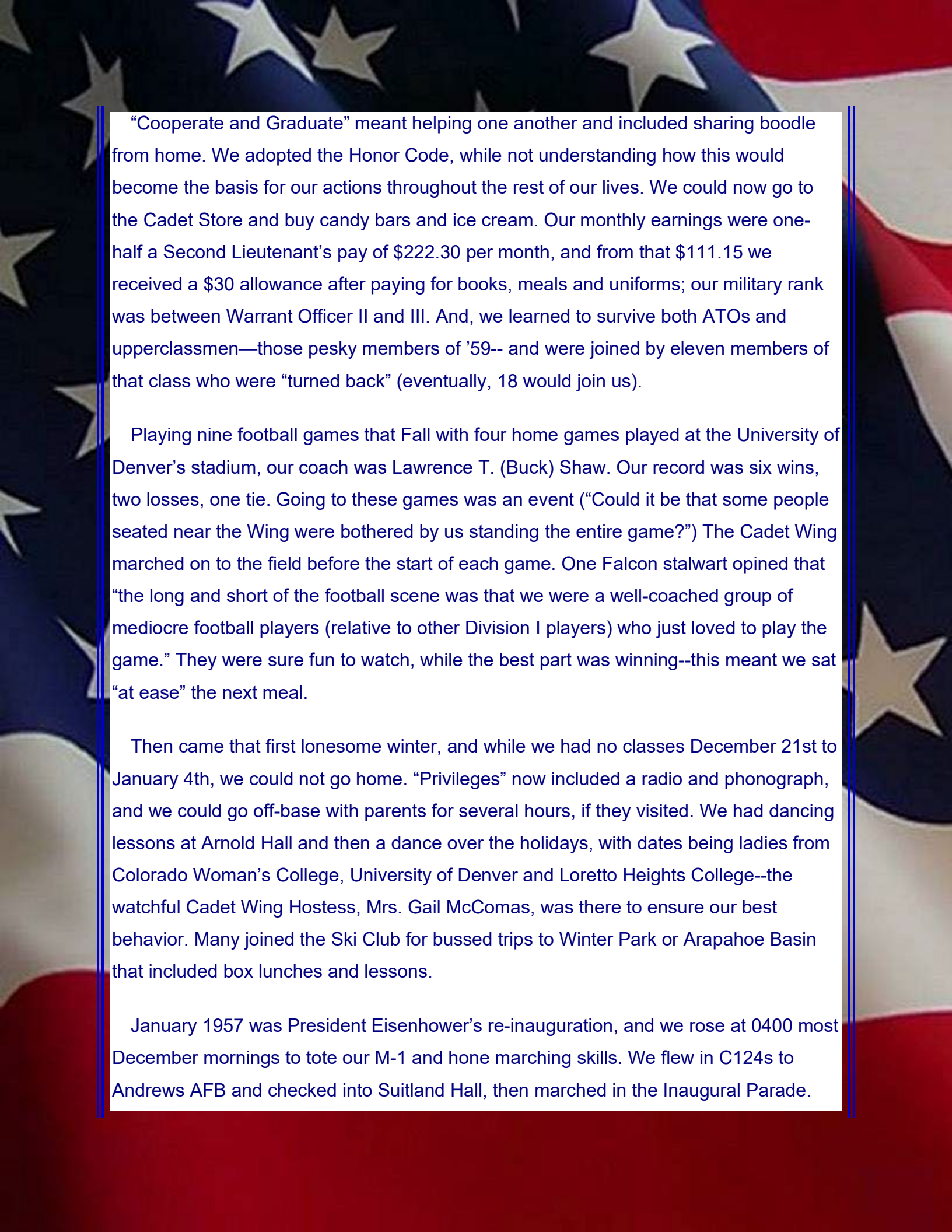
Mornings as Fourth Classmen began at 0550 Hours with a shower, shave and into a clean uniform to be in ranks by 0605 marching to the Dining Hall. Evenings ended at 2200 with an “All Right, Sir” in response to a knock at the door. Mondays through Fridays were academic classes in the morning and afternoon. Intramural athletics were Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, while Saturday mornings included an academic class followed by SAMI and Parade.



Our academic curriculum was markedly “More Math than Monet:” Chemistry, Algebra & Trigonometry, English, Philosophy, Geography and Military Science, while we embraced “The Curve” and skillfully maneuvered our slide rules. Courses were divided between Sciences and Liberal Arts, and included Conditioning & Sports, Customs & Courtesies, Air Power & National Security, Engineering Drawing/Charts & Maps. We marched to class, the Section Leader saluted and reported—“All Present or Accounted For, Sir” . . . we contributed a Graded Review (GR) at many sessions, and had a quiz in most Math and Science classes performed at the chalkboard while standing. We selected “C” on multiple choice tests if we didn’t know the answer, were on a semester system and grades were numbers with 70.0 passing.

Most engaged in intramural sports, while many vaulted into Intercollegiate Athletics—we had 128 “participations” by classmates in 15 sports (some were in two, even three sports that first year)---and, we were in top physical condition. Intramurals included football, bowling, soccer, cross country, basketball, water polo, rugby, lacrosse, boxing, golf, tennis, judo, swimming, handball, squash, wrestling and volleyball. We elected classmates to Honor, Class, Dance, Entertainment, Ring/Crest Committees, and joined Polaris, Talon, Dodo and Contrails Staffs and Hockey, Debate, Geography, Photo, Radio, Bowman’s, Bowling, Hunting/Fishing, Aero/Soaring and Ski Clubs.

There was now a different cadence to our counts: “Sir, there are 49 days until Christmas!” Our lexicon included Punishment Tours, Forms 10 for Demerits and 10a meaning “Special Inspection,” Confinement, Room Orderly, Restriction, Class III, Turnouts, CheckPoints (days to football games, holidays, movie at the Cadet Theater—but, we couldn’t go). We made VFR/IFR position reports and were instructed to write a progress letter to that Congressman or Senator who’d appointed us.

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“Cooperate and Graduate” meant helping one another and included sharing boodle from home. We adopted the Honor Code, while not understanding how this would become the basis for our actions throughout the rest of our lives. We could now go to the Cadet Store and buy candy bars and ice cream. Our monthly earnings were one-half a Second Lieutenant’s pay of \$222.30 per month, and from that \$111.15 we received a \$30 allowance after paying for books, meals and uniforms; our military rank was between Warrant Officer II and III. And, we learned to survive both ATOs and upperclassmen—those pesky members of ’59-- and were joined by eleven members of that class who were “turned back” (eventually, 18 would join us).

Playing nine football games that Fall with four home games played at the University of Denver’s stadium, our coach was Lawrence T. (Buck) Shaw. Our record was six wins, two losses, one tie. Going to these games was an event (“Could it be that some people seated near the Wing were bothered by us standing the entire game?”) The Cadet Wing marched on to the field before the start of each game. One Falcon stalwart opined that “the long and short of the football scene was that we were a well-coached group of mediocre football players (relative to other Division I players) who just loved to play the game.” They were sure fun to watch, while the best part was winning--this meant we sat “at ease” the next meal.

Then came that first lonesome winter, and while we had no classes December 21st to January 4th, we could not go home. “Privileges” now included a radio and phonograph, and we could go off-base with parents for several hours, if they visited. We had dancing lessons at Arnold Hall and then a dance over the holidays, with dates being ladies from Colorado Woman’s College, University of Denver and Loretto Heights College--the watchful Cadet Wing Hostess, Mrs. Gail McComas, was there to ensure our best behavior. Many joined the Ski Club for bussed trips to Winter Park or Arapahoe Basin that included box lunches and lessons.

January 1957 was President Eisenhower’s re-inauguration, and we rose at 0400 most December mornings to tote our M-1 and hone marching skills. We flew in C124s to Andrews AFB and checked into Suitland Hall, then marched in the Inaugural Parade.

Some would later explore the jazzy delights of Benny's Rebel Room under the Georgetown Bridge, while others had their pictures taken in front of the White House and were feted at a luncheon.



During that year, we were instructed in the use of personal flying equipment and given psychological indoctrination by going to 35,000' in an altitude chamber and having the oxygen cut off, took an orientation flight in a T-29C navigational trainer ("The Flying Classroom"), and in the spring had a 30-minute T-33 jet ride. Then, the day we thought would never come, it was Recognition Day! A member of the Class of 1959 pinned props and wings on our collars, and we triumphantly said "goodbye" to bracing, eating at attention and "spouting doolie knowledge." We were now a real part of the Cadet Wing.

We got new roommates Third Class Summer, flying to Hamilton AFB for five days visiting Air Defense Command and took T-33 rides to intercept B-29s; then, March Air Force Base in Riverside, CA, where some rode in KC-97s and watched aerial refueling of B-47s; and, Tactical Air Command at George AFB. At each base were dances supervised by our Dance Committee making introductions to local ladies through the Receiving Line. After that, we went to a primary pilot training base for 80 hours of instruction and 11 hours of actual flying in T-34s and T-28s, while some recall a

weekend swimming at Padre Island. Back at Lowry II, we had our first Off Base Privilege (OBP) until 10PM. Then, we went home on leave!



By Third Class Academic Year many had acquired nicknames like Seal, Gnome, Roach, Rat, Whale, Dolphin, Duck, Hawk, Bear, Pig, Gnat, Wedge, Mole, Panda, Snake, Germ, Flea, Fish, Goose, Shep, Killer, Chik, Slik, Bojo, Rebel, Sabo, Pug, Krash, Salty Able, Stud Horse, Itch, Chum, Buck, Nebs, Gar, Tadashi-San, Shiv, Charlie Brown, Slats, der Wick, Corny, Oogie, LEM, REM, Cask, Jabo, Good Will, Garboon, Camel and Hanyak.

Academics included Physics, Calculus, Chemistry, Literature, History, Psychology, Political Science and Military Science. We started navigation, and some recall doing celestial "pre-comps" and shooting stars in the quadrangle trainers; our only computer was an E6B Weems and the Sanderson Flight Plotter we used to make six navigation flights in T29Cs, while our geographical jargon expanded to include Ponca City, Truth or Consequences, Tucumcari and Garden City VORs. Some began what Dean Colonel McDermott termed "The Enrichment Program," which would lead to an academic major for completion of an 18 to 21 semester-hour overload of six extra courses, most in Engineering Sciences.

Football games were still at the University of Denver's stadium, Buck Shaw coaching our wins over Occidental, Detroit, New Mexico, six losses and one tie (Shaw would later depart to coach the Philadelphia Eagles). That year we had 84 classmate-participations in varsity sports. We went home for Christmas, and upon our return, RosAI Productions had created itself and gave us a "Wing Ding" at the Denver Turnverein for Spring Break (Noon Saturday until evening meal Sunday). In May, our new uniforms designed by Cecil B. DeMille were introduced with much fanfare.

Second Class Summer we flew in C-118s to Europe (optional, required forfeiting Summer Leave), visiting Madrid, Wiesbaden, Berlin, London, Paris, Garmisch, Palma de Majorca; we had a briefing from NATO Commander, General Norstad, during our three weeks of touring military bases in Spain, Germany, France and England, and then took a train from Paris to the World's Fair in Brussels, Belgium. Some then (voluntarily) went on to Ft. Benning (GA) for their jump wings.

That summer we flew in C-97s to Strategic Air Command headquarters in Omaha, NE, where General Power addressed us in an underground bunker. We flew in C-130s to Support Commands at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma and Wright-Patterson in Ohio. While visiting Norfolk and Ft. Benning for indoctrinations from the Army and Navy, we spent time on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Ranger and toured a submarine.

In August we assisted in training the "doolies," then bussed to the permanent site. Some of us got off at the front gate and marched the Class of 1962 uphill to our new quarters (what a change from the WWII barracks at Lowry!) on a tract of 17,500 acres—this was covered in Life Magazine showing us on the cover and in an article entitled "The Toughest School in the World." The new site now provided our "Tale of Two Cities" from Lowry II in Aurora to our permanent home north of Colorado Springs.

Second Class Academic Year included Electrical Engineering, Mechanics, Thermodynamics, Nucleonics, Western Literature, History, Psychology, Economics, Foreign Language (Spanish, French, Russian and German), Military Science and Navigation. "One hallmark of class cooperation was the Poop Sessions conducted by an erudite classmate before important exams in EE, Thermo, Mechanics and Physics, which compressed a semester's work into a three-hour cram course, and dozens took advantage of his clairvoyance to pass one more exam," recalled a classmate.



We still had no football stadium, and used “The Fields of Friendly Strife” at Colorado College and University of Denver. Ben Martin became our coach, and after a great start in early games, we revolted with an After-Taps Rally, and the entire Wing was bussed to Iowa and we tied their top-ranked team 13-13. At the end of that year--our first with four classes--we ranked 10th in the nation, with nine wins, 0 losses and two ties. New Year’s Day we played TCU in the Cotton Bowl and tied the Horned Frogs 0-0. That year we had 64 classmates on 15 varsity squads.

Dean Brigadier General McDermott supervised tests to substantiate that our Air Force Academy’s educational system was deserving of accreditation. We got class rings emblazoned with “Nulli Secundus:” Second To None. Operation Third Lieutenant was in March, and we went to operational Air Force bases across the country. Over this first winter nestled against the Rockies, we marched to breakfast against 100+MPH winds, while one classmate named the imposing mountain to our west: Herman Hill. RosAI provided our Spring Break respite with a toga-clad “Roman Blast” at the Denver Turnverein.

First Class Summer gave us complete responsibility for training the Class of 1963. We became Squadron Commanders, and some were responsible for Customs and Courtesies, Physical Training, Honor Code, and Rifle Training. We were the first class to introduce Survival Training to new cadets—SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape)—and were trained by instructors from the AF Survival School at Stead AFB; we conducted a week-long exercise in the mountains, camping in parachute shelters and teaching cadets to survive in the wilderness.

It was both a beginning and an end during First Class Academic Year--we started four new squadrons (13-16), and at year’s end requested assignments following graduation. Academics included Aerodynamics, Astronautics, Political Science (Clausewitz to evils of the Kremlin), English, Military Science, Law and Navigation. “The course I liked best was Aero 101 because we had a WWII P-51 pilot teaching it, he gave the best graphic illustration of aerodynamics, demonstrating the power of wingtip vortices by ‘drafting’ a fuel-depleted P-51 in the vortices of two other P-51 flight members,” related a

classmate. We flew 16 navigation missions during the year, and took Graduate Record Examinations with 1750 colleges and universities.

Playing our sister academy in football for the first time, we battled USMA to a tie in Yankee Stadium; our record that year was five wins, four losses, one tie (four year record: 23 wins, 12 losses, three ties). There were 58 classmates on the 15 Varsity teams in Football, Basketball, Baseball, Track, Gymnastics, Soccer, Fencing, Wrestling, Swimming, Tennis, Golf, Cross Country, Skiing, Rifle and Pistol, and our collective record was 96 wins, 70 losses and one tie (during our four years, varsity records totaled 356 wins, 249 losses, 112 ties). Just before Christmas, we got cars and had leave. Then, for one final Spring Fling, we flocked to Denver's Grange Hall for RosAI Productions' final "Roarin' 20's Blast" in early-April.



We looked back over the years, even counting roommates--some had a dozen, or more, including their summer mates. We had many "Firsts:" First to be both supervised by upperclassmen and be upperclassmen, to have a classmate killed in an aircraft accident at the Academy, to have Turnbacks, conduct off-base parties for upper classes, a graduate who was first reporting to the Academy, the only class with two years at Lowry II and two at permanent site, and more.

Then came that crystal-clear clarion call: "Sir, there are EIGHT days 'til graduation!" We had a minimum of 190 credits, some over 200. We took finals, some had turnouts, bought uniforms, enjoyed a dance, took a physical, sat for photos, planned our leave, pinned on Navigator's Wings, arranged for parents to visit, shined our shoes, and then, with the sun and moon and all the planets perfectly aligned, it was...

Graduation. The chapel, football stadium, field house and other buildings were not yet completed, but we were. We were awarded commissions by Lt. Gen. John K. Gerhardt, and on June 08, 1960 the second graduating class of 227 received diplomas from the Secretary of the Air Force, Dudley C. Sharp. We had taken that “Long Blue Road” to the Graduation Ceremony which provided our final “15 Minutes of Fame”—then, with a silent “By Your Leave, Sir” and exeunt stage left, we hurled our caps-turned-airborne-missiles into that sunny and azure-tinted Colorado sky and drove out of the Academy and into our promising Wild Blue Future.

