

One Place In Time

The place in time for my 30th college reunion was one weekend at West Point, New York. Our time together in one space was perfect. Our reunion may have appeared as another yuppie college class. Yet, it wasn't. The stories about West Point, the Army, and Life-After-Army provided a different perspective on one generation's place in time. We talked a lot, but it wasn't the usual self-absorbed blathering of baby boomers.

The United States Military Academy (USMA) Class of 1972 is the 'bottom of the barrel class' and proud of it. Every fully qualified applicant who self-selected himself away from the better college's hatred of the Vietnam War was admitted. Every class before and since has turned away willing, able candidates. We were the hard core to swear an oath to defend the Constitution on a beastly hot July 1st, 1968 - expecting fully to fight in Vietnam four years later.

Throughout our officer incubation, which was more incarceration than matriculation, one large board and then another at the entrance to our main academic building filled with names on business card-size brass plates. We measured the progress of the war in West Point dead and estimated the spot for our class reservation on the monument. We graduated after a big communist offensive. Then, the Vietnam War was cancelled, due to lack of interest, during winter Ranger school.

For the next five to thirty years, each to his own, we built the armed mob of 1972 into the finest Army - the pre-eminent and decisive Land Force of the world. We were Hooah. Our Cold War soldiering, like the world, crumbled into the firefights and short combats of the new era. The seniority of those still-serving on active duty and our great luck kept any classmate from dying in combat. Good serendipity.

What is our measure of our 30 years after if our tales of 'So, there we were' and 'you aren't going to believe this s...' are different paeans from the sacrifices of other classes? Our mark is the Army today. Our mettle was the willingness to do the harder right with intensity. Even our classmates who left for greener fields after their five year Army indenture served well when rewards for duty were few, small, and slow in coming. The rest of the class served with absolute dedication until the Army said, "You should go now." Only one classmate dishonored us.

Our uncompromising, insensitive, brutal West Point experience, which is so amusing in the past tense, hardened us. No Army challenge ever compared to our time at West Point (although Ranger training set the standard on physical pain). Our place for four years was the cauldron of manhood for one band of brothers - bloodied only by the attempted suicides of ex-classmates during our first year. We may look the same, but we feel different from our peers who went to college in those years.

We are at the edge of old. Surely, the class survivors at the 60th reunion will scoff that 50ish was young. But age clearly contends with our vigor. The actuarial tables are about to kick in. The fast track of the military priesthood is almost run. Even our General Officers are retiring.

Soon, every classmate will be accumulating years of civilian service. We will all be in it together again - with ambitions and success the twins of disappointments and

failures unremarkable from others. Our distinguishing characteristic should be the quality of service. Not so much for its brilliance, but for its determination and dedication. Our doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, teachers and ministers make work a mission. We serve without complaining, where we are, whatever station, regardless of demands. If someone is slack, I don't know him. We are normal as divorce, dysfunction, disability and death reap our ranks in uneven swaths.

The measure for our final 30 years is this – more Duty, Honor, Country. Our duty to our families will be foremost as relationships triumph over things. Our performance of duty will reek of loyalty. Our honor is personal but transcendent. My honor is calibrated in the eyes of my classmates and theirs by mine. Our Country likely will wage a World War Against Islamist Terrorism all the rest of our days. The magnificent mural of the history of the world in the Cadet Mess Hall celebrates victories only of the West over Islam - since Charles Martel at Tours. There will be more.

We will contribute our treasure as we have it, maybe our children, and our unswerving loyalty to the United States of America. Perhaps, for some, we provide an example. As new fractures in long wars – the clash of cultures at home and abroad – divide Americans, we, who are liberal to conservative in our politics, will stand shoulder to shoulder, despite our declining stoop, for the U.S.A. We can do no less.

Our class ranks grow in numbers of devout Christians. The Christian guys love our Jewish classmates and our irreligious chums unconditionally. We even look to rejoice in death, ultimately, as the coming glory. Until then, there is work to do. No sniveling allowed. Hooah. And when our course is run, we, the Proud and True '72, desire one eulogy: "Well Done."

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