



**"WHY ARE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY GRADUATES NOT EMERGING INTO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN MAINSTREAM AMERICA?"**

THIS IS THE BASIC QUESTION THAT I AND OTHER GRADS HAVE PONDERED FOR QUITE A WHILE. SINCE 1959, USAFA HAS TURNED OUT 51 CLASSES OF GRADUATES TRAINED TO BE LEADERS OF COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY. HISTORICALLY, THE SERVICE ACADEMIES HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE, NOT ONLY IN THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP OF THIS COUNTRY, BUT ALSO IN THIS NATION'S AND THE WORLD'S LEADERSHIP. SUCH NAMES AS EISENHOWER, MACARTHUR, PATTON, HALSEY, NIMITZ AND EVEN MCCAIN COME READILY TO MIND. STRANGELY ENOUGH, USAFA HAS PLAYED A MUCH LESSER ROLE THAN THE OTHER TWO SERVICE ACADEMIES WHEN IT COMES TO OUR NATION'S LEADERS. EVEN FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW, USAFA GRADS HAVE NOT YET EXCELLED ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH OUR SISTER ACADEMIES. NOT A SINGLE GRADUATE

# USAFA Insignificance?

BY DICK MCCONN, '66

has held the Chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and just a few have emerged as the Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF). If we are turning out leaders with character and competence—and I strongly believe we are—where are they?

From a congressional perspective, USAFA has no one in Congress at present and has had only one Member of Congress in its history. As one looks at the staff members on the Hill, cabinet positions and key positions in the bureaucracy, USAFA is far behind the USMA and USNA for people in leadership positions.

On the business and industrial side, there continues to be a dearth of CEOs and COOs with USAFA degrees as compared to West Point and Annapolis. When it comes to fundraising and giving back, we are not even on the same page.

I realize that examining why USAFA grads are not emerging into leadership positions is an invitation to controversy and contention. This question has been discussed and bandied about by a number of grads over the years. With this article, I hope to create an awareness and dialogue by providing some facts and thoughts. Hopefully, some positive actions and results will ensue. I have no doubts that this short, broad look at the subject will be contentious, second-guessed and debated.

There are several factors to be considered when trying to examine USAFA's lesser emergence in the nation's military, political and industrial leadership arenas. The most obvious is the relatively young age of USAFA compared to USMA and USNA. So far, only 51 graduating classes have had the opportunity to emerge into the nation's leadership spotlight. However, 51 graduating classes would include graduates up to the age of 75, normally well past any age for leadership positions. USAFA's young age is a factor, albeit a secondary one.

Geographical location plays a more substantial role. The USMA and USNA are on the East coast and USAFA is located in the West, far from major population centers (except Denver). USAFA is also farther from prominent colleges and grad schools. A heavy predominance of our nation's leaders come from Ivy League schools and schools from the eastern section of the United States. Of late, western schools such as Stanford, the University of California and Cal-Tech have become well-recognized for their excellent academic standards and graduates, but the East still maintains a firm hold. To gain more insight into the issue of grad school attendance, we polled the top MBA grad schools in the U.S. in 2006 and 2007, and the results are exhibited in the chart (right column). This chart illustrates all grads attending these schools, whether they are still in the military or not. As one can easily see, USAFA lags far behind West Point and Annapolis in the number of attendees at these prominent grad schools.

Geographical location is important. The proximity of USMA or USNA to the top grad schools in the East breeds familiarity, and I opine that this encourages graduates of those institutions to apply and attend these elite schools for post-graduate degrees.

Attending prominent business grad schools is not a requirement to be a business leader in this country; however, a recur-

## MBA GRAD SCHOOL ATTENDEES 2006 AND 2007

# 2006

SCHOOL	2006 CLASS SIZE	USMA	USNA	USAFA
Carnegie Mellon	228	0	1	0
Columbia Business School	590	2	1	1
Cornell University	214	3	0	0
Duke University	297	2	0	0
Georgetown University	211	0	2	0
Harvard Business School	828	18	10	3
Kellogg School of Mgmt.	634	1	3	1
MIT Sloan	312	1	1	0
New York University	345	0	1	0
Ohio State	66	1	0	0
Olin Graduate School	94	1	0	1
Rice University	137	1	0	0
Stanford University	334	3	3	2
Tuck School of Business	235	1	2	0
Univ. of California at Berkeley	230	1	0	1
UCLA	327	0	0	3
Univ. of Chicago	534	1	1	1
Univ. Of Michigan	586	0	1	1
Univ. of Notre Dame	153	1	2	0
Univ. of Oxford	208	2	0	0
Univ. of Southern California	351	0	1	2
Univ. of Texas	343	6	1	1
Vanderbilt Univ.	111	3	0	0
Wharton	807	3	5	0
Yale School of Mgmt.	154	2	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8329</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>17</b>

# 2007

SCHOOL	2007 CLASS SIZE	USMA	USNA	USAFA
Boston College	51	1	0	0
Carnegie Mellon	214	1	0	0
Columbia Business School	499	6	1	0
Cornell University	223	4	2	0
Duke University	373	2	1	1
Georgetown University	216	1	0	0
Harvard Business School	909	18	7	1
Kellogg School of Mgmt.	539	6	2	1
London Business School	323	1	0	0
MIT Sloan	331	3	2	1
New York University	409	1	1	0
Ohio State	76	3	0	0
Olin Graduate School	71	0	1	0
Rice University	133	1	0	0
Stanford University	362	4	3	0
Tuck School of Business	238	3	0	1
UCLA	323	1	5	0
Univ. of Chicago	550	4	0	0
Univ. of Maryland	61	1	0	1
Univ. of Michigan	444	0	3	0
Univ. of North Carolina	269	4	0	0
Univ. of Notre Dame	99	2	0	0
Univ. of Texas	246	3	0	0
UVA	293	0	3	0
Wharton	783	1	4	0
Yale School of Mgmt.	197	1	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8232</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>6</b>



rent theme in the biographies of Fortune 500 CEOs is an MBA from one of the top grad schools. I might add that there are a few grad schools where USAFA actually has an edge in attendees such as the JFK School of Government at Harvard. It is helpful that we have 2 USAFA grads on the faculty (Tad Oelstrom, '65, and Bill Hogan, '66).

The undergraduate product also plays a role. By that, I mean that USAFA turns out a more technical and "skewed" product than USMA and USNA. USAFA's specialty is pilots and aerospace-oriented grads. Most of our grads migrate into the aerospace field in one way or another. These jobs are specialized and, in many cases, bleed over to the civilian sector. Hence, a fighter pilot or transport pilot who chooses to leave the service oftentimes has a job awaiting him in civilian society with little need for further grad school attendance. You can imagine what an Army tank driver faces as he exits the military—bleak prospects. Therefore, a typical Army mechanized officer or infantry officer quickly realizes that he had better get back to grad school and develop a specialty and a resume to fit into the civilian job market. The nature of the jobs held in the branch of service plays a major role in encouraging or discouraging service academy grads to eventually hold leadership positions in the political and industrial worlds. Simply put—I do not see many airline pilots emerging as congressmen or CEO/COOs. This is not meant to be a slam at airline pilots; in fact, probably our most famous grad of recent times is an airline pilot who saved many lives in "The Miracle on the Hudson."

Looking deeper into the issue, I suggest that USAFA curriculum and USAF post-graduate scholarship availability play a significant role. USAFA's job is to prepare our grads for a military career and

our core courses and curriculum evolve around that goal. Obviously, we are neither a business school nor a school for politics or bureaucracy, etc. However, it is my contention that, in this day and age, courses in such areas as management, human relations, leadership, accounting, financial management, social skills and even psychology could be given more emphasis at USAFA. USAFA has made recent progress in the area of management courses. There now exists the Schillereff Program, the Kaminski Endowment, the Character & Leadership Chair and many others whereby guest professors and former grads are brought to USAFA to share their past experiences from the "real" world and how they can be applied to help a USAFA student and his future. USAFA has management and leadership courses but I still think that terms such as "EBITDA," "ROI," "forgiveness" and "compartmentalization" as relating to leadership, were never taught, at least when I attended USAFA. Simply put—skills to operate in a capitalist-based system and culture are not emphasized at USAFA. "Real world" awareness and skills are lacking upon graduation, you might say to the point of naiveté, by USAFA grads.

Another area that stands out when comparing USAFA grads to the other service academies is a lack of "ring knocking." Ring knocking has both good and bad connotations, but here I am referring to the good parts: the post-graduate support and togetherness. It seems to me and many others that the grad communities of USMA and USNA are more cohesive, are better organized and just more supportive of each other. It may be the nature of their service branches versus the USAF, or it can go all the way back to the USAFA experience. No doubt this cohesiveness provides a better support network in later years which lends itself to a better chance of success in the military and also in political and business positions. In other words, more USMA and USNA grads are networking and supporting respective grads as they navigate into the hierarchy of business, politics, bureaucracy and the military than USAFA grads.

Without going into great detail, the other two academies have far surpassed us in the field of national politics and key bureaucratic positions. We have no one in Congress now and very few in key positions in our government. As stated earlier, we have had but one member of Congress and that was Congresswoman Heather Wilson of New Mexico, who is now on the sidelines. Our previous Secretary of the Air Force (Mike Wynne) is a West Point graduate, the Secretary of the Veterans Administration is a West Point grad, the junior Senator from Virginia is USNA, the last Republican candidate for President is USNA, the senior Senator from Rhode Island is a West Point grad, and former Presidential candidate Wes Clark is USMA. The list goes on and on. There is hope on the horizon. Several USAFA grads are holding minor offices, or running for office, or at least positioning themselves. Probably the farthest along is Assemblyman Greg Ball (USAFA, '01) in the 19th District of New York. He appears to be the odds-on choice to be the Republican candidate for Congress there and has a well structured campaign organization. There are several others positioning themselves on both the Democratic and Republican sides of the aisle.

Since 1989 and our first 4-star general (HT Johnson, '59), USAFA has produced three CSAFs and no Chairmen of the JCS. The present Chairman is Mike Mullen of the USNA, and both of the other schools have a long history of grads selected to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Chiefs of Staff. It is still too soon to tell how well USAFA will do in the longer run as we have fewer than 20 years on

which to base the findings. However, it is encouraging to note that the present Chief, Vice Chief, and Assistant Vice Chief are all USAFA grads for the first time in our history. No doubt that recent history has spotlighted other service academy grads such as Schwartzkopf, Petraeus and now McChrystal from USMA. The nature of modern day irregular warfare may well have something to do with that along with the present day roles of each service.

In the field of business and industry, USAFA has scored some success. We have had a Vice Chairman of GM, CEOs of Gulfstream, Hawker-Beech, and Presidents at US Air and Oracle. We have grads who have done very well in private business and, at latest count, we have at least one billionaire in the group. However, we pale when compared to the USMA and USNA. CEOs of Goodrich, Footlocker, 7-Eleven, AmGen, Proctor & Gamble and the NY Stock Exchange are all current leaders from the other service schools. At least in the field of basketball we have attained some equality with Greg Popovich, '70, Head Coach of the San Antonio Spurs versus Mike Krzyzewski, USMA '69, Head Coach at Duke.

A comparison of giving back to the three schools shows a drastic difference in amounts of money raised. Between 1999 and 2005, the USNA raised \$253 million in their non-profit while USAFA raised approximately \$30 million. West Point raised over four times the money of USAFA. This lack of giving can imply many conclusions—poor cohesiveness, lack of grads with position and money, and a lack of contact or concern in later years, to name a few. There does not appear to be the dedication and loyalty as shown and stated by MacArthur as he spoke to the USMA Corp of Cadets shortly before his death:

"Today marks my final roll call with you. But I want you to know that when I cross the River, my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps and the Corps."

There are signs of encouragement out there. The August 24, 2009, edition of Forbes magazine featured a cover story on "America's Best College." The winner was West Point. USAFA finished 7th behind Princeton, Cal Tech, Williams, Harvard and Wellesley. Of course these articles depend upon criteria which could be argued for years; but one of the five criteria was postgraduate vocational success.

Are USAFA graduates lagging behind our two larger sister schools in producing leadership for this country? My answer is an affirmative "Yes." Are we on the right track to improve and remedy this? I leave that up to you, the grads and readers of this article. Awareness of the issue is a first step and the major purpose of this article. I have little doubt that healthy discussions, debates and arguments will follow. There are other reasons and maybe more valid ones than I have advocated here. There will be some who take great exception to what I have said here, but it is hard to deny the numbers and results up until now.

There are those who advocate the elimination of service academies led by a (sometime) Washington Post writer by the name of Thomas E. Ricks who, as late as April of this year said, "Want to trim the federal budget and improve the military at the same time? Shut down West Point, Annapolis and the Air Force Academy, and use some of the savings to expand ROTC scholarships." With fewer and fewer members of Congress having served in the military, Ricks may be onto something.

I welcome all comments, critique and discussion. An open dialogue amongst our graduate community about the role of USAFA, its heritage and its future would be a healthy step in the right direction ... and let us not forget the Wing, and the Wing and the Wing. ▀