

USAFA Fourth-Class Second Semester

On the 4th of January 1964 the entire Cadet Wing reported back to the Air Force Academy (AFA) for the start of the Second Semester of the 1963-64 Academic year. Our first formation after returning to the Academy was for dinner. As we stood at attention, a head count was taken and reports were given Squadron by Squadron, to the Wing Staff, to determine if anyone was late returning, or absent without official leave (AWOL). While these reports were being given, we became aware that groups of men in civilian attire (suits and overcoats) had congregated behind each Squadron. This was not so unusual, except for the numbers of these men and their total serious nature. After all the reports were given we normally would march off Squadron by Squadron to the dining hall, but, no command was given, and we remained standing at attention in Wing formation. Then the men who had grouped behind the Squadrons began walking through the ranks of Cadets. When they came to the Cadet they were looking for they would confirm the Cadet's identity and then ask the Cadet to accompany them. Again, it was not unusual for visitors to have Cadet's leave a Squadron formation and then escort the guests to the dining hall for a meal. But, this number of guests had never come to the dining hall at one time. It seemed like at least two or three Cadets were escorted out of each Squadron formation.

Finally the order was given and we marched off. Not long after we got inside the dining hall it became apparent that the Cadets who had been escorted out of ranks, and their guests were not coming to dinner. Some opinions were offered at this unusual situation, but most were totally at a loss for an explanation about what was happening. We never saw those Cadets again. To compound things, other Cadets started turning up missing and the Squadron Staff Cadets, who should have known what was going on, weren't talking. Eventually the entire story came out. Someone inside a cheating ring had gone to the Commandant during Christmas leave and told the whole story of the who, what, where, when, and how about the ring and had given a long list of conspirators. Everyone from that list had been escorted by Criminal Investigations Division (CID) Agents to the top floor of the Hospital for interrogation, processing, and dismissal. Others that at least two of the original group named as being involved were also taken to the Hospital holding area. In all there were over 100 Cadets who admitted their part in the cheating ring and were dismissed. **"I will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate anyone who does."** The Cadet motto had taken a big hit and it was a sad time at the AFA.

Mead went out for the intercollegiate basketball team and easily earned a starting position on the Freshman Team. I got real bold and decided to go out for the gymnastics team. A couple of friends in the upper-classes had volunteered to tutor me in my harder subjects and that helped me decide to go for it. Within a week the coach had trimmed the group down to those he felt had a shot at making the official teams. A week later he was trying real hard to firm up the Varsity and Freshman traveling teams, and I was still in the running. In order to make the traveling team, I had to be one of the top three freshmen in three different events. Of the freshmen, I ranked within the top three on the parallel bars and on the long horse events. My next best event was the trampoline, but I had a ways to go to get into the third place slot. I started spending extra time, even beyond team

practice, working on a better and harder routine. It was at about this time that a rather bizarre thing happened at 18th Squadron.

Cadet First-Class Matthew Feiertag and his roommate, also a First-Classman, were very good students, but had never excelled in the military or physical life of the AFA Cadets. They chose a strange way of enhancing their reputations in 18th Squadron. They formally announced that on a certain afternoon they would hold a special inspection in the alcove outside their room for Cadet Fourth-Classmen Rowley and Meyers in class A uniforms, and a rifle would be inspected. Everyone in the Squadron knew that there had only been two attempts by anyone to inspect my rifle and both times the inspector had dropped the rifle, a very embarrassing situation for the inspector. Because of this, it was a good bet that Feiertag or his roommate would try to inspect Mead's rifle. We practiced many hours on rifle inspection procedures trying to get Mead's technique as sharp as we could and made sure that I stayed sharp also. In preparation for this unusual inspection, Mead and I cleaned and re-cleaned our rifles and uniforms. We had inquired about what had possessed Feiertag and his roommate to do something this crazy and found out that in their eyes they had nothing to lose and everything to gain. If they could beat the best at an inspection they would enhance their standing considerably. Considering their current standing, a loss would do no harm.

At the appointed time Mead and I marched out of our room and headed for our appointment with destiny. As we turned the corner from our cross hall into the hallway with Feiertag's room we could not believe our eyes. It looked like every third, second, and first classman in the Squadron was waiting in the hallway for our arrival. Everyone sensed that something spectacular might be about to happen and no one wanted to miss it. As Mead and I stopped in front of Feiertag's door and came to attention with our rifles at port arms, we both knew we shined like new silver dollars and that we were ready. Our appearance must have been impressive because the looks we were given by the assembled Upper-Classmen were ones of distinct admiration. When Feiertag and his roommate came out of their room, everyone was shocked. These guys had never looked so good in uniform. Their movements, their bearing, their demeanor, their entire presence was beyond anything they had demonstrated before. It was obvious they had worked very hard preparing for this event and they had no intentions of coming off as second best. It looked like they wanted to get the hard part over with first because Feiertag stepped right up in front of Mead as if to start an inspection. Mead snapped the bolt open on his rifle, took a quick look into the chamber, and then stood rigid with his eyes peeled straight ahead.

Feiertag stood motionless for a moment and I could sense his eyes moving around Mead's uniform, but would occasionally flicker over towards me. I imagined his greatest desire at that moment was to be able to step over in front of me and then swiftly and confidently take my rifle, inspect it, and return it after finding some foreign material that would allow him to berate me for my slothfulness. However, I could also sense that he did not have the confidence to make that step. Even though he was getting some cat calls from his fellow First-Classmen about why he was not inspecting me, he was going to have to inspect Mead's rifle. With my peripheral vision I saw Feiertag's right hand start

its movement upward and I saw Mead's swift reaction. Mead pulled his hands away from the rifle and down to his side so swiftly that the rifle was left floating in mid-air. Feiertag fumbled the catch. The rifle flipped over in the air and came crashing down right on top of Feiertag's highly polished shoes. Everyone stood silently watching as the rifle rocked back and forth, back and forth while making a sound like click, clack, click, clack. The rifle was balanced over the thumb guard which was slowly cutting a channel down through the polish of Feiertag's shoe as the rifle rocked back and forth, back and forth. Except for Mead's and mine, all eyes were glued on the rifle and the desecration of the third best spit shine of the day. Mead and I stood ramrod straight with our eyes firmly caged. The only sound that could be heard was the click, clack, click, clack as the butt of the rifle and the barrel of the rifle alternately bounced off the tile floor. Then there was a muffled titter of laughter.

Across the alcove from Feiertag's room was the room of two Squats, my classmates. The sound had come from inside that room. An upper-classman standing next the door grabbed the doorknob and swiftly jerked the door open. A half-a-dozen bodies tumbled out into the hallway. Many of my classmates, not wanting to miss the great spectacle, had made their way to that room well in advance of the inspection time. They had opened the door just a crack and several had actually laid one on top of the other, about six or seven high, so that they all could see out the door. As the door was pulled open so swiftly, they had lost their balance and spilled out into the hallway. The alcove erupted into total pandemonium. Squats were being pulled to their feet. Squats were being pulled from the room. Squats were being braced all over the area. Upperclassmen were screaming their heads off, and those upperclassmen that didn't have anyone to scream at were falling over onto the floor in hysterical laughter. Mead and I remained standing at rigid attention. Feiertag scooped up Mead's rifle, told Mead he would return the rifle to Mead later that evening after he had cleaned it, and then informed us that the inspection was over. We were free to return to our room. It was all we could do to make it back to our room before we doubled over with laughter. That had to be the best inspection I ever had the privilege to attend. Feiertag's embarrassment could have been much worse. Because of the way things turned out, he actually got complemented on throwing such a great party. However, he did have trouble trying to polish out the crease in the toe of his shoe. Mead and I talked to him and convinced him to scrape all the polish off the toe and start over without the crease. It took him some time, but he ended up with a great shine. We had no more problems from Cadet Feiertag or his roommate.

With the infamous inspection behind us, I turned more time and attention toward winning a slot on the freshman gymnastics traveling team. When I stayed after team practice, one of the trainers would stay close by and keep an eye on me. One afternoon I could tell that I was getting tired, but decided to keep going on the trampoline a little longer. I was doing some repetitive back flips, working on balance and technique. I got a little off balance on one landing, but instead of pulling out of the exercise and starting over, I decided to push through another flip while trying to correct my position. I over corrected and came down completely wrong causing my back to bend way over the wrong way. I hurt, but didn't realize how badly I was hurt. The thought came to me that if I stopped now I might be afraid to try the next day at practice. Kind of like a diver hitting the

board while doing an inward dive and not being able to try it the next day out of fear. So I started the exercise over. The first time I came down from a significant height and landed in a layout position, I realized that I had hurt myself a lot more than I had thought. I panicked, but at that point I was already on my way back up. I knew I was drifting out at an angle and figured I was not going to like the landing. It turned out much worse than I had expected. I came down into the springs at the edge of the trampoline, tipped the trampoline over, and got hammered by the apparatus as it and I crashed to the floor. The trainer was right there helping me get untangled, and he could tell by the look of pain on my face that something was really wrong. He loaded me onto a cart and took me to the hospital for an examination. I didn't have any broken bones, but I had torn several muscles off the bones in my back. My life had changed again.

The Doctor loaded me up with painkillers and muscle relaxants, put me on extreme light duty, and wanted me back in a couple of days. I never knew pulled muscles could hurt that bad. Every movement by any part of my body seemed to have a connection to my back. The pain would start and I would flinch which made the pain many times greater. The worst part was that I could not even begin to study. Sleep became something to day dream about as every time I would begin to drift off to sleep some part of my body would go through some minor involuntary movement, the pain would hit, and my eyes would fly open. It was during this process that I learned about the ability of muscles to actually grow back into place. My problem was every time I flinched, any new growth would be torn apart. Just about every visit to the Doctor, my medication was changed to stronger and stronger dosages to help me stay relaxed. Eventually, on a Friday, the Doctor put me on Codeine. The next thing I remembered, Mead was gently poking me and saying that I had to get up and get ready for class. It wasn't like I had just lost the two days of a weekend because it was Tuesday morning. I had lost three days. But it had been a Holiday weekend so I had not missed any classes.

I did remember that I had been invited to go to a Major's house Sunday evening to have dinner with him and his family. He was a Regular Air Force Officer assigned to the Medical Staff at AFA as a Psychiatrist. He was also a member of the LDS Church and a good friend. When I got a chance, I called him at his office and asked him what happened Sunday. He said that I had not gone to church, but did show up at his house for dinner. He added that I had been there physically, but he had no idea where I was mentally. My mind had gone off to another place and time, but at least I hadn't done anything too embarrassing. Thank goodness he had been aware of my injury and medication.

The codeine did the trick. I stayed very relaxed and my muscles had the opportunity to continue growing. I had to take three pills a day and before each meal seemed to be the opportune time to do so. One side effect of taking the pills was drifting off to a real happy place for about a half hour after taking each pill. Marching in formation during those times was totally out of the question so I just made my own way to the chow hall. I almost caused many an upperclassman to go into cardiac arrest as I went floating through the Cadet areas in my own little world and with total disregard for the decorum of a Fourth-Class cadet. On several occasions an upperclassman from 18th Squadron would

have to come and rescue me from a lynch mob of other Squadron upperclassmen. They said it was actually quite funny to see several guys screaming and yelling at me at the top of their lungs while I stood there in my world of fog with a smile on my face. One unexpected side effect to this ordeal was a very unusual loss of appetite. It was so bad for a time that all I could eat and keep down was milk. Because it was late winter we wore very bulky coats that had a lot of room in the sleeves. I and a few of my classmates would procure extra quarts of milk at the end of each meal and smuggle them back to my room. I lost over fifteen pounds before I got back on the mend. Fortunately I didn't stay on the codeine long. As soon as the real pain went away the Doctor put me on a good regimen of physical therapy. My recovery was very good and it wasn't long before I was able to get on with normal Fourth-Class Cadet life.

As soon as I was declared physically fit by the Medical Staff I returned to full duty as a Cadet, which included the requirement of being on an athletic team. With my intercollegiate athletic career as a gymnast filed under ancient history, I had to select an intramural team to join. Even though there weren't many weeks left in the season, I decided to see if I would be any good at wrestling. Because my weight was over ten pounds below what it should have been, I was able to wrestle in a lower weight class. That turned out to be especially good because I had really responded to the physical therapy well and was as strong as I had been before the pulled muscle problem. When we went through the wrestling class during the first semester I had always been matched against heavier guys, but had held my own very well. In those intramural matches against significantly lighter opponents I won all my matches. I was not able to participate in enough matches to come close to any individual honors for number of matches won in the season, but I did help out the Squadron's win-loss record.

The biggest problem during the whole semester was my academic achievement, or more properly stated would be my lack of academic achievement. During my weeks in lala land I got so far behind that even my tutors lost hope. Again, I found myself getting by on two to four hours of sleep a night and still not being able to read all the required materials. Many mornings I would not have to make up my bunk because I would just pass out from exhaustion in the middle of the night while sitting at my desk and still be draped there when Mead woke me up the next morning. There were a few constants at the AFA and my name on the Dean's bad list was one of them.

John Terry, one of my classmates in 18th Squadron, was the son of Col Melvin Terry of the USAF. When John received his appointment to the USAFA, Col. Terry put in for an assignment at Colorado Springs and got it. Col. and Mrs. Terry purchased a home in the subdivision across from the main entrance to the AFA and became surrogate parents for many of John Terry's classmates, including me. Mrs. Terry took great interest in the health and welfare of her young men and tried very hard to see to it that we had meaningful recreation when ever we had opportunity to get off Base, however short the time might be. She was always on the lookout for good looking young ladies who would be willing to spend some time with her Cadets. One of the first young ladies that Mrs. Terry arranged to go out on a date with me, was another AF Colonial's daughter. She was a very nice gal and I had several dates with her throughout my Fourth and Third-

Class years. One of my more remarkable dates, set up by Mrs. Terry, was being able to escort Miss Teen America to one of the bigger formal social events at the AFA. This young beauty queen picked me up in her new Chrysler LeBaron convertible at the Terry's home and drove us to the event. The convertible was one of the prizes for winning the title of Miss Teen America. She was very pretty and extremely interesting, but I think she would have been happier with someone closer to her own age. Although I was four years older than she was and we had slightly different tastes, we had a good time. I asked her how Mrs. Terry had set the date up and she said, "I had never met Mrs. Terry before, but she stopped me on the sidewalk in downtown Colorado Springs and asked if I would like to go to a dance at the Air Force Academy with a Cadet."

The young lady I liked to date the most during those years was not introduced by Mrs. Terry, nor was she ever able to attend any function at the AFA. I met Dianna Lynn Batts at church while stationed at the US Military Academy Prep School, Ft. Belvoir, VA. She was one of the most beautiful women I ever had the pleasure to date. She had just graduated from High School, was living with her parents in Falls Church, VA, and was working for the US Government in the Washington, D.C. (WDC) area. We started dating just prior to my assignment to the AFA. Neither of us had the means to pay for her to travel to Colorado for a visit, so we had to wait for me to get to the WDC area in order to see each other. As a Fourth-Classman, I joined the Cadet Chorale. It was one of the better things I did at the academy because The Chorale turned out to be one of the finest glee clubs in the US. The Chorale also went several places to perform, including WDC at least once a year. Each Squadron at the AFA has a host Squadron within the Regular Air Force. The host USAF Squadron for 18th Squadron, AFA was stationed at Otis AFB, Massachusetts. At the invitation of our host squadron, every Cadet in 18th Squadron was able to visit Otis AFB at least once per year. Whenever I traveled back east as a Cadet it didn't take a lot of ingenuity to arrange a stopover at WDC. Dates with Miss Batts were few and far in between, but were worth the effort.

Two weeks before Spring Semester finals the Cadet Wing went through what was affectionately known as "Hell Week". During the academic year most squadrons had relaxed, to varying degrees, the requirements of the Fourth-Class System as it pertained to the Squats in their squadrons. 18th Squadron was known for its high ranking in athletics and marching and its low ranking in academics. Because we stressed athletics so much, there was a lot of familiarity among the teams and most of the Squats were treated very kindly by the upperclassmen. It became a tradition to really put the Squats through the worst possible Fourth-Class torture for at least one week before recognizing them as actual human beings and accepting them with full honors into the ranks of the Cadet Corp. Special inspections were held many times a day instead of just before dinner. What Fourth-Class knowledge I had managed to learn earlier in the year had disappeared from my memory banks, so special inspections became, again, a time of great wagering on the number of pushups I could accomplish. Screaming and yelling at Squats caught out in the open became the favorite past time of all upperclassmen and even continued while marching in squadron formations. At times some of the Upper-Classmen whom I had become quite friendly with during the year would attempt to give me the best chewing out possible so they would not be accused of favoritism. These sessions would

often border on the absurd and degenerate into a laugh fest. I, however, would do my best to maintain proper decorum and respect. The week went quickly and before we knew it we were standing in Wing formation on the parade field. We passed in review for the Commandant, then marched on to our designated Squadron area. The Squats were formed up in a single file and put at ease. Then the Upper-Classmen came down the line and shook each Fourth-Classman's hand. With that hand shake we were recognized by that Upper-Classman. There were no more square corners, caged eyeballs, or yelling about Fourth-Class knowledge. It was good to be human.

All that was left for that academic year were finals and First-Class Graduation. I was too tired to worry about the first and did not really care that much about the other. I managed to get enough points on my final exams to complete the year with just over a 2.0 grade point average and to secure my place at the AFA as a Third-Classman. As new Third-Classmen we left the AFA immediately after the Spring Semester ended, on a month long tour of military installations. This tour was designed to give us an understanding of the missions of the various Military Services and of the different Air Force Commands.

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