

USAFA 3rd Class & Resignation

September 1964 found me back at 18th Squadron, 3rd Group of the Cadet Wing of the United States Air Force Academy (AFA) starting the academic year of 1964 – 1965. Life was much different as a Third-Classman (sophomore) from what it had been as a Fourth-Classman, a Squat. I was a recognized human being, my time was mine, and no one was waiting to unload on me for the grievous sins that plagued the life of the Squats. Mead Meyers and I teamed up as roommates again and really looked forward to the calmer, more stable, and more satisfying life of Upper-Classmen.

Because of his performance on the Freshman Football team, Mead pretty much had a lock on a spot on the Intercollegiate Football team. I went out for the Squadron intramural football team and again, I was able to secure a place on the starting eleven. We followed the same pattern as the year before by running a good ground game and with me as the pulling guard, leading most of those plays. However, our quarterback did have a pretty good arm, so every now and then he would throw a little pass just to screw up the defense. We had another great season. Well, the team did, my season didn't end so well. In our next to last season game we scored a touchdown just prior to the end of the first half. I decided to give the ball an extra big lift on the kickoff. I had been the kicker both years and had consistently put the ball deep in the end zone on kickoffs. If the other team did decide to run the ball back I wanted to be in on the tackle as much as any of my team mates and was usually one of the first down the field. I did not realize until some time later that I had not done any leg loosening exercises before making that particular kickoff.

As I charged down the field I could tell that I was having to work extra hard to get my right leg to do what I wanted it to do. We formed up on defense and as the ball was snapped I charged forward, but my right leg acted like it wanted to stay behind. The defensive team captain, a linebacker, was right behind me and could tell that something was wrong. He asked me what was wrong and I told him I didn't know, but there was something wrong with my leg. He had me go out and had a substitute come in. I walked around the sidelines for a bit and it was obvious something was definitely wrong. The half ended right away and we sat down in a team group right there at the corner of the field for our halftime conference with our team player/coach. After a few minutes of relaxing we got up to do some warm-up exercises before the second half. I stood up, took one step, my right leg rebelled, the pain hit me, and I fell flat on my face. One of the trainers came rushing over to find out what had happened. I told him about the kickoff and how my leg had been acting. He got me on my feet and had me push my pants down so he could get a look at my leg.

There was a big bubble of mushy stuff right above the knee of my right leg and there was an indentation in the skin where the femur muscle should have been. I gave the skin a little push and my fingers pushed all the way into the femur bone with no resistance. The femur muscle had literally exploded and was now a gob of mush trapped just above the knee. I had to hobble from the playing field into the trainer's office, with very little help, and the pain got more intense with each step. By the time I got inside, the Doctor had

arrived from the Hospital. Fortunately, the pain from this injury was nothing like the pain I felt after the trampoline accident so the pain pills were of a minor dosage. The Doctor had me on physical therapy with the trainers right away and the recovery period was quite short. Almost immediately I could feel the femur muscle growing back. It started out like a thread and got bigger and stronger almost daily. I could actually feel the muscle with my fingers as it grew along the top of the femur bone. The therapy worked well and before I knew it I had strength in my right leg beyond the tested strength of my left leg. Then I continued the therapy and increased the strength of both legs. When the Doctor declared me completely fit for duty, football season was long gone and I had to find another sport to play.

During my second year at the Academy we had enough LDS Cadets at the Academy that the Stake organized our own LDS Group and we were permitted to officially have our own meetings. One of the First-Classmen was our Group Leader and for most of the year I was the Group Teacher.

Mrs. Terry remained on the hunt for available young ladies to help her adopted family of hard charging Cadets enjoy their leisure time away from the Academy. During the Fall Semester of 1964 she set me up with a black haired, green eyed, cowgirl beauty who was attending College at Pueblo, Colorado. Pueblo is a ways south of Colorado Springs and it was difficult to get there for a date on a day pass so our dates were usually restricted to times when I had a weekend pass. Besides being a beautiful young lady and having a good western heritage, this girl was slightly crazy. Not that I really cared, but she also happened to be the daughter of one of the biggest ranch owners in Colorado. We hit it off right from the start. I was lucky if I get to see her once a month, but those dates were fun from start to finish. We truly enjoyed spending time together. Toward the end of the fall semester we had a date set for a Saturday night. In the middle of that week she called to see if I would go to a ballet with her on our date. She had a required number of cultural events to attend for one of her classes and this ballet would be her last opportunity to get the required number. I thought what the heck, even if the ballet turns out as bad as I feared, at least I would be spending time with her. It would be a great night no matter what.

As we arrived for the performance we discovered that our seats were in the middle of a row about five rows from the stage. This was an older style auditorium with the seats tied together across the whole row. In those old seats, if you gave one of them a push it caused the whole row to rock back and forth. Neither of us had much appreciation for the finer arts and a good case of the giggles got hold of us both rather early in the performance. As we would start squirming or moving around in our seats, the folks on both sides of us, much to their dislike, started getting rocked back and forth with ever increasing frequency. After several complaints were made to the ushers, my date and I were moved to an empty box seat up on the side wall in front of and slightly below the balcony. Our levity was getting the best of us and before long the dignified patrons in the balcony were throwing their trash at us. After what was described as our "final" warning we settled down for a while. All was well until this fairy dressed as a man started spinning around like an accelerating top on one toe (I think they call it a pirouette). At

the peak of his spin, Green Eyes placed both of her little fingers into her mouth and let forth with a whistle that would have made my father very proud. The fairy fell off his toe and we were ejected through the nearest alley exit. My admiration for the little lady just kept going higher and higher.

In early November 1964 I was able to vote for the first time in an election for the President of the United States. I am proud to say that I have never missed an election since that day. In 1964 Barry Goldwater ran on the Republican ticket against President Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Democrat. I was able to vote on an absentee ballot from the State of Montana, my home of record. Because I voted absentee, I was able to fill out my ballot a couple of weeks prior to the actual general election. I had to open my ballot, mark it, and seal it in a secure location. The Air Officer Commanding (AOC) allowed me to use his office for that duty. As I turned my completed and sealed ballot over to the AOC for mailing, he said that he knew he should not ask, but would I mind telling him who I voted for.

It should be noted that after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Nov 22, 1963, Vice President Johnson assumed the Office of the President. In life, Pres. Kennedy had not been able to get his "reform" legislation through the Congress. However, before Kennedy's actual four year term ended, Pres. Johnson pushed through one of the most extensive legislative programs in our Nation's History. Johnson's New Deal Programs brought about the greatest changes ever in social reform and welfare packages. I thought social reform was probably a good thing, but I believed even at that young age that it would be bad for the country to do away with people's incentive to work. I had also been able to observe how Pres. Johnson and his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, were ramping up the war in Viet Nam while keeping military decisions in the hands of the politicians instead of allowing the Generals to form a strategy to fight to win. To this day I hold Johnson and McNamara responsible for turning military victory after military victory in Viet Nam into a resounding political defeat. When the AOC asked how I voted, I told him that I definitely did not vote for the Commander in Chief. He looked a little surprised and then asked why not. I told him that if Johnson remained as the President, our country would wind up in very deep dodo. Unfortunately, my words turned out to be prophetic.

The academic side of life continued to plague me and I accepted my place on the Dean's bad list like I had been born to that fate. A few of the Second-Classmen and First-Classmen were continuing to tutor me and I was getting used to surviving on my two to four hours of sleep. I thought that sooner or later I might develop some study habits or the pace would kill me. I wasn't sure which would happen first, but was getting way past caring.

By the time Christmas vacation caught up to us I was one tired Jose. I don't remember much about my time at home that Christmas, I think I slept a lot. In early January 2005 I was back at the Academy, but not too eager to start another academic semester.

When we returned from our Christmas leave and formed up for our initial formation I noticed some very somber looking gentlemen wearing suits and overcoats standing near each Squadron formation and I developed a strong feeling of dejavu. My feelings turned out to be correct when all Squadrons were held at attention while the suits started working their way through the ranks of cadets asking identified cadets to leave ranks and go with them. Most of us stood there in a state of shock thinking to ourselves about the possibility of there actually being another cheating ring at the academy. Then the unthinkable happened. Two of the men stopped beside Mead Meyers, confirmed his identity, and led him away. As my roommate was led out of formation, my breath caught in my throat and my heart stopped. The emotional wave that hit me almost took me off my feet. I was in a complete daze as we marched to the dining hall, had our dinner, and made our way back to our rooms. I know that several times that evening other cadets had tried to engage me in conversation, but I felt like an emotional cripple and close to a total shut down.

Three days later in the middle of the afternoon I went back to my room between classes to pick up some books. Just after I arrived, Mead and two suits came into the room. I could tell the suits were a little flustered at finding me there, but consented to Meads request to leave us alone for a couple of minutes. He quickly told me how he got caught up in the cheating ring. The Cadets that got caught in January 1965 were mostly athletes and a lot of them were from the football team. Mead was a naturally good student. He did not have to cheat nor had he any desire to cheat. However, toward the end of the previous semester he had walked into a room full of football players who were studying from the French final exam that would be given the next day. He made a quick decision that he was not going to turn in his buddies who were cheating, and in that moment became just as guilty in the eyes of the Honor Code as the cheaters. I felt horrible for Mead. Of all the ways a person could leave the Academy that had to be about the worst way to go. Deep down inside I felt very bad for myself also, knowing that most of my good times at the academy had involved Mead and that that chapter had just ended.

January 1965 the top six Squadrons in marching at USAFA went to WDC for President Johnson's inauguration. The inaugural parade is led by contingents from the different US Military Services and 18th Squadron of the AFA was to lead the USAF contingent of that parade. We would also be going to the Inaugural Ball at Andrews AFB. In all we would be in WDC for at least four days. As soon as I could, I called Dianna Batts to tell her I was coming and that I wanted her to go to the Inaugural Ball with me. She talked to her parents and got permission to ask me if I could stay at their home while at WDC on this trip. As it actually saved the government money, permission to stay at a private residence was no problem. I just had to make sure I was on time to all formations. Dianna had an older brother, my age, who reminded me a lot of Vic Perkins and we had always gotten along very well. He was home from the Marine Corps and I stayed in his room while at the Batts'. Dianna and I really had a great time sight-seeing, bowling, playing card games and visiting.

The day of the Inauguration I had to be at an assembly area down by the Capitol building early and got to enjoy my favorite military past time, hurry up and wait. After the Army

and Navy units marched off it was our turn. We marched west along the north side of the Mall and past the Reviewing Stand that was part way down the Mall. I was in the left column of our formation. As we passed the Reviewing Stand, all the Cadets in the other columns would do an "Eyes Left" during the salute to the President. That meant they would all be able to get a look at the President while keeping their eyes on the Cadet in the left column in order to keep the row straight. The Cadets in the left column were supposed to keep their eyes straight ahead in order to keep proper spacing in the formation. When the "Eyes Left" was given I could not help myself, I glanced up to view my President. There stood LBJ bigger than life looking as charming as ever. My look turned out to be a big mistake though because the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, whom I loathed, was standing beside LBJ with an even bigger smile on his face. My first reflex was to throw up, but my devotion to duty won out. I just swallowed deeply and marched on.

That evening Dianna got dressed in a beautiful formal gown and I dressed in my Cadet Class-A uniform tuxedo. As we were getting ready to leave for the Inaugural Ball, an Uncle of Dianna's came in, handed me the keys to his new Cadillac, and said we needed a car to ride in that looked as good as we both did. We only got a little lost, but finally arrived at Andrews AFB and made our way to President Johnson's Inaugural Ball. It was kind of a Fairy Tale evening with me being the Prince and Dianna definitely being the Fairest Princess of Them All. This was the first time any of my fellow Cadets had seen Dianna in person and they fell all over themselves and any furniture that happened to be nearby whenever they got close. We had a ball. It was tough to leave Dianna that trip, but I couldn't afford the problems that would come my way if I missed the flight back to Colorado. I reluctantly said my good-byes and hoped for an early return to WDC.

With Mead gone, my anchor started to float and without him there to push me in academics, I really began to flounder. I decided the heck with going without sleep and started sleeping about six hours a night. I became much more selective about which lessons I would study and gave up trying to complete all the reading material. Strange as it might seem I think I got more out of my classes after that even though my ability to respond to questions obviously suffered.

About half way through the semester a rather unusual thing happened in our Spanish class. Colonel Berdecio, an Officer from the Bolivian Air Force, was our instructor. He was a very likable man and a good teacher. One morning we reported for class, but Col. Berdecio, who was always very punctual, was not there. In some schools if an instructor is 10 or 15 minutes late the students are free to leave and will not be docked. At the AFA no one was free to leave no matter how late an instructor might be. After about 20 minutes, a very out of breath General's Aide rushed into the classroom and apologized for our instructor not being there. Then he proceeded to explain that Col. Berdecio was now General Berdecio, Chief of Staff of the Air Force of Bolivia. There had been a Revolution in Bolivia during the night and the new Dictator had called General Berdecio home immediately to assume his new duties. Our class would have a new instructor assigned by the next class period. We were dismissed.

In April of 1965 I was nearing the end of my second year at the US Air Force Academy. As I got closer to the end of that year, the feeling that I should resign from the Academy became stronger and stronger. Because my Grade Point Average was below 2.0 (C average), there was a possibility that at the end of that year I would be terminated from the Academy involuntarily. That could have a negative effect on any application to another University at a later date. I knew that before I could resign in "good standing" I would have to be interviewed by Officers on the Dean's Staff, the Commandant's Staff, and by a Staff Psychiatrist. I also knew that the first accusation would be that I was quitting because of my low grade point average. I had been on Academic probation since the first grading period of my freshman year. Being on probation causes restrictions in extracurricular activities and loss of privileges (the number of times you can sign out of the Academy on a weekend day or overnight pass). However, I had been consistently rated very near the top of my class militarily which put me on the "Commandant's List" and gave me extra privileges. The Dean's bad list and the Commandant's good list cancelled each other out. Also, someone on the Commandant's List who is in academic trouble at the end of their second year can be offered an extra year to complete the required curriculum. There were a couple of upperclassmen in my Cadet Squadron who were on the five-year plan.

There was another, bigger issue that I had to resolve and I had only discussed it with one other person a couple of years prior. I had realized from very early in my days in the military that if I wanted to make the military a career I had the ability to do it well. When the opportunity to go to a Military Academy presented itself, I thought that it might be a sign of good things to come. However, just about the time the actual appointment was offered, I got a very strong feeling that a military career was not the right thing for me. I had sort of a dilemma. If I had learned nothing else from my three years in the Army, I had learned the value of having a college degree. And then I was given the opportunity to receive one of the best, an Engineering Degree from a Military Academy. How else would I ever afford that kind of education? I had sought the advice of an Air Force Lt. Colonel who was a member of the LDS Ward I attended near Ft. Belvoir, VA. He told me that this kind of opportunity was one in a lifetime. I would always have the ability to withdraw from the program later if I truly believed it was the right thing to do. However, if I turned it all down before hand, that opportunity would not be offered again. On his advice, I had accepted the appointment to USAFA. Now that same dilemma was eating away at me and I could not get around it. During the many trips I had made to various Military installations as a Cadet I had been able to associate a lot with Officers of all ranks. My gut kept telling me that I could make a good career out of the military, but my heart kept telling me that it was not the right thing to do. There was also the feeling that under false pretenses, I was depriving someone else of a position at the Academy. I had to commit one way or the other.

About the first of May I decided to go talk to one of the Psychiatrists as the first step toward my resignation. He just happened to be one of the LDS Officers assigned to the Academy Staff and had been a friend for about a year and a half. After a lengthy discussion of the issues involved, he stated that he felt I had given the problem sufficient study and that he would support my decision to resign. The Officers from the Dean's and

Commandant's Staffs who interviewed me stated that they were very impressed with the thought and reasoning I had put into my decision. They also said that they felt that I could become an excellent Officer if I should choose to stay and offered me the opportunity of the five-year program. I declined the offer. The next issue was to select the actual date of my resignation.

I told them that I would be willing to complete all the resignation paperwork in advance. However, whatever we did, I wanted to be able to receive academic credit for any class I could pass for the semester. It was agreed that I would fill out the paperwork on or about the first of June, but that no action would be taken until finals were completed about the seventh of June. As soon as that decision was made, it was like a great weight was lifted from my shoulders. They had said that it might be good that there would be a few weeks waiting period before I signed the papers, because that might give me a chance to reconsider. They seemed to really be hoping that I would end up staying. As I walked out of that office, I knew without a doubt that I was making the right decision and would not be changing my mind. However, about half way back to my room the joy faded as the realization set in that I was going to have to tell the folks that I was resigning.

I guess it is human nature or maybe even some law of nature that fathers do get bragging rights from the exceptional exploits of their children. Because I was the first person from that part of Montana to go to a Military Academy, that was considered exceptional, at least by Dad. Bragging rights were vested and used with abandon. Telling Mom and Dad was not going to be easy. I decided to set that problem aside for a couple of weeks and worry about it later. In the mean time I had finals to prepare for and I had to do some planning for the rest of my life. My first order of business was to contact BYU and have them send me an application. If I had any hope of getting accepted as a transfer student for the fall semester the application would have to be in as soon as possible. The second order of business in preparing for civilian life was to get a car. I certainly did not want to show up at home heading straight to the doghouse and not have wheels of my own. At a used car lot in Colorado Springs I found a dream car for a guy my age that was just getting out of the Air Force Academy. It was a 1958 Chevrolet Coupe, lots of chrome, autumn-bronze paint with a metallic flake, heavy-duty automatic transmission, and a 348 cubic inch engine with three two-barrel carburetors. That was probably the next best thing to having my own jet fighter. I was even lucky enough to get the dealership owner to throw in some fixer-up items at no extra charge. Stashing the car at the Terry's for a few weeks turned out to be no problem at all.

In early spring of 1965 the Cadet Chorale received an invitation to perform at the Washington National Cathedral during a special service in May. The invitation was accepted and the complete Chorale went to WDC for a long weekend in early May. The best part of that weekend was being able to spend a lot of time with Dianna. There was also a down side to the trip. I had to tell Dianna that I would be resigning from the Academy and would be trying to get accepted into BYU for the coming Fall Semester. We both knew that by leaving the Academy my cross country trips would come to an end and there would be little chance of seeing each other in the foreseeable future. Our

relationship was as good as doomed to failure. We did maintain some hope, but reality didn't take long to set in. I never saw Dianna again.

Toward the end of May the green eyed beauty called me on a Friday afternoon and said that she needed to see me that day or the next at the latest. She sounded like an emotional mess which was really out of character for her. Saturday morning Mrs. Terry picked me up in my 58 Chevy and ushered me on my way to Pueblo. I think she wanted to go find out what the problem was more than I did. I found Green Eyes sitting in her dorm room staring at the floor. As soon as she saw me she started crying and I concluded that it was going to be one tough day. Through the tears and the blubbing I finally got to the root of the problem. The next day was her wedding day. Yep, Cadet Rowley was speechless. What I finally began to understand was that her parents and another couple, who owned an equally large ranch, had several years earlier entered into a contract for the marriage of their children and the combining of their ranches. Green Eyes had known for years that she was to marry this other rancher's son, but had conveniently ignored the fact that she had never been in love with him. Evidently she had had more fun with me that year than she had ever had with anyone before and she had one day to resolve her conflict. For a while it seemed like she wanted me to just say "let's run away together and everything will be okay." Now it is true that on occasion I have made some pretty stupid decisions, but there was no way I was going to venture into that quicksand. I told her that in a couple of weeks I was heading to Montana with the shirt on my back, a paid for car, little in the bank, no job, and an uncertain future. A relationship under those conditions would be snake-bit from the start. If we tried to throw her emotional baggage in as well, there would be no hope of success. She was going to have to stand on her own two feet for the next few hours and make the decision of a lifetime. As I drove back north that afternoon I knew I was going to miss the fun we had had, but there was a great sense of relief that I had avoided the storm that was swirling around Green Eyes' life.

About June first I reported to the Administration Office to finish the resignation process. I was interviewed again by the Officers I had spoken to earlier. They talked long and hard trying to get me to stay, but I convinced them that my mind was made up. We finished up the paperwork and I was about one week away from being out the door and on my way to civilian life. All I had left to do was to take the final examinations for the classes I had taken that semester. I had not really put a lot of effort into my studies that semester and going into finals I was looking at possible failing grades in at least two subjects and was close to failing in a couple of others. This was shaping up to be my worst semester of all. I was thankful that it was going to be my last.

It wasn't that I was a bad student. I just had never learned how to really study. In high school I rarely took a book home because even if I had found the time to do some homework, I wouldn't have bothered. For some reason I could get pretty good grades on tests and found that I could get by on test scores. I graduated from Choteau High School with mostly Cs on my report cards and absolutely no study skills. Part of my problem in High School was my expectations in life. I had never believed that I would go to college. I had always known that the folks did not have the means to send any of us to college and there were no financial aid programs in those days like there are today. With no

expectation of being able to go to college or even a trade school, my outlook on future success was kind of dim. At the beginning of my Freshman Science class in September 1956, our teacher, Albert Finley, asked us to take out a piece of paper and write down our answers to four questions. Question one was "To be a success, how much money will you have to make in one year?" I answered "Ten thousand dollars." Question two was "What do you expect to accomplish in this life?" I answered "I will die a ranch-hand on someone else's ranch." Question three was "How long do you expect to live?" I answered "I will not live to be 50 years old." Then he said that we should dream the impossible without any regard to financial ability or talents before answering the last question. Question four was "What would be the greatest accomplishments you can imagine?" I answered "To be an astronaut." Well, my expectations in life had certainly changed between September 1956 and June 1963 when I entered the Academy. However, the bad habits I developed in High School became a curse throughout all my college years.

The academic load at the academy was something that I was totally unprepared to handle. They crammed a five-year Engineering Degree into four years. A full load at most universities is anything over twelve credit hours a semester. At the Academy, most Cadets were taking eighteen credit hours a semester. They also had to participate in intramural or intercollegiate athletics every semester and participate in all the military aspects of the Academy life. Most of my time at the Academy I had averaged two to four hours of sleep a night trying to find the time to at least read through the assigned material for the next day's classes. However, most of my Instructors realized that I was really trying and now and then I did get some gifts at grading time. The Academy used a curve grading curve system and sometimes the curve got stretched a little on the lower end to keep failing grades to a minimum. I think good people skills on my part had a lot to do with some of the grades I received.

When I walked into my first final exam that June of 1965 I realized right away that my Instructors were aware of the fact that I had resigned. I was afraid that some of them might be critical of my decision to leave the academy and drop my grades even lower. I was pleasantly surprised to find out later that most of them had in fact given me going away presents of grades higher than I probably would have received had I stayed. I did not get one failing grade for the semester. That helped a lot when I arrived at BYU that fall. They gave me equivalent credit for every class I had taken at USAFA.

On June 7th, as soon as finals were over, I was relieved of duty from 18th Squadron at the USAFA and placed on Leave of Absence pending approval of separation from appointment as a Cadet, USAFA. I did not want to face the folks alone so I talked Dick Midkiff, one of my former classmates, into traveling to Montana with me. As he was still a Cadet, he had to wait a few more days at the end of the semester before he could go on leave. I stayed at the Terry's home until Dick and I were able to head for Choteau. We got home on June 15th to a warmer than expected reception from the folks. I never did find out if that was because Dick was with me or if the folks had just decided that what was done was done. Dad asked me one time for an explanation of why I left the Academy. He did not look very pleased with my answer, but he never brought it up

again. Although the pain eased a little when I went to BYU that fall, I know he was bothered about my leaving the Academy for quite some time. I got to see a few looks of pride on Dad's face at some of the things I accomplished later, like when I went into the US Border Patrol in 1968 and when I graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso in May 1970. And I got it from good authority that bragging rights were attached and liberally used again when I became an FBI Special Agent in January 1972.

Regarding Dian Parkinson:

She was born Dianna Lynn Batts on November 30, 1944 in Jacksonville, NC. In 1965, while living in Falls Church, Virginia, Diana Batts won the Miss District of Columbia USA title and competed in the Miss USA 1965 pageant, where she placed fourth runner-up. She went on to represent the United States in the international Miss World contest, and was first runner-up to Lesley Langley of the United Kingdom. From 1975 to 1993, as Dian Parkinson, she was a Barker's Beauty model on the [game show](#) The Price Is Right. She frequently appeared in the "Price Is Right Department Store" Showcase as the elevator operator, as well as becoming the favored model for operating the Bump game. In 1993 she sued Bob Barker for sexual harassment over sexual occurrences with him in the late 1980s, but dropped her suit in 1995. Dian Parkinson was the cover girl of Playboy in December 1991 and May 1993.

Dell V. Rowley
November 20, 2007