BECOMING LEADERS OF CHARACTER

Conversations with the Class of 1973

UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE ACADEMY

PAX IN TEMPORE MUSTRO

Michael Mosier

FOREWORD

Early on the morning of June 23, 1969, my parents dropped me off at the Base of the Ramp at the Air Force Academy and bid me a final farewell. I eagerly bounded up the Ramp to join my future classmates—as young and naive as we all were—as a member of the future "Illustrious" Class of 1973.

We weren't an "illustrious" class in those days—far from it. We still faced a long, hard summer before being accepted as cadets. And it would be another four years of grueling academics, intense military training, and physical challenges before we received our commissions as second lieutenants in the world's greatest Air Force. Even then we couldn't consider our class "illustrious." We were just beginning the journey toward becoming leaders of character in the active-duty U.S. Air Force. There were hard lessons to learn, scar tissue to build up, and a broader perspective to gain—things that only come with time. More than 50 years later, I can now say that our class is often referred to as "The Illustrious Class of 1973." I credit that not just to longevity, but to the values we learned at the Academy, our collective hard work and dedicated service, and a determined effort to live honorable lives, both in and out of the Air Force.

One thing we've learned over the years—and what you'll see reflected in the stories and vignettes in this book—is that career satisfaction goes beyond attaining rank or position. Instead, satisfaction is derived from

helping others and serving something bigger than yourself. The reality is that one doesn't have to be an Academy graduate or a career officer to serve our great country; in fact, many of our classmates left the Air Force after fulfilling their initial commitment. As you'll read in this book, service opportunities abound in America in all walks of life. And, just as in the Air Force and the Space Force, our Nation's professions and institutions have a desperate need for honorable, selfless, and principled leadership—leadership that builds and sustains our society. Perhaps most significantly, the Core Values you'll read about here are essential elements of that principled leadership and are therefore relevant to anyone who picks up this book.

To the Class of 2023: when you raised your right hands and took the oath of office, you made a deliberate decision to become defenders of our great Nation. It doesn't matter what part of the country you came from, how much money you have or don't have, what sex or race you are, or what your parents did or did not do. Your fellow citizens depend on your willingness to defend this Nation against all enemies foreign or domestic, and to support and defend our great Constitution. It won't be an easy life. As at the Academy, your time in the Air Force and Space Force will be marked by difficult training and demanding education. You'll end up moving many times, sometimes to dangerous parts of the world. There will be times when you'll be tired, scared, uncomfortable, and missing your family back home. But know this: you'll be serving a noble cause alongside other great Americans. While you'll be forced out of your comfort zone time and time again, as a defender you'll never stop growing as a human being and as a leader. You'll get to do things that you've not dreamed of, because our great military lets ordinary people do extraordinary things.

Fifty years have passed since my classmates and I eagerly took those first steps from the Base of the Ramp to lives of service. *Becoming Leaders of Character* chronicles our journey along the way. It's an important story,

not because we did everything perfectly, but because of our continuing determination and commitment to lead honorable lives.

It's our hope that these examples will inspire others as we pass the sword to a new generation.

Stephen R. Lorenz
General, USAF (Ret.)

INTRODUCTION

As our legacy Class of 2023 approaches graduation and their new lives as Air Force and Space Force officers, there's a great deal of excitement and anticipation. But, while the new graduates have all imagined what lies ahead, the future and their role in it remains largely unknown. On the other hand, for the Class of 1973, the story of our professional lives has been largely written.

It's a legitimate question to ask: "Why is it important to know what the Class of 1973's experience has been?" After all, nearly all aspects of the Academy experience have greatly evolved between 1973 and 2023—from academics to technology to military training. Even more fundamentally, our class was all male, and we lacked the more diverse demographic that characterizes the Air Force Academy Class of 2023. Furthermore, there are significant differences between daily life in the Academy of 1973 and the Academy of 2023. We marched to the parade field down the "Bring Me Men" Ramp. Sijan Hall was called the "New Dorm." There was no Center for Character and Leadership Development with the spectacular glass spire pointing toward the North Star. We didn't have to deal with the challenges and hardships of a global pandemic—no social and emotional isolation, quarantines, Zoom classes, or uncertain futures. But the relevance of our experience lies in the common experiences that all Academy graduates share. We all walked onto the Terrazzo

with some degree of apprehension, not really knowing what to expect. We suffered through the trials and tribulations of the fourth-class system. We spent four years under continual pressure, operating on little sleep. We pulled "all-nighters," writing last-minute papers and cramming for finals. We all faced challenges with new and unfamiliar responsibilities. And, through it all, we experienced the highs and lows of youth.

This book is organized around the three Core Values that define service in the Air and Space Forces: Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do. *Becoming Leaders of Character* uses a story-telling methodology to impart hard-earned lessons accumulated over many years of service; the stories presented here are intended to provide texture and nuance to what might otherwise be a collection of dry biographies. But this is not a "how-to" book on leadership; rather, it's about our experiences, both good and bad.

Some stories you'll read were contributed by well-known classmates, like former Air Force Chief of Staff General Nort Schwartz and Captain Sully Sullenberger of "Miracle on the Hudson" fame. Others were submitted by lesser-known classmates, but with equally powerful messages: you'll learn how character and leadership were tested in a perilous rescue of helpless survivors of a burning ship in the Gulf of Alaska, a series of dangerous Cold War missions in East Germany, and a complex effort to rescue an Afghani family from the hands of the Taliban following the withdrawal from Afghanistan. You'll even be asked to consider how you'd respond to a moral dilemma at the top of Mount Everest. Taken together, each story provides critical insight into leadership under the most difficult circumstances.

It's important to note that becoming a leader of character doesn't follow a linear path—it typically has twists and turns, with the occasional stumble along the way. Some of life's most enduring lessons are generated by failure, as much as by success. While *Becoming Leaders of Character* doesn't chronicle all our failures, those failures have inevitably

contributed to the successes we've enjoyed. It's also important to remember that character isn't defined by how we fall, but rather by how we get up. As we discovered over the years, misfortune and failure—or, more important, how one deals with misfortune and failure—play a significant role in the continuing education of a leader of character.

This book is the result of a great deal of introspection. As a class, we have the advantage of being able to look back and see how our formative years at the Academy molded our character and guided us on our journey through life, during our time in the Air Force and in follow-on careers. This book is the compilation of history, introspection, and consideration of what was and what could have been.

To the legacy Class of 2023: While the times and circumstances that have shaped our journey may differ from yours, we will all stand together as you take your place in the Long Blue Line.

You're just beginning to write your story.

This is ours.

PART I

BECOMING THE CLASS OF 1973

We came to Colorado's Front Range from all parts of the country to start our new lives as cadets at the United States Air Force Academy. Some of us were brought to the Base of the Ramp by anxious and proud parents; others were dropped off by well-wishing friends. Some of us were delivered by large silver-and-blue buses with "United States Air Force Academy" emblazoned on the sides. But, regardless of how we arrived, we were all transfixed by the large, awe-inspiring commandment in silver letters on the wide arch above the Ramp: "Bring Me Men."[1]

As we climbed the Ramp, suitcases in hand, we left the past behind and took our first tentative steps into a new world. At the top of the Ramp, the gleaming silver-and-glass buildings, broad, marble-striped

1 | "Bring me men to match my mountains. Bring me men to match my plains. Men with empires in their purpose. And new eras in their brains." *Bring Me Men to Match My Mountains*, Sam Walter Foss. See Appendix D, *Rocky Mountain News* article from June 1964.

Terrazzo, and spectacular Chapel with its 17 aluminum spires pointing toward the heavens lay before us, all nestled against steep forested green mountains and deep blue Colorado sky.

We didn't know what our futures would bring, but there was one thing we knew for sure:

This was our destiny.

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THE JOURNEY BEGINS

You could have heard a pin drop.

After three days of long lines, shots in arms, uniform issue, short buzz haircuts, never-ending forms, and a mind-numbing battery of placement exams, we finally gathered in one place as a class. Herded into Arnold Hall Theater by stern-looking upperclassmen in light blue short-sleeved shirts, black-and-silver shoulder boards, wheel caps, and white gloves, we quietly sat in orderly rows, each lost in his own thoughts. The silence was ominous. We wondered: What next? Am I ready for this?

The heavy silence was broken as a tall man strode onto the center of the stage. He was an imposing figure: blue-green flight suit, sleeves rolled up to mid-forearm. Craggy face, square jaw, thick, rakish moustache, erect muscular frame. He walked back and forth with a deliberate pace, arms crossed, eyes studying our young faces intently. Then he stopped, put his hands on his hips, staring at us, as if daring us to move. Finally, he spoke.

"How many of you graduated in the top ten percent of your high school class?" he demanded in a gravelly voice.

Hands confidently shot up throughout the auditorium.

"How many of you were members of the National Honor Society?"

Again, hands raised high.

The staccato-like questions continued: "How many of you lettered in three or more sports? How many of you were class president? How many class valedictorians?"

With each new question, the show of hands throughout the auditorium remained impressive. Finally, he paused, his intense stare moving from face to face.

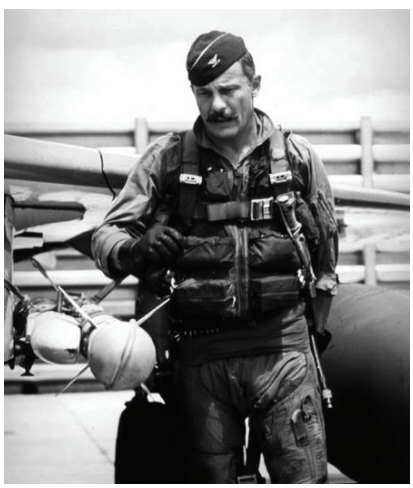
"Well, good for you," he growled. "But just look around. You may have been a big deal in your hometown, but here, you're just a face in the crowd. You're all starting from zero. If you're going to survive, you're going to have to prove yourself."

He paused again. "Look to your left. Now look to your right. One of the three of you won't make it to graduation."

He let that sink in. Then he continued, his tone softening a bit. "Okay, let me give you some advice. This next four years will be like trying to eat an elephant."

(Elephant? What?)

"Know how you eat an elephant?" He searched the confused faces. "I'll tell you: one bite at a time. Okay," he concluded, "now get to work." He turned on his heel and abruptly strode off the stage, leaving us in stunned silence.



That was our introduction to Brigadier General Robin Olds: legendary fighter pilot from two wars. Triple ace. Four MiG kills in Vietnam. And, most recently, commander of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, stationed at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base.

He was also the commandant at the United States Air Force Academy.

PART II

BECOMING LEADERS OF CHARACTER

Many of us had our share of ups and downs as we transitioned from the Academy to the operational Air Force. In fact, the "Real Air Force" we had all heard about required a greater adjustment than many of us expected. The following chapters describe the stark reality that confronted us: life is rarely black or white, but rather painted in shades of gray.

PART III

APPLYING THE CORE VALUES

Gen. Fogleman's announcement of the Core Values in 1996 confirmed what we already knew from our Air Force Academy experience: the foundation of effective leadership is Integrity, Service, and Excellence. Living those Core Values, on the other hand, requires strong commitment and difficult decisions.

As outlined in the "Little Blue Book," each of the three Core Values is supported by several underlying virtues. The following chapters help illustrate the role the Core Values and supporting virtues have played in our development as leaders of character.

PART IV

LEADERS OF CHARACTER FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

What does a leader of character look like from the perspective at the highest level of the institution? Why is having leaders of character so important to maintaining the health and well-being of the force? What role does character play in the military ethos? The following chapters present the perspectives of a variety of our classmates who held key leadership positions in our Air Force.

PART V

LEADERS OF CHARACTER IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS

We never know when our character will be tested. Sometimes tests appear dramatically, in the light of day; sometimes they creep in quietly, in the dark of night. Regardless, we need to be prepared to meet them and draw on every bit of character we have to overcome the unexpected. This harkens back to the basic lessons from doolie year, when we were pushed beyond what we thought were our limits. Years later, when time and circumstance put us in extraordinary situations, we were able to persevere.

The following chapters describe such situations. While other classmates have had analogous experiences, the selections here are intended to illustrate how character is tested in times of crises.

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FROM FIGHTER PILOT TO INFANTRY PLATOON SERGEANT

by Major (Ret.) Rowe P. Stayton

Rowe Stayton
CS-36

Maj. Rowe Stayton is unique among our classmates. In 1981, he separated from the Air Force as an F-15 fighter pilot to pursue a law degree. Then came 9/11. Like many of us, Rowe tried to get back into the fight to defend his country; however, the Air Force Military Personnel Center said that he was too old for the fight. Rather than giving up, he enlisted in the Army National Guard in Arkansas, and later deployed to Iraq as an infantry soldier and platoon sergeant. This is his story.

My Air Force career started out like that of many other classmates. I went to pilot training at Williams AFB. My first assignment after graduation was as a T-37 instructor, and I served at Williams for three years. After finishing my tour at Williams, I was fortunate enough to get an F-15 as my first operational assignment. I spent three years in the 27th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Langley AFB, flying the air-to-air mission. It was a great opportunity and I loved both the mission and the people I flew with.

As time went on though, my career goals changed, and I decided I wanted to become an attorney. I applied for and was accepted to law school at the University of Denver. Because I still loved flying, I decided to join an Air National Guard unit in Des Moines, Iowa while I pursued a legal career. What a great life—I commuted every weekend from Denver to fly the A-7 in Iowa. I'd only flown air-to-air in the F-15, so this was a great opportunity to learn the air-to-ground mission. I got to work with some outstanding Air National Guard officers for the next seven years. As time went on, though, it became apparent that I wouldn't be able to keep the level of proficiency I wanted in the A-7 because of my growing law practice in Denver. It was a difficult decision, but I felt it was best to step aside after eight years of active duty and seven years with my Guard unit.

Looking back, I know that was the right decision to make. Still, I really missed the people I'd served with. So, when DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM kicked off, I tried to get into the C-130 reserve unit in Colorado Springs. They actually accepted me, but the war was over before I could get to upgrade training, so I had to put that on hold.

GETTING BACK INTO THE FIGHT

Then came 9/11. At that time, I was 50 years old, but I just felt I had to get back in the fight. I decided to call a classmate of mine who I worked closely with at the Academy, Nort Schwartz. At the time he was working for the secretary of defense. Given the circumstances, Nort was pretty

busy, to say the least. Still, he took my call, and I told him what I wanted to do. He laughed and said, "There's no need for a 50-year-old fighter pilot in the active-duty Air Force. Why don't you look for a Guard unit?" So that's what I did.

After looking around, I managed to work a deal with the Air National Guard unit in Denver. I was told they'd bring me in as a lawyer and then, after some period of time, would let me transition to an F-16 position. I was thrilled, because this was really what I wanted to do. Unfortunately, I discovered there was a regulation that prohibited me from coming back in as a judge advocate general unless I was forty-five years or younger. I questioned the age limit, thinking, "How tough can it be to work in a courtroom in the Air Force?" But, despite my best efforts, I was told I was ineligible to serve.

Needless to say, I was pretty disappointed. But, if the Academy taught me anything, it was to never give up. After considering my options, I decided to try to get back into the fight through another branch of service, the Army. I managed to locate an Army National Guard unit in Arkansas where I had a hunting and fishing cabin. So I started the application process. It wasn't any easier than it had been with the Air National Guard—in fact, they "lost" my paperwork on two separate occasions. But it was finally approved, and I was called up. I drove to Arkansas, was sworn in as an E-5 (sergeant) and joined the Arkansas Army National Guard in an infantry unit.

ADAPTING TO THE ARMY

The transition wasn't an easy one, as I was an ex-Air Force major having to adapt to a new position as an infantry sergeant in the Army. It was also a challenge because I found that, as I aged a bit, I didn't process things as quickly as I used to. That's what Nort was getting at when I asked him about getting back in the fight—he recognized that a 50-year-old fighter pilot probably doesn't process the air combat arena as quickly as a 28-year-old fighter pilot does. So it was an uphill climb in many respects.

For me to get back into the fight as an infantryman, there were two things I had to learn right off the bat. First, I had to learn the enlisted rank structure. As an ex-fighter pilot, I really didn't understand the enlisted side of things. Although the actual rank structure was pretty straightforward, there were certain protocols and cultural aspects I didn't understand. For instance, at the Academy, we had some of the finest NCOs in the Air Force serving as our group sergeant majors. They helped tutor and mentor us. As a matter of fact, most of us on group staff probably spent more time talking to the sergeant majors about being good officers than we did our AOCs. To a man, they really wanted the cadets to succeed. By contrast, when I came into the Army, it wasn't like that at all.

To begin with, the enlisted corps in the Army is extremely rank-oriented and, as a result, there are very clear divisions. Due to the demands in the combat environment, they put a very high priority on physical performance—much more so than in the Air Force. So here was a 50-some year-old man coming into a team with 18, 19, and 20-year olds—you can imagine the reaction. On the one hand, the soldiers thought it was really cool that I decided to come back in, particularly given that I had been an Air Force major, a fighter pilot, and a lawyer. On the other hand, my previous achievements meant nothing when we went out in the sector. So, to gain respect from my people, I knew had to step up my game to operate in the very physical manner that my position required.

I started lifting weights and running. That was a great start. But, ironically, one of the things that helped me gain the most respect stemmed from having been the Wing Open boxing champ at the Academy. As I said, in the Army enlisted corps, you have to perform physically—and sometimes that requires getting physical. There were always a couple of guys who wanted to call me out. I had brought my gloves with me, so if anyone wanted to try me on for size or didn't want to follow my lead, we boxed. Now, I may not be a good wrestler, but I can certainly box.

So I did pretty well and, in the process, I earned their respect. Earning their respect made a world of difference when it came to being a successful team leader, squad leader, and then, later on, a platoon sergeant. The importance of earning your peoples' respect was another one of the important lessons I learned at the Academy.

There were other significant cultural differences I had to deal with as I transitioned to my new role in the infantry. I can honestly say that, as a flight lead, I knew that everyone on my wing was highly competent in all circumstances. In the Army, on the other hand, I quickly learned that you can't make that assumption. That's not my service parochialism speaking; it's just the nature of the beast. In the active-duty Army, for example, when they test people to see which military occupation specialty they're best suited for, the lower-scoring individuals tend to be assigned to the infantry, whereas the higher-scoring people are put into the more technical career fields, such as cyber warfare or air and missile defense. Consequently, infantry training is based on the lowest common denominator and involves constant repetition. People are watched very closely and there's very little room for creativity. To be fair, in the fighter community, there were a few pilots who weren't well-suited for the mission, either because of the way they processed information or because they weren't sufficiently aggressive. But those pilots were weeded out of the community on an informal basis and ended up going to other jobs. As a result, the line fighter pilots, particularly the weapons officers, were highly talented and people you knew you could count on in a fight. On the other hand, the demographics and selection process in the Army meant you really had to watch the infantry troops carefully. My unit in Arkansas was a bit more of a mixed bag. I had older schoolteachers and police officers who were always great soldiers. But I also had guys who were right out of high school and required more "hands-on" supervision. In the fighter world, I could give a pre-flight brief and be confident the mission would either be executed the way I briefed or, if not, any

errors would be corrected after a debrief. I didn't have that confidence in my Army unit.

One of the first things I learned at the Academy was the importance of doing your duty. That was a foundational principle in everything we did. By contrast, one's concept of duty in the Army wasn't always as well-formed or as intuitive as I would have expected. It certainly wasn't something I could take for granted. For instance, I was deployed to Iraq in 2004. Six months into my tour, I was assigned to a new squad and stayed with that unit for another seven months. The squad leader was a good friend of mine and, at that point, had seen a lot more combat that I had. Toward the end of our tour, our squad was tasked with clearing five houses that were a hotbed of insurgent activity on Haifa Street—sardonically named "Purple Heart Boulevard" by the troops—in Baghdad. My squad leader gathered us together and, to my amazement, told us, "We're not going to do it. I'm not going to get anybody hurt." I couldn't believe it. I pulled him aside and called him out on that—not because I was heroic or suicidal, but because I just felt I had to remind him of what our duty was.

Don't get me wrong, I was scared. I was scared every time I went out. Initially, I thought there was something wrong with me for feeling that way, but the longer I was in the combat zone, the more I realized that everyone was scared. So I adopted an attitude that it's normal to be scared. Matter of fact, it's not normal to not be scared. But you do your duty anyway. You've got to do your job. From that perspective, I would never have forgiven myself for not challenging the squad leader. Had we not cleared those houses, we would have endangered a large troop movement that was due to move along Haifa Street. Our job was to ensure they didn't get attacked or shot at. After some discussion, my squad leader actually saw it my way. Having said that, I understood why he wanted to stand down. It was his squad, and there were ten soldiers counting on him to get them home safely. But that didn't matter because

we had an obligation to do our duty. So, we did. Fortunately, no one got hurt, but it was something we needed to do. The teaching point for me was that it's critical in the profession of arms that we prop each other up and support each other in doing our duty.

EATING CROW

Not all conversations I had with superiors had such a happy ending.

We'd been in Baghdad about six weeks, and I had been observing some leadership failures I considered to be unforced errors. For instance, I was on a mission to an outpost in Baghdad and was standing in line with all the other enlisted guys to get some food. Suddenly our company commander walked in with members of his staff and personal security. They looked at the long line, cut right in front of us, and got fed first. I remember thinking, "Wow, I don't think that would have flown well at the Academy." You should always take care of your people first. That was just one trivial—but very visible—instance I saw of a lack of leadership by example during my tour in Iraq, but it was indicative of larger failures I'd seen.

While I was in Iraq, I had been communicating with Nort Schwartz and another classmate, Bruce Wright. So, when I came back from this particular mission, I sent Nort an email and in the subject line I put "For Your Eyes Only." I said to Nort, "I don't know what you're being told but, from my viewpoint as an E-5 team leader, there are some leadership problems over here."

In all fairness, I don't know that I was seeing the big picture. And, being an Academy grad, a former major fighter pilot, there was probably some ego on my part. But I was trying to let Nort know about some problems I was seeing from the ground level.

After sending that email, I left on a three-day mission. When I got back, I had a return email from Nort. I thought, "This is cool." I opened it. And, to my horror, Nort said, "Look, Rowe, I just read your email. It

was too good. I had to send it up. But don't worry, we've sanitized all the aspects of it so there's no way they could identify who wrote this."

Three days later, I was out in sector driving a Humvee. Over the radio from the command post, I heard, "Is Sergeant Stayton in that vehicle?" My squad leader said, "Yeah, he's here." Command post said, "Well, tell him to be at the chow hall at Camp Warrior at seventeen hundred hours." Needless to say, I was pretty curious. I was able to get a bit of intel before the meeting—turned out they wanted to talk about the email I had sent.

As directed, I showed up at 1700. I was only guy in my unit to go, but the rest of the battalion was there—probably 200 to 250 soldiers. Then our battalion commander walked in. He started by talking about things that had happened in sector—pretty routine stuff. I thought I had dodged a bullet since my name hadn't come up by then. But, after about 30 minutes, he said, "Well, that's enough of that." Then he turned to his staff and said, "Okay, pass out the email." Well, he passed out a copy of my email to everyone in the room. Fortunately, names were blacked out. But then he started talking about insubordination, that he disagreed with the author's viewpoint, and that the author was dead wrong in his allegations.

They knew it was me; I was sure of it. That's why they had me come in. So I raised my hand to let the battalion commander know it was me. And he just glared at me and said, "No." So I put my hand back down and listened to about 20 minutes of what was probably well-deserved criticism for me going around him and not bringing up the issue with him directly. Finally, he dismissed us by saying, "Well, we're not going to prosecute this guy. We don't know who it is but if we find out or if he does it again"—and he was looking at me as he said this—"there will be consequences." Then he dismissed everyone.

As everyone was leaving, I went up and said, "Colonel, it was me. I wrote that email." He glared at me and said, "We knew it was you. You're the only guy in the whole battalion that could write a letter like this. That's because the subject and the verb actually agreed with each other."

I tried to talk to him about leadership based on what I had been seeing at my level. I said, "Well, this is my viewpoint. I haven't seen a whole lot of what I'd consider to be leadership by example. Your subordinate commanders aren't taking care of their soldiers." Those kinds of things. And, after about five minutes into the conversation, he started calling me "sergeant."

Now, I did learn very quickly in the Army that when you begin every sentence with a person's rank, the exchange is over—there's no more give and take. It's no longer a two-way conversation; it's now just a monologue. Finally, he turned away and walked off.

I went back and sent Nort another email, asking him if they had a job for a gate guard at the Pentagon. I figured I was finished in Iraq. But, as it turned out, nothing happened to me. However, the company commander I complained about was replaced within four weeks. We got a West Pointer in, and the difference was night and day.

The first thing the new company commander did was what we call a show-up inspection. The Army's very equipment-oriented. You're given certain tasks. You've got to have a compass. You've got to have bandages. You've got to have all the right kind of equipment, otherwise you can't do the job. So the first thing our new company commander wanted to do was a show-up inspection, because he wasn't about to have his soldiers tasked to do something they weren't properly equipped to handle. And I was sitting there watching this and thinking, "Yeah, yeah. This is what it's about."

It was just amazing watching that change in leadership. I watched the way he took care of his soldiers. So, while I suffered some short-term difficulty in the battalion's eyes, over the long term I think it helped.

I really appreciate what Nort did. But, oh, man!

PART VI

A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

Service doesn't stop when you leave active duty. The following chapters describe how our classmates have channeled their Academy experiences and the Air Force Core Values into business, civil service, the law, medicine, the priesthood, community service, and education. The examples here demonstrate the larger commitment to lead in all circumstances, regardless of profession or organization.

PART VII

UPON REFLECTION

Age provides two things: the ability to step back and reflect on decisions made and paths taken—or not taken—and history, which provides a rich context with which to evaluate past events. Both are critical elements in developing perspective. The 50 years that have passed since our graduation have provided us with a unique vantage point to consider a variety of "could-a, would-a, should-a" issues.

In response to the question, "Looking back, what are some of the seminal lessons and experiences you'd like to pass along," our classmates offer a variety of answers. Here is a sample.

MIKE EDWARDS

Mike Edwards
CS-13

Someone asked me recently whether I was happy with what I was doing. That really got me to thinking.

Of course, there will always be little regrets along the way but, when I considered the big picture, my answer to that question was, "Absolutely." I

have felt blessed my entire life, because the things I've chosen to do have put food on the table, and what others might call "work" have been exactly what I love to do.

I've been so fortunate to be able to do what I've done in my career. But in all honesty, I think that's largely a function of attitude—looking at situations in a positive light, rather than in a negative light. In fact, I've always told people I'm a "glass half-full" guy. In my experience, having a positive attitude enables you to look back on your life and appreciate how things have worked out to make you who you are. That's when you realize how truly blessed you've been. So, from my perspective, attitude is everything.

I remember "bitch sessions" at the Academy on Friday nights. We'd go to the snack bar [now "Hap's Place"] in Arnold Hall. I quickly became disillusioned with those sessions because they seemed pointless to me. They weren't constructive. In reality, there was never a time that I wanted to leave the Academy—not once. From the time we reported in, I thought "What an amazing place and what an amazing opportunity," and that never changed for me. Of course, I had tough times like everyone else, but no matter what was going on, I never really wanted to leave. So I got tired of the sessions. I'd go to the snack bar with my friends, but once the bitch session started, I'd just go back to my room and relax. One of my friends ended up leaving the Academy, mainly because he was there because that's what his parents wanted, not for himself. It was tough to watch him leave, but I also understood that wasn't what he really wanted out of life.

One of the things I've told my kids over the years is to find their passion and follow it wherever it leads. Do what you believe in, and don't look back. This great country of ours offers tremendous opportunity. If you work at it and keep a positive attitude, you can be whatever you want to be.[130]

HERB HARRISON

Herb Harrison
CS-25

People always say to me that I always seem to have a good attitude, and I'd like to think that's true. The way I look at it, I don't have the right to have anything less. Every morning I wake up thinking that I have a chance to do it all over again. Whatever I may have gotten wrong yesterday, I can get right today. Any mistakes I made yesterday just made me stronger for what I have to do tomorrow, and maybe I'll get it right this time.

Obviously, there are bad things that happen that are beyond our control. In those situations, I know it's easy to feel sorry for yourself. I can't—and won't—let those things define me or stop me from moving ahead. That's where maintaining a positive attitude comes in. If you take the right attitude about any obstacle you run into, you'll figure out a way to be successful.

When I'm talking to homeless veterans, my message is the same: "Yeah, you're down at the moment. But let's figure out how to make your future better. Let's get you some benefits. Let's get you down to the VA. This is a new

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