

**CLASS DINNER, 29 APRIL 2017
ON THE OCCASION OF OUR 60TH REUNION
Gerry Galloway**

Paul Schwehm asked me to say a few words tonight to mark the 60th anniversary of our graduation – and to bring our minds back to 1957 and the world that surrounded us 60 years ago.

But before I do, I would like to make three points:

First, on behalf of all of us, I would like to express our corporate appreciation to Paul Schwehm, Bill Ray, and the class board for putting together such a wonderful reunion. You all suggested a more relaxed reunion with more time together, and they have provided it. Please join me in thanking them for their efforts.

Second, yesterday at the memorial service, Dick Mollicone, in his tribute to the deceased ladies of the class, reminded us of how much the ladies we have lost contributed to their families, their spouses and the nation. In that vein, I would like to acknowledge on behalf of all the class, how much we owe the wives who are still with us. They have been our inspiration, our companions, and the strength that enabled us to follow the path we charted so many years ago. Thank you, ladies, for being with us on our march.

Third, in putting my remarks together I ran into an interesting document, the Annual Report of the Superintendent to the Chief of Staff of the Army, submitted to the Chief shortly after our graduation and quoted in our 50th Reunion Yearbook.ⁱ At our 30th reunion, I shared with you GEN Maxwell Taylor's forgiving words about our class.ⁱⁱ Now I would like to share LTG Gar Davidson's words following our graduation:

The class of 1957 behaved in an undisciplined fashion at graduation parade when it broke ranks as it moved forward to the reviewing line. I believe members of the class felt that they were following an established practice since some classes have rushed to the reviewing line at graduation parade in recent years. Of course, this raised grave doubts in our minds as to how well the class of '57 had learned the lesson of discipline. Thorough soul-searching on the part of myself, the commandant and other senior officers here led us to conclude that this was an isolated incident, not typical of the otherwise fine record of exceptional leadership which the class of 1957 provided for the corps during the year.

This incident may however have some correlation to the unduly boisterous mess hall and after taps rallies during the football season. I plan to tone the former down radically and either eliminate or restrict the latter to two or three selected occasions.

[I am not sure that GEN Throckmorton read the Supe's report, but it does say GEN Davidson was in our corner and that, perhaps, most of these problems can be traced to Jack Vickers' boisterousness in leading 'Rockets' from the top of a stack of mess hall tables!]

But let me move to my assigned mission.

Today, we had the privilege of being honored by a cadet review by the classes of 2017 to 2020. If that did not race your heart and bring hundreds of memories to your mind, you are a cold jug.

As I stood there, I wondered what we might have been thinking about as we stood on the Plain at the alumni review just days before our graduation. I am sure the thoughts included getting ready for graduation parade, graduation hop and graduation itself and the pinning on of the bars of a second lieutenant.

What did the world around us look like as we went through our first class year and approached graduation?ⁱⁱⁱ

- Our President was Dwight D. Eisenhower, one of the Long Gray Line
- The Vice President, Richard M. Nixon

- At West Point we had taken a new Supe and a new Comm, LTG Gar Davidson and BG John Throckmorton, through our first class year and they both got to know us well.
- The US population was 172 million (today it is 324 million). The world had 2.9 billion (today, 7.5 billion)
- At graduation, our life expectancy was 70 years; (someone born today can expect to live to 88.)
- Federal spending was \$70.64 billion/yr - now 3.4 trillion
- Federal debt: \$272.7 billion – today \$19 trillion
- Average cost of new house \$12,220.00
- Average monthly rent was \$90.00
- Average yearly wages \$4550.00 – and even with housing allowance, our lieutenant's \$222.30/month pay was going to be well below average. (Today a new lieutenant will receive over \$3800/month
- The average cost of a new car for us was \$2,050.00 - the Ford Fairlaine was the best seller, but the 57 Chevy Bel Air became the quintessential 1950s car^{iv}
- Cost of a gallon of gas for these cars was 24cents
- "My Fair Lady" had opened on Broadway and many of you were courting Julie Andrews; Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" was capturing the love of those to whom we were pinned, but little did Elvis know that, within 18 months, he would end up with many of us in the 3rd Armored Division in Germany.
- President Eisenhower was pushing peace and recovery from the war in Korea and building the Korean national economy. He had just signed a bill to start building something called "Interstate highways."
- No one could spell "environment," but social justice appeared on the horizon as Brown v Board of Education was moving from a Supreme Court decision to, shortly after our graduation, sending federal troops to enforce the desegregation law in Little Rock, Arkansas. Another federal court ruled racial segregation on Montgomery, Alabama buses unconstitutional.
- Nuclear was the deterrent element in foreign policy. Both the United States and the UK continued to test new nuclear weapons.

In Europe and the Mid-East, there were both tensions and signs of sanity:

- The Warsaw Pact was just getting started in Eastern Europe and included East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, and

the Soviet Union. It acted as the communist military counterpart to NATO. In May 1955, the allies had ended military occupation of West Germany and when we arrived in Europe in 1958, we would find that the West German Bundeswehr had joined us as partners in NATO

- The Soviet Union began giving aid to Syria (and continued it until the end of the cold war). At the same time, the CIA was covertly working to undermine its government through use of Islamic extremists.

You may remember that, as plebes, we sang for the firsties:

*Army blue, Army blue,
Hurrah for the Army blue
We'll bid farewell to cadet gray
And jump on Dienbienphu.*

But the French lost that battle and that war and in April 1956, the last French soldiers left Vietnam. It looked quiet over there. The class of 1954 did not make it to Indo-China --- then.

As we moved into first class year, storm clouds began to appear over Europe and the Middle East:

- In May 1956, after 72 years, Britain gave up the Suez Canal to Egyptian control, but, in July, Egypt closed the canal to traffic.
- In October, the Hungarian government quit the Warsaw pact and on November 4, the Soviets sent tanks into Hungary and threatened to bomb Budapest. Hungary appealed to the US and the UN. We, the UN and the world stood by and left the Hungarian freedom fighters to perish. (For a brief while, many of us thought that Budapest would be our Dienbienphu.)

- On November 5 1956, Britain and France landed forces in Egypt to take back the canal. They joined Israeli forces that had come thru the Negev, but the US pressured Britain, France and Israel to withdraw from Egypt, and they did.

Tensions began to rise on the other side of the world:

- In 1956, in Southeast Asia, the term Viet Cong came into use and gradually replaced the older term Viet Minh. (The government-controlled Saigon press first started using the term referring to communists in South Vietnam as Viet Cong, a shortening of "Viet Nam Cong-san" which means "Vietnamese communist.")
- The Geneva accords of 1954 forbade any increase in foreign military personnel in Vietnam. The US kept the level of its military advisory assistance group (MAAG) in Saigon at 342 personnel. However, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles authorized a "temporary mission" of 350 additional American military personnel to South Vietnam to salvage military equipment left behind by the French military; over the year they morphed into MAAG mission to train the South Vietnamese army (ARVN).
- In 1956, Senator John F. Kennedy gave the keynote speech at a conference of the American Friends of Vietnam, and lauded the accomplishments of President Diem and described South Vietnam as "the cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia...this is our offspring -- we cannot abandon it, we cannot ignore its needs."^v
- The Joint Chiefs of Staff said, "the major threat [to South Vietnam] continues to be that of subversion."^{vi}the CIA agreed. Despite those conclusions, American assistance to the South Vietnamese army was focused on building an army to deal with a conventional military attack the concept of counterinsurgency received little attention in the US Army at that time. US soldiers received only four hours of "counter-guerrilla" training.

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When we went home for Christmas, we chalked up a good first half of firstie year. Visions of sugarplums and assignments in Europe, Korea and stateside army posts danced in our heads.

The football team under Ed Szvetez's leadership had staved off a determined Navy challenge to hold the 1956 game to a 7-7 tie and give us two victories and a tie in our four years.

As we came back in January in time to march in the inauguration parade for President Eisenhower's second term, we learned that he had committed the US to defending Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan from communist influence and that the North Vietnamese had begun an insurgency in South Vietnam.

Perhaps the world was changing. We began flying secret reconnaissance missions high over the Soviet Union in something called the U2 (and only a few short years later a Soviet missile hit on a U2 would take many us to the East-West German border.

With that background, we chose our branches and first stations and committed ourselves to a lifetime of service to the nation, in and out of uniform.

To us the cold war had not begun in earnest and Asia was far away. Those were the "happy days." (And we would later learn that the 5-year retention of our class was among the highest in the post WWII period.)

Last spring the West Point Alumni Glee Club sang to a gala that marked the retirement of Jan Scruggs, a corporal in the Vietnam War who became the driving force behind the building of the Vietnam Wall Memorial in Washington. The Glee Club sang a Vietnam medley. But unlike World War I and World War II where there were plenty of patriotic songs, you may remember that there were no patriotic songs other than the "Ballad of the Green Beret" to mark our conflict. As a result, the Glee Club sang the tunes of the period - tunes that were melancholy and marked the discord that existed during much of years of that conflict. They included "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," "Aquarius," "Last Train to Clarksville," "Leaving on a Jet

Plane,” “I Got to Get Out of This Place,” and “Bridge Over Troubled Water.” The medley was followed by the singing of “Mansions of the Lord^{vii},” the anthem that was written to end the 2002 movie, “We Were Soldiers Once,” the story of the battle of the Ia Drang in 1965. The medley was accompanied by a video that showed pictures of young privates and young captains leaving for the war, saying good-bye to their sweethearts and their wives and children and then returning in a year or less to a far different situation in our country. The scenes and the accompanying music brought many tears to the audience that included several hundred Vietnam veterans who recalled their departure for Vietnam, their time there, and the less than warm public welcome on their return from that far-off land.

As we stood at the alumni review in 1957, could we have visualized the Vietnam War, the Cold War and where the next 60 years would carry us?

I also wondered what thoughts were in the minds of the members of the long gray line standing across from us in 1957– a group that included the 60-year class – the class of 1897. Their last days at the Academy included the dedication of Battle Monument and a graduation speech by an Iowa congressman who would die, along with the several of that class, a short two years later in Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. Did they know that 20 years later they would be fighting in the war to end all wars- World War I?

What did the class of 2017 think as it marched by us today?

As our class meets here tonight, smaller in number than at graduation but no less dedicated to our nation, I would suggest that as we marched across the Plain for the Alumni Review, we never could have imagined the 60 years ahead, the places we would go and the heartbreaks, joys and pride that would accompany us on this journey. Tonight, we at the Thayer Hotel are in the company of 20% of our numbers at graduation. We can be proud that here and across the globe, 57% of our class (316 classmates) are still with us.

In 1957 only 13% of the class of 1897 was still alive and that number quickly fell after 1957.

I would like to go back to the “Bridge Over Troubled Water” and tell you why the Alumni Glee Club thought its message was so meaningful. Let me read you the first stanza.

*When you're weary, feeling small
When tears are in your eyes, I'll dry them all
I'm on your side, oh, when times get rough
And friends just can't be found
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down^{viii}*

Life is not always easy, but, we are fortunate that “when times get rough” we have classmates to be our bridges -- in the past, today and in the future.

I think we would all agree that it has been an honor and privilege to serve our Nation and to be part of our family, the class of 1957, for 64 years.

To the class of 1957!

ⁱ <http://digital-library.usma.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/superep/id/64/rec/1> . Extracts from the report are found in the 50th Reunion Yearbook.

ⁱⁱ In the spring of 1987, at the age of 85, General Maxwell Taylor entered Walter Reed Army Hospital with Lou Gehrig's disease for what would be his last stay at that venerable facility. At that time, I was serving as a Professor and West Point Chief of Staff for the Superintendent, LTG Dave Palmer, '56.

When he heard of General Taylor's hospitalization, General Palmer decided to send him a plaque from the Military Academy noting his service to the Army and the nation. When the Supe learned that I was going to Washington for a Pentagon visit, he asked me to take the plaque out to Walter Reed and, if possible, present it to General Taylor. When I arrived in Ward 72 the VIP section, I was told that the General was not seeing visitors and they introduced me to his doctor. When the doctor learned that I was from West Point, he agreed to take me in to see the General, hoping that the visit might cheer him up.

When I entered his room Gerald Taylor was lying flat on his back with his head lifted from the bed by a couple of pillows. The doctor introduced me and General Taylor, who could barely speak, thanked me for coming. Recognizing his condition, I moved close to the bed and quickly presented him the plaque. Before I could leave, General Taylor grabbed the sleeve of my greens and pulled me to his side. He then began to trace the West Point patch on my sleeve with his finger, explaining to the doctor in a soft voice what the elements of the patch represented. He then turned to me and asked, “What was your class?” I quickly and proudly said, “1957, sir!”

At that he turned towards me extended and shook his index finger at me and said in a gravelly whisper, “Naughty boys!” A big smile then broke out across his face and he grabbed my hand to shake it. The doctor nodded it was time for me to go. So, I thanked General Taylor and left the room knowing that he clearly remembered the Class of 57. Shortly thereafter, on April 19th General Taylor died. [Taken from the 50th Reunion Yearbook]

ⁱⁱⁱ Most of the facts came, in part or verbatim, from:

<http://www.brainyhistory.com/years/1956.html>

<https://www.brainyhistory.com/years/1957.html>

<http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1956.html>

<https://www.infoplease.com/year/1957>

<http://www.infoplease.com/year/1956.html>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/1956_in_the_Vietnam_War

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/1957_in_the_Vietnam_War

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Revolution_of_1956

<https://coldwarstudies.com/2014/03/13/cold-war-spying-year-by-year-1957/>

^{iv} <https://www.hemmings.com/magazine/hcc/2011/12/Why-the-1957-Chevrolet-is-an-American-Icon/3706461.html>

“Consider 10 elements that define, or have come to define, the 1957 Chevrolet: 1. It's a Chevrolet...traditionally, although not in 1957, America's favorite car. That puts it on first base right away.”². The 1957 Bel Air showcases all the major 1950s styling cues without going overboard: "Dagmars" up front, headlamps below heavy eyebrows, distinctive hood ornaments, swoopy stainless-steel side moldings, anodized-aluminum quarter-panel trim, Harley Earl's sexy dip below the quarter windows, a hint of fins, a "betcha can't find it" gas cap location, and dual exhaust outlets (albeit fake) in the rear bumper. Simply, it includes every major styling element from a decade characterized by the outlandish.”

^v https://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/JFK-Speeches/Vietnam-Conference-Washington-DC_19560601.

^{vi} Spector, Ronald H. 1985. *Advice and Support: The Early Years 1941-1960*. Washington: US Army Center for Military History.

^{vii} <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGoSWn1tHeo>

^{viii} Simon and Garfunkel. 1970. Columbia Records