

The Great Air Corps Costume Ball

By the spring of 1949, 1st Class cadets were permitted to own cars and park them at West Point in lots set aside for that purpose.

I was pondering whether I could afford a car by the time my own graduation came around a year later. A simple two door new Chevrolet would cost the princely sum of \$1,200, and I would have to get car insurance too. There were no shortage of Car Dealers and Insurance Companies, and Banks, eager to offer special cadet deals.

Quite a few 1st Classmen of the Class of 49, due to graduate in just two months already had cars. Many of their parents were well heeled enough to pay for pretty fancy 'sports' cars for eager single cadets. Many of them with cars were happy to drive around West Point and New England whenever they, 1st Classmen, had more weekend and evening 'out' privileges than even we Cows had. But all of us could take off for Spring Break.

So I wangled a ride with a 1st Classman who was going to drive his new car to Springfield, Mass, Friday evening, and drive back Sunday. He would drop me off at the Officers Club, Westover AFB close by, and pick me up noon Sunday. That was a deal.

The only problem was I would be trying to do business

with Base Operations on a Saturday, normally a day off for those not required to be on duty. And I had no contacts with anyone at Westover.

I would have to depend on what I could do using my Cadet Gray uniform - probably well recognized by many on an Air Force base with lots of commissioned pilots - as my calling card.

So I took off, got there by 11AM, got a small room in the Westover 'BOQ' - wooden bachelor officers quarters building - slapped up during WWII. I didn't rate any better accommodations. But as a Cadet - military person - I had no trouble renting the room.

As I feared there were no more senior officers around the offices that might be curious what I was up to - instead I had to deal with the busy over the counter staff. I learned that if I wanted to go right now, they could probably get me on a plane to London. Lots of 'support' aircraft for the Berlin Airlift, and reconditioned Lift planes were always coming and going. But trying to arrange for a flight two months later was a crap shoot. I could put my name on a list but that was about it. I got on a list.

After trying a few other things I got a dinner snack at a cafeteria next to base operations, and headed for my room at the BOQ.

The room was stuffy and hot, and I walked over and

opened the window to get some night air. I could see down the grassy slope from the BOQ a lighted building that lively music was coming from. I figured that was the Officer's Club and it sure seemed busy. But then it was Saturday night.

So I put my cadet dress coat back on, and my cap, and headed down there.

When I walked in, the whole scene was a gasser. It was, believe it or not, a Costume Ball! The place was jumping. Somebody saw me and loudly exclaimed "What a Costume" and guffawed. So loud that those at the head table where the Commanding General and his wife and staff saw me. A junior aide came over and invited me to join their party. Of course the general knew immediately what I was, a West Point cadet. Hand shakes all around.

Already several of the officers were in their cups, and repeatedly claimed I had the 'best costume' of anybody in the packed club.

They wondered what I was up to. I told them. Whereupon the Base Operations Officer across the table, started betting with a Wing commander at the table WHO could get me to Europe faster! It was a blast.

Before the evening ended they wanted to fly me Sunday afternoon in a PBY (probably a rescue float plane, close

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to the ocean) back to West Point where they would land on the Hudson River , taxi up to West Points dock and deliver me!

Only trouble was the weather turned bad in the morning, so I got back to West Point the same way I came.

I just hoped the Operations Officer, who had been drinking well at the Costume Party would remember me when I came back two months hence, trying to get an immediate ride.