

Beast Detail

As the Powers that Be announced before we all went on Leave, the schedule called for our Class - 1st Class - seniors or 'Firsties' would train all the incoming plebes, who would be arriving on July 1st, 1949.

That has always been the way it was. The most senior upperclassmen, as the 'Beast Detail' would train the new plebes from the day they dropped their civilian suitcases until Beast Barracks training was over.

Since I enlightened you all on what life – for me – was like during Beast Barracks, I won't bore you by repeating it. The incoming class of 1953 would be treated exactly like we were three long years before.

Our Class had to be organized into a complete 'chain of cadet command' to both 'command' the plebe class, and to be the command hierarchy over all four classes of cadets – for this year from July 1949 to graduation June 1950. The Tactical Department (whose active duty officers supervised and evaluated the 'leadership potential' all 2500 cadets all four years. And did some formal and informal classroom training as well as 'counseling' cadets. It was up to their judgment which cadets should fill any of the one-year Corps of Cadet leadership positions. Another exercise in developing leaders. Now Cadet officers had no real, standard Army,

Court Martial level, power. Only the Tactical Department officers and Commandant had such powers.

But Cadet officers, within the limits of West Point Cadet Regulations could control the activities of cadets, and award demerits. So there had to be a 'First Captain', two Regimental and several Battalion commanders, with small cadet staffs, 24 Company Commanders, lots of 'Platoon' leaders, and squad leaders. Cadet Sergeants, Lieutenants, Captains. (all the Corporals were 3d Classmen, and all Plebes are, of course, 'Cadet Privates.' Classmate John Murphy, who had a 'command presense' about him, deep voice, was made 'First Captain' - the most senior cadet position

I got orders appointing me a Cadet Sergeant. As I explained in my first Entering West Point article, over half our classmates had prior military service. So there was a tendency, on account of their relative age maturity and experience to select those older and more experienced kind of cadets for the top cadet leadership positions for the coming year.

So once we were 'reorganized' into those cadet ranks Beast Barracks started just as it had for the last 150. I was just a part of it like every other classmate, haranguing and instructing the plebes from their first day.

The Big Photograph

Now I did something special that summer. Because I was always looking for an opportunity to express, especially in the Pointer, Cadet and West Point life with my camera (a new Rolliflex, thanks to Germany) and words, I had an original idea that the Class of 1953 would thank me for years, but also led to a real problem for me in the fall.

I told my cadre classmates that I could take a picture of the entire Plebe Class at once in a way all 621 of their faces would be visible in the picture.

Now sure there have always been 'Class' photographs, and ones with large numbers in it, such as parades. But none like the way I would do it.

I said that if the Beast Detail cadre marched all the plebes into a very large rectangular formation up against the wall of the old Academic Building, and ordered them each to look up, I could, from the roof of the Building capture them all.

There was, understandably, quite a debate between my classmates and the 'chain of command.' But the originality of the idea, and their knowledge that such a picture of each of them would be a lifelong keepsake, did the trick.

So it was done. The cadre explained to each Plebe Platoon what would be done, and how they would have to march to get into the temporary formation. Below I

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show one view of the cadre marching their plebes into that rank. And then the resultant picture.

621 Members of the entering West Point Class of 1953

(512 graduated four years later)

That picture became famous. First it was reproduced in the Pointer. Then it attracted National Media attention. Then the Class of '53 adopted it for their own, and it appeared on their final Year Book.

And it got me into lots of trouble later, which I will explain.

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