Interview with Lieutenant General Bradley C. Hosmer, USAF, Ret.

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General Hosmer was superintendent of the United States Air Force Academy from June 1991 through June 1994. As a member of the first graduating class at the academy, he became its first Rhodes scholar and first graduate to become superintendent. He was a command pilot with over 160 combat missions. A graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff and the National War College, he commanded two Air Force fighter wings and an air division. He also served as president of the National Defense University and as the Air Force inspector general. He is the recipient of numerous awards and decorations, including the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Defense Superior Service Medal, and Legion of Merit.

First Class of Cadets

Q: Influence of Early Experiences

General Hosmer, I would like to begin by asking about the influence of your early life experiences. Your father was a West Point graduate in the same class with General Westmoreland, General Estes, and Lieutenant General Clark (academy superintendent from 1970–1974). You entered the Air Force Academy in 1955 with the first class of cadets. Please tell us the circumstances of your coming to the academy: How did you learn of the academy? What motivated you to apply? And how well did your previous experiences prepare you for the military and academic environment at the academy?

Hosmer: Early influences are useful to talk about. Let me set out a couple of things that seem perhaps pertinent. My father was a military officer, Air Force officer, who had graduated from West Point. So I had been in the environment as a dependent. I finished high school at the age of sixteen. As I was closing on high school, my parents and I talked about college. The deal was very simple. I could go to any college that I could afford, which narrowed the choices down to the federal military academies. It was more financial than a driving interest in a military career on my part.

In those days and until about 1950, one could enlist in the military with one's parents' permission at the age of sixteen. So the game plan was going to be that I would go with my dad down to the local recruiter and sign up at the age of sixteen, expressing an interest in West Point, citing some congressional support. My dad was a North Dakota boy, and there was a North Dakota representative who would say, "Yes, maybe," which would get me to Stewart Field, which was then, as it is now, the prep school for West

Point. We were not very current with these matters because the previous three years had been spent in France, where dad was stationed with NATO. We had just returned to the United States. Here I was, a high school graduate, sixteen years old, down at the recruiter's office with my dad, and oops, the rules had changed. You could not enlist at sixteen. So that game plan disappeared instantly, and I was looking around for something to do to keep me academically tuned for when the entry exam came, next spring.

We were in Washington, D. C. I had applied to go to George Washington University. I'd gone through the early entrance process there. Then we got a flyer in the mail, advertising one of the prep schools in Washington. Since my goal was fairly narrow—which was to remain current enough academically to be able to do well in the competitive exams for entry into West Point or Annapolis—any would do. It was less expensive, and seemed like a better choice than GWU. So my folks said they would stake me to the prep school, and off I went.

In the course of that year, actually the first semester, an announcement came out that there was going to be an Air Force Academy. There I was, one might say, in a holding position. There was going to be an Air Force Academy, and I had an incentive to take the exams. The incentive was that at this prep school an award was given of $200 to any student who scored at the top in the "Presidential" competitive exams. "Presidentials" were the label for academy appointments awarded to sons of regular officers. There was a good-sized group of us, and that was always a marketing domain for the prep schools, so they'd use first place awards for advertising. I figured I could get three cracks at this instead of two. So I took the Air Force Academy exams as well, and I was given appointments to all three academies.

When it came time to make a commitment, I decided the Air Force really made more sense because of the spirit of adventure as much as anything. It would be a new school. The high school I had gone to in Paris was a new school. It was established the year my family arrived in Paris. I liked all that turbulence and that unsettled atmosphere and anticipated that it would be a more interesting experience to go through the shakedown period of building a new academy with its open-ended potential. So Air Force it was.

Q: Entering the Academy

You entered the academy at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver on Monday, July 11, 1955. The day included administrative processing, drill rehearsal, and a nationally televised dedication ceremony. Please tell us what you recall most vividly about that day.

Hosmer: The first day at the academy, as you say, was very busy. The main imprint left with me was a day of drill. Of course there was the issuing of the bunny suits, as we called them, the blue overalls and hats. But it was drill, drill, drill. Pretty clearly the ATO's, the air training officers, and the administration were focused on making that opening ceremony a success. We were going to march into the opening ceremony, so we had to march. We had a few hours to figure out how to march as a group, so that's what we did: drill.

I have one other clear recollection. I had driven up with a classmate who lived in San Antonio. I was visiting him, getting ready to come. We drove together to Denver, and we got there a day early. The opening of the academy had some orientation, public

exposure events, available. This was a big deal, "They're starting up." There were ATO's around as guides, and we went to look. One of the exhibits we went to was a room, a cadet room set up as a model of what the cadet room would be like. There was an ATO there, an officer named Ray Battle, who was at that time a first lieutenant. He was courteous and friendly. We were three, the two of us and my classmate's mother. Lieutenant Battle was the soul of gentlemanly conduct. So as we were leaving I said to him, "Well, see you tomorrow."

He said, "You won't see me, but you'll know I'm there." He was exactly right. The next day—the "first day"—we knew the ATO's were there, mostly by hearing them.

The other thing about opening day that I recall vividly is I really wanted to look at the air show. But after that day's training it was "eyes front and center." We were sitting at a rigid attention through the whole show. I can remember noticing a couple of my classmates' heads beginning to move toward the end of the air show. So I thought, "Hmmm," and I got a look at a series of cargo planes streaming down initial doing three-sixty overheads, pitching out and landing. I think they were C-123's. That's the only part of the air show I remember seeing because we were all "straight and level" sitting at attention.

Q: Original Senior Staff

The original academy staff included the superintendent, Lieutenant General Hubert Harmon; the dean of faculty, Brigadier General Don Zimmerman; the commandant of cadets, Colonel Robert Stillman; and the

director of athletics, Colonel Robert Whitlow. Please tell us how much you saw of these officers and give us thumbnail sketches from a cadet's viewpoint.

Hosmer: The senior officers at the academy, as you might expect, were rather remote personages. I never saw General Zimmerman. I saw General Harmon, I think, only months later, well after academics started. General Stillman was a frequent presence because he would join us in the dining hall. You wouldn't see much of him, or hear him. Now and again he would make a presentation at the break point in the middle of the meal. But he was around. I remember seeing him as a colonel, before his promotion to brigadier general was effective. Whitlow: I was not an intercollegiate athlete, so I saw very little of Colonel Whitlow.

General Harmon, when I did come in contact with him, was a friendly, open, approachable person, very likable, did not talk business with cadets at all. He did not take the trouble to establish a distance with a cadet, at least with the groups that I saw him with. But neither did he talk about academy business or anything of that sort. That was not what he was about. General Stillman, the reverse. He seemed a kind of distant, foreboding person, but he was interested in the academy and in cadet reactions to questions—he was on alert to hear things. As I came to know both of them a lot better later, I saw that both were similar in many respects. Both were the soul of integrity. Both focused on the academy and what needed to be done to make it as good as it could be. Both just had a

slightly different view of what their role with the cadets should be, which was what we saw at first. I would agree with them.

Q: Air Training Officers

Early plans were to provide upper classmen for your class by transferring some cadets and midshipmen from West Point and Annapolis. But the Air Staff decided in 1954 to use Air Force second lieutenants as surrogates for upper classmen. How would you describe the relationship between these air training officers, or ATO's, and the first class of cadets?

Hosmer: The ATO's and the Class of 1959 had a very interesting relationship. There was a lot of humor involved because they came out-of-role as first classmen occasionally. The fundamental, first point was, as upper classmen, they were not bound by cadet regulations. We were, and they were not. That served to balance somewhat the fact that we had a heavy numerical advantage. There were 300 of us and about sixty-five, if I recall correctly, of them, the first group. So we did have a numerical advantage, and we used that to some effect. Of course there was a constant friction. We're talking about infractions that were really small stuff, like wandering down the hall at the wrong time or not asking permission to do thus and so. But it was a source of amusement to us to be bound by cadet regulations and to see the ATO's drifting in at two and three o'clock in the morning after they'd had a day out in Denver, then seeing the after effects

of that in the morning. They were very good people. Many are still closely associated with the class; they are associate members of the AOG and have a very high place in the Class of 1959's notion of positive influences at the academy.

Q: Do you recall any particular ones with whom you were associated?

Hosmer: Ray Battle was one, an early squadron commander of mine. A few of them I felt honored to retire, such as Jack Doran and Elmer Biersack. Others include Jim Clendenen, George Gary, Art Harre, Blair Hennessey, Jack O'Donnell.

Q: Several lost their lives that first year.

Hosmer: Yes. George Fredrick, John Malanaphy, Bev Parrish.

Q: And Jerry O'Malley some years later.

Hosmer: We all thought the world of Jerry O'Malley. Of course he was the first ATO to get married. There's that old story about some ATO later commenting to his own wife that he did not notice what she had said because he was watching Diane O'Malley hang out the laundry. She was a point of attraction. But O'Malley was a striking person then, and he

remained striking. There have been dozens of things written about O'Malley and his charisma and leadership style. Just to offer a thought here in passing—part of it, at least, was the extreme level of trust that he instantly conveyed to a subordinate if he trusted you. It was really quite remarkable.

I had an encounter with then Colonel O'Malley many years later. This would have been in the seventies—'73, '74, that era. For reasons related to what I was doing in Washington at the time—I was on the Air Staff—I found myself at Castle Air Force Base for about a three-day quickie orientation. I was a very green selectee for full colonel at the time. The wing commander invited me to dinner, and he said, "I've got an old friend coming through town. We'll eat at the club. Care to join us?"

I said, "Sure."

It turned out the old friend was Jerry O'Malley, who was at that time driving south from Beale Air Force Base, where he had just left the command of one wing, down to a base by L. A. where he was going to take command of a different wing.

We fell into conversation. I had seen this man only once or twice since graduation, just in passing. In the course of that conversation he said, "You know, I'm looking for a D. O. You want to come and be my D.O.?" I had to decline, but I was struck by the fact that this was a genuine offer. He trusted me. He was willing to offer that job in a new wing based on trust. I was stunned by that, but that sticks with you, that level of trust. We

worked together again later, of course. He was the commander of PACAF at the time that I was the planner out there. The same thing continued. If he trusted you, he trusted you. It was really quite something. Other ATO's did quite well, none quite as well in their careers as Jerry O'Malley.

Q: First Academic Year

Academic studies began in September after years of effort devoted to the academy curriculum. By September 21, 137 cadets (nearly half your class) were deficient. At about that time the athletic director calculated that cadets had only one minute and forty seconds of unscheduled time per day. Yet the deputy commandant noted about a month later that several cadets with previous college were contemplating resigning because, "they were not pushed enough by academics to retain their interest." On December 1 the first dean of faculty, General Zimmerman, left the academy to be succeeded eventually by Colonel Robert McDermott. What do you recall about that first academic year?

Hosmer: The first period of academics was pretty intense. I didn't recall that a large number of us were academically deficient. Doesn't surprise me, but I didn't recall that. Remember that, academically, the transition from high school level to college level was a pretty sharp transition. I think all of us thought we'd be under water for a while. The academics were challenging, and of course there were the daily recitations, the daily grade. You couldn't fall behind, so the pressure was high universally.

One of the things that I do recall about that early period is that the practice of cadet tutoring became established very quickly and comprehensively. This was a matter of helping your chums. If there were a handful of people there in your corner of the dormitory who were academically deficient, that didn't mean only *they* were working hard. That meant *everybody* was working hard, because you were trying to help bail them out. The practice of group study for a group of people who were in trouble or who wanted help became established. I found myself teaching a lot of my classmates. If you weren't having much trouble with a subject and others did, you tried to help.

Val Bourque was one of my early failures. I was unable to help him stay in the class. Van Inwegen was another who graduated with the Class of 1960. I think we all felt that responsibility. There was a strong sense of community, you might say, a strong unit-integrity sense that this was a community problem, and if a cadet was in trouble, it was up to us all to help fix it.

> I was rather surprised when I came back as superintendent to learn that the practice of cadet tutoring had virtually disappeared. Because of the formality of the march through different levels of academic trouble, the role of the officer instructor's engagement in extra instruction had become quite rigid. A cadet understood that if he got in trouble, his will to succeed was to some extent measured by the time he spent with his instructor in extra instruction. Well, that put strong pressure on cadets to go over to the academic building, make appointments with officer instructors from the faculty, and spend whatever time they could to dig out of trouble—as opposed to cadet instruction. Nonetheless, it surprised me. In those early

years it was relatively rare for a cadet to seek out officer instruction until he had some particular reason to. The default approach was to find a classmate who was comfortable in the subject and who could communicate with you and learn from him what worked for you. So that's my dominant memory of that first semester, helping a lot of people, because I was lucky and wasn't having a lot of trouble.

Q: How did the practice begin, the practice of cadets tutoring cadets?

Hosmer: Spontaneous, I think. I suspect it was simply a matter of discussions, probably on the weekend, which was the only unstructured time you had. "Does anybody have an idea how to solve this problem or work this issue?" Or, "What do you think about this exam that's coming up?" You start sharing ideas, and pretty quickly those who are in trouble and those who can be helpful come to recognize each other and link up. Of course there's a little more to it than that. There's also communication. I might be able to speak and help effectively Smith and can't get through at all to Jones. Jones has a much better time with Brown who can get it across to him. So the communication links had to work as well. But it was, as far as I can recall, spontaneous.

Q: Was it the practice in those days to have the same exam given on successive days?

Hosmer: The practice at that time was that you took the exam whenever the class came up in the routine schedule, which meant that since the schedule was spread across two days, half the wing would get it on the first day and half the wing would get it on the second. The exam might in some circumstance be early and late on one day, but typically it was day one and day two. That simply was not a concern. First of all, the honor code and your responsibilities under it were understood very rigidly. But we were helped in this, because in those days everybody took the same program. The accelerated and then enhanced and then optional variations only began in our second year, perhaps in the second semester, and then only for a small group at first. So during the very opening semesters, everybody in one squadron was on the same schedule. What that meant was, within your organization everyone took tests at the same time. So in my flight and my squadron there was no potential conflict at exam times. Life is not nearly so simple now.

Q: Origin of the Honor Code

As a member of the first class of cadets you had a unique viewpoint from which to see the honor code come into being. Please tell us what you recall about the beginning of the code: How was the code introduced to your class? And how did your class decide to adopt what was basically the West Point code?

Hosmer: I'm not a good source on the early honor code because I had lived with the military environment, the Air Force environment, all my life. My dad was a West Point graduate and happened to have been an honor rep. I had some sense of the character of the honor code, the nature of it, and its role in the military. I considered an honor code a foregone conclusion. This was never a question in my own mind. For that reason I didn't pay as close attention to what was going on, probably, as most of my classmates.

I can recall that the opening discussion was during fourth class summer, and then-Captain Bill Yancey made a presentation in the cadet theater to all the cadets on the honor code. At a later stage, classmate Gerry Garvey did the same thing. I'm not sure Gerry Garvey's presentation was before our vote. I think it may have been after our vote. I'm just not very clear about that. You'll find much better reports from other classmates. There was discussion about the toleration clause, and Captain Yancey went into that in some length, that there are different ways to do this: "The West Point way is this. The Annapolis way is this. My views are thus and so. Here are the implications as I understand them." As I say, I didn't pay a lot of attention to that because to me this is all "stocking stuffers." It is filling in extra choices, but the right choice is pretty clear.

Q: Do you remember the vote?

Hosmer: Pretty strong [in favor]. I don't remember exactly. There was probably a record kept. Some of my classmates may remember. But whatever the vote was, it was accepted in the community strongly. There were no effective dissensions once the vote was taken.

Q: Once the vote was taken, you were fully under the code?

Hosmer: Correct.

Q: In fact, you had some classmates leave the first year?

Hosmer: Oh, yes. As far as I recall we were fully under the code as soon as we voted on it, which would be toward the end of fourth class summer. I recall within my flight, which was one dormitory, we voted Bruce Thompson, a classmate who then left later in our freshman year, as our honor rep. I was quite disappointed because I was a runner-up and I didn't make it. I felt like I missed something important.