

Here are some rough notes I have accumulated over the past few years, which should be of help.

Call with any questions.

Denis

I want to write about one of our own who served his country well, and should be remembered for that. It is not a story about a fighter Ace or one who achieved high rank or high decorations. No he just did his job. He was a hero. He was the first USAFA graduate to be killed in action.

It is 11 November 2012.

Valmore W. Bourque was a very proud graduate of the United States Air Force Academy. He was totally dedicated to the institution and to what it stood for. I was his room mate for a couple years. He studied long and hard every day that I knew him. He squeaked by every term, every week. His grades were abysmal. He took so many "turn out" exams and faced so many review boards I lost count. Nothing could dissuade him from his objective; to serve as an Officer in the United States Air Force. His social life was almost non existent. Val was a gifted athlete. He started out on the varsity soccer team and on the baseball team. That didn't last long. His marginal status in academics precluded any pursuit of these loves beyond the first semester. NOTE TO GREG: There was a much published picture of val sliding into a soccer kick in a USAFA varsity soccer uniform. This would add a lot to this part of his story. If you can't find it I will look for it, too.

I was not a great scholar myself, but I had a couple years college before entry into the Academy, and I tried to help him. It didn't work. He had to grind it out on his own. The focus on his all consuming desire to graduate carried him through.

Val's serial number was 26K. The number was assigned to the first entering class according to alphabetical order. Had they been assigned in the order they were sworn in, he would have been number 1. He showed up so early that he was indeed the first in line, and the first to be sworn in. In the fall of his second year, he finally was refused by the review board and the decision was to "wash back" one full year, to the following class. He had no time off whatsoever. One day he was an upperclassman, the next day he was a doolie again, and repeated the rest of freshman year, along with three more. But he made it.

Val was a cadet Sergeant and my Element Leader, in 6th Squadron. I was gone for a couple days on a Rifle Team trip. When I returned I found my previous room mate was gone, and Valmore was moved in. I was flabbergasted. He told me they had informed him he would have to not only turn back to the class of 1960, but would have to go to another Squadron. He refused. He simply stated that he was not staying unless he remained in our Squadron. Val prevailed. I doubt the Commandant and Superintendent had ever met anyone with his determination, or ever would again. That level of determination and dedication to his goal was certainly the strongest I witnessed.

More notes from 2014, for Greg Swanson:

To start at the beginning. Val was from Mass. Either Springfield, Holyoke, or another nearby town. The rumors had it that his mother was an Indian princess, but we never discussed it. You might contact Larry Fortner, '59 who might know. Whichever the home town, it had a local Sgt who was assigned to lowry, in USAFA Personnel. He was detailed to handle the incoming class of 1959. Since he was a family friend, it was arranged that Val would stay with him the night before reporting. The Sgt, of course had to go early, took Val with him, and made sure to swear him in first! So he was the first Cadet sworn in at USAFA.

At the beginning of 1956 school year, the wing was expanded from four to eight squadrons. Val was therefore a founding member of 6th. Our AOC was Arnie Braswell, a former first captain at West Point and a real spit and polish officer.

I was also assigned to 6th Sq, and quickly went through three room mates. The first was Jack Brush. They broke us up so I could tutor classmates who were deficient. This was a mistake, which was made obvious when they both flunked out after one term with me.

Much to my surprise, Val showed up as my classmate/fourth room mate in the Spring, as mentioned above. While we had several 'wash backs' from 1959, I believe he was the first to be turned back a complete year. Usually they would get some semesters off, then pick up with our class with the class they had flunked. He was sentenced to repeat the whole remainder of Freshman year as well as Sophomore.

We were to remain together until the end of our 2nd class year, which was summer 1959, at the present site. One of my vivid memories of that year was when my father died unexpectedly. I was flying a Navigation training mission, and did not get back to the room until 0200. Valmore had been told of this but ordered to not tell me when I returned, so that I would be sure to get some rest, since I would be traveling the next day. Of course he ignored the order and correctly assumed I would want to be informed immediately so he waited up for me, to do so. That's the way he was.

Val was assigned to C-123s and was flying a resupply mission to some special forces who were in dire need. The airdrop was deep in the jungle near the Laos border. The weather was too low for the mission but Val (flight lead) went ahead anyway and managed to break out just in time to get hosed with ground fire. Another classmate, 6th Sq Gary Crew was flying right behind him and saw the whole thing. Of course Gary also continued the run and made the drop. His crew escaped. I never knew of this aspect of the story until after I retired in 1991, and got reacquainted with Gary who also retired in Denver. One other classmate who was in the same C-123 wing was John Bujalski, also retired in Denver, who may know more, but he was in a different squadron.

I was in Florida at the time of the funeral and could not get away. The scuttlebutt was that the USAF was trying to downplay the event since we didn't yet want to admit to active involvement in Vietnam in the first place, and it occurred right on the border with Laos, which we definitely didn't want to admit too. You should be in a better position to verify that. At the time we had Dick Mathews, as the AOG person a one man office at USAFA, who was on the verge of a medical discharge and given the job.

Valmore was promoted to Captain post humorously, since we were all promoted at the same time, four and a half year after graduation, and this occurred after his death.

Valmore's widow showed up for a couple of our reunions, and I met her. I also tried to relate some of the above to his grandchildren, but did not succeed very well. She remarried as I recall, and had more children.