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**"THE  
U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY  
ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION"**

**AN EXHIBIT**

**PRESENTED BY**

**THE FRIENDS OF THE AIR FORCE**

**ACADEMY LIBRARY**

**IN COOPERATION WITH**

**THE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS BRANCH**

**OF THE**

**AIR FORCE ACADEMY LIBRARY**

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## **HISTORY OF THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

The creation of a new service academy became inevitable as soon as the U.S. Air Force became a separate service in 1947. In 1949, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal appointed a Service Academy Board to review the programs and facilities of the Military and Naval Academies and, in light of their findings, to make specific recommendations for the establishment of an academy for the Air Force. After intense state competition to win the site for the new academy, Secretary of the Air Force, Harold Talbott, with the support of Charles Lindbergh and others, decided to locate it at Colorado Springs. The deciding factors included the quiet, isolated location away from the crowded East Coast, accessibility to large urban areas, favorable weather for training and the not insignificant fact that the State of Colorado had offered one million dollars toward the purchase of land. On 1 April 1954, the Congress authorized construction of the new academy.

The architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill won the design and construction contract and produced a stunning and unique all metal and glass plan that admirably suited the mission and vision of the Air Force and the Western mountain site. The striking design of the Cadet Chapel initially drew considerable criticism, but all plans with some modifications were ultimately approved and construction began in July 1955. Today architectural students from all over the world come to study this facility for its modern beauty and consistency of form and design. The Chapel, which is the centerpiece of the cadet spiritual life, has in fact created a whole new style of church architecture in the country.

In July 1955, concurrent with the beginning of construction, the Academy was organized and commenced operation at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver. Lt. Gen. Hubert Harmon, the distinguished first Superintendent, accomplished the early planning and organization and led the new Academy through its first two difficult years in this temporary location. The permanent facility at Colorado Springs was finished in time for the Cadet Wing to move from Lowry in August 1958.

The Academy site comprises 18,000 acres at an elevation of about 7,200 feet along the eastern slope of the Rampart Range and is contiguous with the Pike National Forest on its western boundary. The facility includes eleven major buildings associated with the cadet mission, many of which have been named in honor of distinguished Air Force persons. The associated facilities include an airfield where very active cadet training in powered

flight, soaring, and parachuting continues year-round. There are extensive sports fields, a service and logistics area, schools for children, and 1,100 sets of quarters for assigned personnel, including a very elegant residence for the Superintendent that was already on the land when it was purchased for the Academy.

It should be noted that a fine stadium, a visitors center, an impressive building for the activities of the Association of Graduates, and golf courses have all been provided without recourse to government funding. The Academy possesses all the elements and characteristics of a small town with a population of over 4,000 cadets, 2,000 officers and enlisted personnel, 1,800 civilian employees, and over 1,200 families.

## **ABOUT THE COLLECTION**

The exhibit chronicles benchmarks in the Academy's history and depicts the administration of the Academy's multifaceted program of instruction. It is focused on the evolution of the process by which the Academy trains and educates military professionals-officers who are disposed to a career of service to the United States in the Air Force.

This exhibit is drawn from the rich collection of official documents, personal papers, photographs, news clippings, and Academy related publications which are housed within the Special Collections Branch of the Air Force Academy Library. The Special Collections Branch operates as the Academy's institutional archives. It serves as the repository for historical documents which reflect the origin, establishment, development, and operation of the Air Force Academy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this exhibit the Friends intend not only to chronicle the history of the Air Force Academy in terms of buildings and events, but also to focus on the evolution of the process by which the Academy educates and trains military professionals who personify the Academy's core values of "Integrity First, Service Before Self and Excellence In All We Do." A brief summary of the contents of the panels and cases in the exhibit follows:

Panel #1

## **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

The National Security Act of 1947 tacitly approved an Air Force Academy. During 1948 and 1949 an Air Force planning board under Gen. Muir Fairchild developed curriculum, but

Congress did not act until 1954, and President Eisenhower signed the authorization legislation. Gen. Harmon, designated Superintendent of the new institution, greeted the first class in July 1955.

Panel #2, Case #1

### **COLORADO SPRINGS WINS**

In 1949, Secretary of the Air Force Stuart Symington appointed Air Force Chief of Staff Carl Spaatz to chair the Air Force Academy Site Selection Board. A later commission, which included Charles Lindbergh, narrowed the choice to three locations. In June 1954, Secretary Talbott announced Colorado Springs as the winner, and the Colorado Land Acquisition Commission began purchasing 17,800 acres north of the city for the Academy's permanent site.

Panel #3, Case #2

### **ACTIVATION AT LOWRY**

In June 1954, Secretary of the Air Force Harold E. Talbott announced that Denver, Colorado would be the interim location of the Academy during construction of the permanent facilities at the site north of Colorado Springs. The Academy was dedicated when the first class arrived on 11 July 1955.

Panel #4, Case #3

### **CONSTRUCTION**

The Air Force Construction Agency was designated to supervise the Academy construction and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill selected as the architect. Actual construction of the \$126 million complex began in July 1955, and employed 6,000 workers. By August 1958 most of the cadet area was completed.

Panel #5, Case #4

### **THE CHAPEL**

The Cadet Chapel is the crowning architectural feature of the Academy's cadet area. Designed by Walter A. Netsch, Jr., construction began in August 1959 and was completed in summer 1963. At its dedication the Chapel was praised as "a symbol to the world to know that the United States is truly a nation under God."

Panel #6

### **EXPANSION**

When the Academy was approved, cadet strength was set at 2,529, equal to that of West Point. In March 1964, President Johnson authorized both academies to expand to the same strength as the Naval Academy, 4,417. Congress then authorized \$38 million to expand essential facilities, build a field house, and improve athletic fields. The Cadet Wing reached its new strength when the Class of 1974 entered.

Panel #7

### **THE MASCOT**

During the Academy's first year the cadets chose the falcon, a bird of prey known for its fighting spirit, to be their mascot.

Case #5

### **THE ADMISSIONS PROGRAM**

Each year the Academy admits only about 1,200 of approximately 10,000 applicants. Since 1959 more than 30,000 have been commissioned. Many have won graduate scholarships, reached senior rank, and have been highly decorated. All have left their mark in service to their country.

Panel #8

### **INTEGRATION OF WOMEN**

In 1975 Congress directed the three military academies to admit women. Early planning by Air Force Headquarters and the Academy produced an orderly and successful introduction of women into this traditionally male institution.

Panel #9 & 10, Case #6

### **CADET WAY OF LIFE**

A cadet's daily life is not an easy one but it does have a lighter side. The Academy is accessible to sizable urban areas and there are 87 clubs and extra-curricular activities available. A fine student union, Arnold Hall, contains a ballroom, theater, and restaurants where a cadet may meet family and friends. The cadet sponsorship program offers surrogate family support.

Case #7

### **THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM**

The first curriculum introduced at the Air Force Academy has seen much change. Periodic reviews provide updates,

especially in science and technology. In the past twenty-five years, for example, the science curriculum has moved from the slide rule to the laptop computer. In 1992 Congress directed the Academy to open faculty positions to qualified civilian instructors who now make up about 20 percent of the faculty.

Panel #11 & 12, Case #8 & 9

### **CADET HONOR CODE**

Nothing distinguishes the military academies from civilian educational institutions more than the Academy honor code. The Air Force Academy's honor code is demanding and is administered and guarded by the cadets themselves. It continues to meet the challenges of changing social mores from one generation to the next.

Panel #13, Case #10

### **MILITARY TRAINING PROGRAM**

In their four years at the Academy, cadets proceed through an intensive military training and professional military studies program. Acquiring leadership skills is first priority. Over half of the cadets receive flight training and a majority qualify in soaring and parachuting. Summer programs provide diverse Air Force related experiences. The need for cadets to acquire professional knowledge, develop personal habits of discipline, and be motivated for a career in the service, continue to guide the military training curriculum.

Panel #14, 15, & 16, Case #11 & 12

### **ATHLETIC PROGRAM**

The physical education program develops and maintains physical condition, teaches athletic skills, and provides experiences to enhance the development of character demanded of officers. The curriculum for the female cadets parallels the men's program as much as possible. The completion of Falcon Stadium in 1962 and the field house in 1968 made the Academy's sports facilities among the best in the nation.

Panel #17 & 18, Case #13

### **SUPERINTENDENTS**

Each of the Academy's fourteen superintendents was selected as a role model and an example of a successful career Air Force officer. They have all had the privilege of influencing the lives and careers of many fine young men and women. In addition to

their responsibilities with respect to 4,500 cadets, their command constitutes a community with all the activities and problems associated with a town of some 10,000 inhabitants.

Panel #19

### **GRADUATION AND GRADUATES**

Graduation and commissioning mark the end of four challenging and rewarding years. Hats are thrown into the air and proud parents, relatives, and friends share this once in a lifetime experience. Then it's off to the operational Air Force. The measure of the Academy's success is spelled out by the thousands of young men and women graduates who serve their country and live the qualities that are the hallmarks of the Academy.

Panel #20, Case #14

### **BOOKS**

Through the years many fine books have been written about the Academy and some of its more distinguished graduates. Brig. Gen. George Fagan has written the only definitive history of the Academy. This case displays an interesting sample of the Library's rich collection.

Case #15

