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2017! Can you believe it? To start, Gil **Merkle** sent the following from Linda, Cy **Rickards** wife: “In November, Cy and I traveled to Georgia, where Cy was able to get together with Gary **Saban**, Doug **Hardgrave** and Jeff **Heal**.” The happy group is pictured below. “In August, Bud **Gilligan** and his wife Joyce and Doug Hardgrave and his wife Jan, came out to California, where we all met up at Les and Judy **Denend**’s home in St. Helena. [Also] pictured below are Bud, Doug and Les, who was giving them a tour of the yard.”





Art **Johnson** wrote he had just returned from a strenuous but fantastic 13 day REI hiking trip to the southern Patagonian region of South America! “I felt I needed to do something outdoors to celebrate my 75th year and this hiking trip was my choice. Having been in the area last year, I eagerly looked forward to hiking in Argentina's Los Glaciers National Park and Chile's Torres del Paine National Park. The weather was generally very good and helped make the trip a huge success; we didn't experience the very high winds and snow that are an ever present danger to hiking in southern Patagonia. During 9 day hikes, we trekked about 100 miles with vertical gains of over 20,000 feet. Although the 69 year old MIT professor and I couldn't always keep up with the three younger members of our group, we were slow but steady and didn't meaningfully hold up the rest of our great group. I am now in the process of obtaining visas for my upcoming trip to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and parts of old South Vietnam in January and February. Once the trip is over, I will have visited 83 countries (well on my way to my goal of visiting at least 100 countries).”



Fabulous Picture! Art in Patagonia.

Received an Email from John **Borling** about standing up the new SOS America (Service over Self) website. This is what he said. “With pleasure and anticipation, the Leadership at SOS America announces the official launch of the new SOS America website.” JB added that Service over Self is a patriotic, not-for-profit organization advocating a one-year national service program aimed at American renewal. For more information you can go to their facebook page or website [www.sosamerica.org](http://www.sosamerica.org).

Recently the AOG updated their list of our class officers.

Class President	Col (Ret) James H. <b>Diffendorfer</b>	<a href="mailto:jimdiff@comcast.net">jimdiff@comcast.net</a>
Class Vice President	Mr F. Denis <b>King</b>	<a href="mailto:denny63@sbcglobal.net">denny63@sbcglobal.net</a>
Class Secretary	Col (Ret) Preston H. <b>Davis, Sr</b>	<a href="mailto:chdphd@earthlink.net">chdphd@earthlink.net</a>
Class Treasurer	Col (Ret) Marvin L. <b>Odefey</b>	<a href="mailto:modefey@msn.com">modefey@msn.com</a>
Class Historian	CPT (USN Ret) L.S. ‘Lou’ <b>Matjasko</b>	<a href="mailto:lsmatjasko@msn.com">lsmatjasko@msn.com</a>
Class Scribe	Col (Ret) Norman I. ‘Skip’ Lee III	<a href="mailto:54wrs63@gmail.com">54wrs63@gmail.com</a>
Class Advisory Senate	Maj Gen (Ret) John L. <b>Borling</b>	<a href="mailto:jibviking@yahoo.com">jibviking@yahoo.com</a>
Class Technology	Lt Col (Ret) G.R. ‘Gil’ <b>Merkle</b>	<a href="mailto:merkleg@texas.net">merkleg@texas.net</a>

And now a change in course. Classmates (Hank **Hoffman**, Bill **Mitchell**, Tom **Fryer**) and other curious Daedalian friends alerted me to an article in an online site called “OpsLens” titled “The United States Air Force Academy Doesn't Train Warriors Anymore.” The author is a USAFA 1986 graduate who spent 8 years in the Air Force as a Special Operations/Combat Rescue helicopter pilot flying HH-3 and HH-53 helicopters. In my judgement, a group of true warriors. You can find the article by googling “OpsLens Jan 2017 Warrior Training at the Air Force Academy.” The article grabs your attention but more importantly I would like your comments. Maybe begin a dialogue.

I was initially surprised and a little troubled with the author’s observations and conclusions about the current condition of cadet training. At one point he referred to the Academy as UCLA in uniforms. It is

important to note the author was making his first trip back to the academy after 30 years to attend his Class Reunion. He gets to the heart of the matter when he writes about his experiences as a cadet: “In fact, the discipline that was drilled into me has served me well my entire life, giving me a leg up on my competition: once I start something, I just don’t quit, no matter the odds or barriers put in front of me. I credit USAFA for helping me to develop this ability.” He goes on though by saying when approaching the Bottom of the Ramp he commented on what he saw in place of the “Bring Me Men” quote: “Imagine my shock,” he writes,” when I saw the quote had been changed to some PC gibberish about ‘Integrity First. Service Before Self. Excellence in All We Do.’” And, he concludes the article with the following observation: “It is obvious the Air Force Academy is no longer training warriors to lead men, or women, into battle. They are no longer into the type of training that created the greatest air force ever known to man.” In contrast, my personal interaction with cadets beginning in 1969 when I joined the History Department (DFH) and quite regularly up to this day including graduates serving with me or under my command has not led me to any such conclusions.

The Academy Mission Statement found and memorized in our Contrails issued to us in June 1959 is essentially the same today. Undoubtedly many of us would like to think we left the Academy after four years with a warrior’s mindset but fundamentally, the Academy’s mission is to create Leaders for the Air Force. We were given a baseline from which we were able to further develop leadership skills through experience. In a way, we first learned to be wingmen then we became leaders. Many, not all, became warriors.

The world has changed dramatically over the past 50 years and will continue to change at a rapid rate—some say at an accelerated pace. Just look back to 1986 and reflect on what has happened to our daily lives since then. Cadets today are, literally and figuratively, our generation’s grandchildren. They have grown up with a life experience and a world view vastly different than that of ours and even different than that of their parents. Without going into details it is both obvious and important to note that the Air Force Academy is not the same as it was in 1963 or for that matter 1986 but its mission remains essentially the same: to create leaders. Not only has the physical plant changed, there has been dramatic growth and/or adjustments to the military, academic, athletic and airmanship programs and now the introduction of the Center for Character and Leadership Development which will be indispensable for this ever-changing environment. Who knows but it may someday be known as Star Fleet Academy. Imagine what a member of the Class of 2017 will experience during a 20 to 30 year career. Is it possible that if we fail to anticipate the future we will not be able to benefit from it?

That’s it for this time around. I hope you found the discussion interesting. Let me know and please, take care and stay warm.