



Kadet Newsletter

Peacock Military Academy

Alumni Association, Inc.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



My Dear Fellow Ex-Cadets:

Your Board of Directors met on Saturday, October 3, 2009, at our old Headquarters Building in San Antonio. Twenty Board Members attended our regular meeting and one brother Cadet that could not make the regular meeting because of pressing business matters was there for our evening get together. So, all together, there were twenty-one of us out of the twenty-five Directors that met for some good fellowship and I have to say that the Spirit of our old Military Academy is still alive and well.

Brother Jimmy Hale, Class of '62, stepped in for Director and brother Worth W. McDonald, Jr., Class of '55, who passed away a few months ago. Jimmy, who lives in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was one of our Alternate Directors that we elected at our 2008 Reunion. He was also there for our meeting.

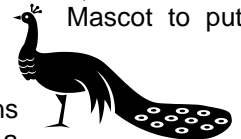
I know that I have mentioned this before, but I think it is worth mentioning again, that all these fellow and brother Ex-Cadets serve you as Directors just to keep the Spirit of Peacock Military Academy alive and having fun doing it. Maybe one of you brother alumni has the desire to serve as a Director? All you have to have is the will and desire to serve your Association as a Director or Alternate Director and express that desire at our next Reunion. If elected, all you have to do is make your very best effort to attend our meetings which are twice a year – the first weekend in April and the first weekend in October. The friendships and memories of old classmates of yesteryear are worth all the effort that we put in traveling long distances just to attend a Directors' Meeting. Also, planning our Reunions, getting up-to-date on the PMA Kadet Medals given out to some worthy cadet at other military schools is rewarding to us who attended a military academy, the Peacock

Academy Records Report or "PAR" Report, our Treasurer's Report, and the good discussions we have and good laughs at our meetings are very exciting, to say the least.

Also, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who sent in their dues for the year and any donations to our Association – it was and is greatly appreciated and remembered, no donation is too small or too large for your Association. This is your Association and it belongs to no one else but you, because you are one of us.

We are well on our way in planning our 2010 Reunion, the first weekend of October. We have decided on the Marriott Plaza Hotel as the site for our next Reunion. This Hotel is a resort oasis of tranquility in the heart of San Antonio. It is surrounded by sun-bathed courtyards, sparkling fountains and beautiful gardens with free-roaming pheasants and peacocks (yes! peacocks). So, we will try to get our Military School Mascot to put on a show for us, if possible.

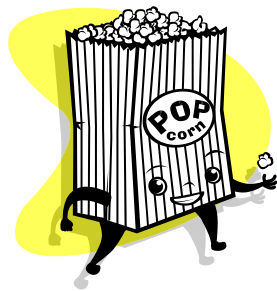
So, my Brother Cadets, please start making your plans now, or as soon as you have a chance. Call up classmates or academy buddies you have not seen in a long time. Plan a mini class reunion for you and your classmates. The joy one gets in seeing an old classmate or just another old friend from a different class is extremely rewarding. "So, see you then in 2010." Make this the best Reunion we have ever had. Just by you being there with us will make all the difference. Take care and God bless you and your family.



PMA Alumni Association President,

Frank R. Torres
"Pancho"
Class of 1963

Where was the Popcorn?



The movie screen was filled with black and white images. At least, that's the way I remember it. Of course, there were occasional Technicolor feature films. But most of the movies were already old—box office hits from many years earlier, long before we watched them on Friday or Saturday nights at the Peacock auditorium.

Each summer, my sisters and I took great interest in the movie catalogues mailed to the Academy. We wanted to believe that we had the power to schedule the coming school year's weekend films. Our father, Colonel Don, indulged us. Or so we thought.

We girls wanted 'chick-flicks': tear-jerkers, romantic comedies and musicals. Somehow, our choices never made the list. Instead, along with the cadets, we regularly watched James Stewart in *Winchester 73* (about the Winchester rifle); Tyrone Power in *The Black Rose* (I vaguely recall men in tights and bows and arrows); Burt Lancaster in *The Crimson Pirate* (the hero swashbuckled his way across the ship, white teeth flashing and his golden-tanned, oiled chest gleaming); John Wayne, of course, in anything and everything: westerns and World War II stories — lots of John Wayne. And Errol Flynn as George Custer in *They Died With Their Boots On*—tragic music playing as the Indians at Little Big Horn surrounded the cavalrymen.

Oh, yes, there's one more that comes to mind: an old film called *Northwest Passage*, directed by King Vidor, a PMA student in the early 1900s. It was probably my introduction to Spencer Tracy (already a mature actor), and was about Rogers' Rangers during the French and Indian War. The main thing I remember is a man on the expedition gone crazy, running around hysterically with someone's severed head bundled in cloth, tucked under his arm. I bet the boys loved that one!

Nope. No chick-flicks in the batch. And nothing remotely new for the times: just old standards with plenty of adventure and gore. Except for the time that the audience was comprised only of females.

As many PMA cadets will recall, the annual Junior-Senior Prom at St. Mary's Hall was an extravaganza, always designed around a theme. When my sister Dottie was a junior, the prom theme was *Alice in Wonderland*. Connections with the Commandant made it happen: Dottie and her Saint Mary's Hall classmates enjoyed a private showing at the PMA auditorium of Walt Disney's animated

version of Lewis Carroll's famous story — for educational purposes, of course.

Overall, however, my memories of the auditorium are masculine and military. My sisters and I (and friends) usually sat in the very back, near the entrance and by the projectionist booth. The seats were wooden, painted drab olive green — and, somehow, the smell matched the color of the seats: the smell of rifles or the oil used to clean the M1 rifles stored in the armory just steps across the sally port (close to the bulletin board posted on the wall and the "Coke" machine that Cadet Sammons loved so.)

The projectionist booth was manned by one or more cadets especially trained to handle the large film reels of the time. Mike Vlieger (class of 1962) was one of those projectionists. On one occasion, he made a mistake on the last reel and used a 'pick-up reel' that was too small to hold all the film coming out the projector.

"I quickly decided to use my fingers gently to keep the film winding on the small reel. If I hadn't done that, there would have been a lot of film spaghetti on the floor. I was never discovered and Lt. McLaughlin issued me a license."

Mike reminded me that the auditorium was more than a place to show movies on the weekends. It was used sometimes as a classroom: "I had a class there with Lt. Cortez. We were supplied with lap boards to assist us in taking notes." That memory made me think of even earlier days when Wesley Peacock, Sr., and my uncle, Colonel Wesley, taught Sunday school classes in the same space. Captive audiences, no doubt.

And I'd forgotten about the pep rallies before major games and the female presence which softened the military setting. Mike Vlieger reminisced, "At the right time, the side door near the stage would open and in jump girl cheerleaders dressed in green and white. They were quite a sensation."

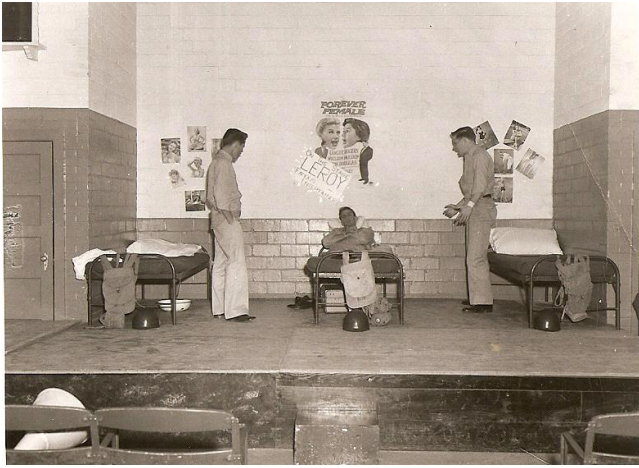
Vlieger's last memory of the auditorium? "Being on stage during a talent show. My French class did a skit with "The Players," wearing French berets."

At some point, the name "King Vidor Theatre" surfaced and took its place in plaques and in the history of the school. But for many of us, the auditorium was a relatively small, several-windowed room, from which you could see and almost touch Senior Terrace.

I guess memory is shaped by the lens through which we view it: narrow the perspective and a space is a movie theatre, filled with the voices and images of John Wayne, or that crazy guy running rampant across the screen. Widen the perspective a bit and there's more.

As much as you want to and can remember.

Donna Peacock



Lee Wilson Fred Rigby Gerald Sears
Class Play '56



Bernie Young,, Class of '57



Class of '56 Varsity Basket Team
Colonel Richardson
Coach Lt. Cortez

“SALUTE”

A special thanks to Thurman Lee Wilson, '56, for an envelope full of newspaper clippings, pictures, and memories. This helps make a newsletter possible!



Sue Ellen Peacock Lee Wilson, '56 Fred Rigby, '56 ????

NEXT BOARD MEETING
Saturday, April 10, 2010
The Wesley Peacock House
12:00 Noon

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

Robert E. Crancer, Class of 1954
William D. Hadash, Class of 1956
Charles L. (C.L.) Harris, M.D., Class of 1958
Mark J. Rosenfield, Class of 1966
Victor Fournier Wolf, Class of 1953

The Alumni Association thanks you for your support!



TAPS

Thomas Roscoe Peacock, Jr., Class of 1938
Sebert L. Pate, Class of 1945
Worth W. McDonald, Jr., Class of 1955

Email dated October 26, 2009, received from James Ingram, '56

“A member of my church here in Houston passed away Saturday. He was a very good man and a successful business man with the ownership of a Chevrolet, Cadillac and Nissan dealership here in Houston on I 45. He was 91 years of age and I never knew what class he was in at the Academy. His name was Tom Peacock, Jr. Thanks, Jim Ingram”

Thomas Peacock was a member of the Class of 1938.

He was a close friend of

A. M. “Aggie” Pate, also Class of 1938. Tom Peacock supported the Alumni Association over the years and we salute you.

REUNION 2010

Make your plans early to attend the PMA Reunion on October 1-3, 2010, at the Marriott Plaza in San Antonio. Reservations can be made by calling 800-228-9290. Identify your group as the Peacock Military Academy Alumni Association. Hotel reservations should be for Friday Night, October 1st and Saturday Night, October 2nd, 2010

Received from Betty Jo Pate, Wife of Sebert L. Pate, Class of 1945:

“Thank you, Michael, for remembering Sebert, Class of 1945 – Peacock Military Academy. I met him in 1962 in New York City and he was still talking about ‘Peacock.’ He was very special; and we were married 42 years. I shall miss him-”

Received from Cynthia Rheam, daughter of Gene Potter, Class of 1945:

Mike – I Finally made it back to the mountains and cooler weather! Thank you for the Newsletter – Daddy was so proud of PMA and would be honored to have some of his “garage pictures” on display. I appreciate your donation to Pilgrim Presbyterian Church. The church meant so much to him. The flag I was given at the funeral sits on a special shelf and next to it - his PMA cap. I miss him. Thank you for all you did to honor my father – he was a special man - a good father and a proud Cadet.

WebSite and Emails

The PMA WebSite is www.PeacockMilitaryAcademy.com

This Newsletter will be posted on the WebSite.

We need your email address for our records!

Peacock Kadet Medals presented in 2009

Ethan Ausburn at San Antonio Academy

Kevin Presley at Texas Military Institute
Presented by Michael A. Vlieger, '62

Chloe Rocha at San Marcos Academy
Presented by Raul Gonzalez, '68

Park Tipton at Marine Military Academy
Presented by Earl B. Adams, '62

Michael Martino at Sarasota Military Academy
Presented by William F. Brockman, II, '65

MAJOR ROBERT GRAHAM BELL, USAF

Sixth Group: 13 March 1959

Robert Graham Bell was born in Cisco, Texas, on 23 May 1930. Two years later his father Frank, a sergeant in the US. Marine Corps, was killed in Indochina. His widowed mother would eventually

remarry and he would grow up under his stepfather's surname of Edwards. As a pre-teen, Bell attended the Peacock Military Academy (PMA) in San Antonio where he was registered (and known) as Bobby Bell Edwards. At PMA he became part (and later captain) of the crack Zouave drill team, whose teenage cadets performed precision drills in their immaculate uniforms. He would also receive his student pilot license at the age of sixteen and become president of the senior class. After six years at the academy Bell would graduate in 1947 as a Battalion Commander – the highest rank for a cadet. Following his graduation he would attend a single semester at Rice University and another the following year at the U.S. Naval Academy's preparatory school. He would then become a freshman at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. At this time he would also legally revert to his birth surname of Bell.

In the early 1950s the U.S. Air Force was actively recruiting Navy personnel in order to fill its technology and piloting ranks, and Bell was one of those who opted to make the change, entering the Air Force with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant and a service number of 23271A. There would be another defining change in his life in 1952 when he married his sweetheart, Jackie (Jacquelyn) Rogers. The next phase in his Air Force career was pilot training, which he would undertake from 3 June 1952 at Hondo AFB, followed by jet training the following year at Connelly AFB, also located in Texas. Promoted to 1st Lieutenant, Bell then took advanced jet training and attended fighter gunnery school before being assigned to the 1st Fighter Squadron at Hamilton AFB, California, in 1954. That same year he and Jackie would celebrate the birth of their first child – a daughter, Cherlyn Cathleen. A second child – a son, Wesley Curtis – was born in 1955 to round out their family. Around this time Bell was assigned to overseas duties with the 35th Fighter-Interceptor Wing flying F86D Sabres out of Yokota AFB in Japan, and in 1956 spent another year with another F86D squadron, the 41st Fighter-Interceptor unit based at Anderson AFB in Guam. While serving there he was promoted to the rank of captain.

In 1958, Bell entered Test Pilot School at Edwards AFB in California and subsequently flew such aircraft as the C-130, B-57, F-100 and F-101 while based at Robins AFB in Georgia. At the time he submitted his application to NASA as an astronaut candidate he was also involved in studies at the Squadron Officer School, located at Maxwell AFB in Alabama. Although he did not make the Mercury astronaut cadre, two of his academy friends from PMA, G. Weldon Slaughter and Tom Knight, revealed that Bobby Bell had divulged to them that he had come twelfth in the rankings.

Moving on from Robins AFB, Bell next became a member of the U.S. Air Force's 4520th (Thunderbirds) Air Demonstration Squadron in 1961. As an officer pilot, he would serve a two-year assignment with the team. Then operating F-100C Super Sabres out of Nellis AFB in Nevada, the squadron would tour the United States and other selected venues, performing aerobatic formation and solo flying in four specially-marked jet aircraft. The 1961 team comprised Major Ralph ("Hoot") Gibson - America's third jet ace -



as squadron commander and team leader, with Captain William Hosmer positioned on the left wing and Captain Robert Cass on the right, while Bell took up what was called the "slot" position. In creating the squadron's signature diamond formation, the slot pilot's role was to move into position astern of the lead aircraft, which usually meant that the vertical stabilizer on this aircraft was permanently blackened from the exhaust of the lead aircraft. Five years earlier, future astronaut Bill Pogue had also flown this same slot position with the Thunderbirds. The 1961/62 team would travel 652 days in their two-year tenure, visiting forty states and fourteen Central and South American countries while flying a total of 180 spectacular demonstration shows, each of around twenty-three minutes duration. During this time Bell would appear twice on the Johnny Carson show to discuss his role as a Thunderbird pilot. He revealed he had been keen to reapply for the astronaut corps, but when applications were invited for the second intake in April 1962 he had already become an integral part of the Thunderbirds team. That year, during a Thunderbird exhibition in Houston, Texas, several ex-PMA cadets honored Bell with a reception at the Shamrock-Hilton hotel.

Promoted to major in 1963, Bell then attended Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and in 1964 was awarded his Masters Degree in International Affairs at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

From 1964-65, Bell was on temporary assignment to the Navy, first at Miramar Naval Air Station in California. This was followed by deployment to Vietnam as an F-8E Crusader pilot on the carrier USS Oriskany. In his book Captain Hook: A Pilot's Tragedy and Triumph in the Vietnam War, a fellow aviator on the Oriskany, Wynn F. Foster, described Bell as "a popular Air Force exchange pilot who had been serving with Oriskany's VF-162 squadron." By now he had been awarded the National Defense and Vietnam Service Medals, as well as an Air Medal.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, 16 May 1965, Major Bell set off from the Oriskany on an air-support mission near Saigon, but his aircraft was apparently hit by enemy ground fire, damaging the bomb release mechanism and causing a fuel leak. He aborted the mission, but under Navy regulations he knew he would not be permitted to return to the carrier until the hung bomb had been removed. Low on fuel, he opted instead to divert to the military airstrip at Bien Hoa, fifteen miles north of Saigon, where he could have maintenance technicians investigate the problem. After landing, he clambered out of his cockpit and was making his way to the base operations centre when it seems he returned to his aircraft, possibly for some maps. At around 9:30 a.m., he was still standing on the wing of his Crusader when a catastrophic accident suddenly took his life at 34 years of age.

The holocaust began when a 500-pound bomb loaded onto a B-57B Canberra Night Intruder exploded on the ground while the pilot was in the flight line, ready to take off on a bombing mission. The deadly detonation of napalm set off a tragic chain of explosions in other aircraft and fuel dumps. In the resulting conflagration another ten bomb-laden B-57 aircraft, which had been parked nearby wingtip-to-wingtip were destroyed, along with fifteen A-1E Skyraiders and Bell's navy Crusader. In all, twenty-seven men including Bell died in the massive series of explosions and resultant firestorm, while nearly a hundred personnel were injured. The explosions were so violent that debris would later be found nearly a mile away.

It was later determined that the catastrophe resulted from a known fault. The B-57 was started with a black powder cartridge that fired when the pilot pressed an ignition switch, which in turn caused a small starter turbine to begin spinning. According to Vietnam veteran Delmar Shelley Hilliard of the USAF, these turbines "had a nasty habit of spinning loose and coming out of the starter housing like a buzz saw." On this occasion, however, Hilliard says the turbine "came out and hit the fuse of one of the 500-pounders, starting a chain reaction." He was one of those involved in the removal of the bodies, among them that of Robert Bell. "We found his name tag," Hilliard would report, "but it took about three days to figure out who he was."

Robert Graham Bell would be laid to rest alongside his Marine sergeant father, Frank T. Bell, at the Oakwood cemetery in his hometown of Cisco, Texas. By way of tribute to one of their fallen a memorial service was held at Miramar NAS, during which the Thunderbirds demonstration team performed a fly-over of the station.

As a tribute to those who fell in America's longest war, the names of all service personnel listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. were included in a fingernail-sized microchip loaded into NASA's Stardust probe, launched in February 1999 on a round-trip journey of discovery to comet Wild 2. One of those names was Robert G. Bell, USAF.

Printed with permission of author, *Colin Burgess*, who was researching a book on the Mercury 7 Astronauts and the process that lead to their selection in April of 1959. G. Weldon Slaughter, '47, assisted Mr. Burgess in compiling information on PMA graduate, Robert Bell, '47.