



# The More Things Change

BY WILLIAM "T" THOMPSON, '73, PRESIDENT AND CEO

Many of us are familiar with the old proverb "The more things change, the more they remain the same." The saying is attributed to the French critic and novelist, Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr (1808–1890) and generally makes the observation that turbulent changes do not affect reality on a deeper level other than to cement the status quo. The phrase came to mind recently as I read; "An Open Letter to the Graduates of the USAF Academy," penned by then, Col. David Goodrich, '59, the new AOG President, upon his election in 1975. Dave went on to retire as a major general and passed on March of 2002.

There is no question that the AOG has made considerable progress over the ensuing years and that some of the issues Dave addressed have been resolved. For example, he envisioned the establishment of permanent, separate offices and a larger staff for the Association. Today we have a dedicated and professional staff and a wonderful building in Doolittle Hall. Built in 1992, it is our Alumni House and serves the graduate community, the Academy and

our cadets, and the public at large. In fact, it has been listed by the Broadmoor as one of the top five venues for events along the Front Range and the building is constantly busy throughout the year.

Dave also called for an effective voice for the AOG to memorialize and display Air Force memorabilia at the Academy, and to preserve locations on the Academy to honor distinguished graduates. Today the AOG is represented on several Academy Boards that deal with these issues. Additionally, the AOG and the Class of 1964 has established the Mall of Heroes in the Cadet area which honors our illustrious warrior graduates. Thanks to support from the Classes of 1959, 1960, 1969, and 1973, the AOG has built the Heritage Trail at Doolittle Hall to recognize our Distinguished Graduates. Finally, the Memorial Park at Doolittle Hall will honor graduates who have served in combat zones and areas of conflict. The Classes of 1960, 1970, and 1989 have been the primary supporters of this effort thus far.

While progress has been made, what was illuminating is that many of the issues the Association faced then are still challenges today, 35 years later. Dave listed our 'Financial Independence' as the most significant

problem. He said, "We must find means for steady, significant, financial growth ... including ... graduate contributions and endowments, as appropriate." Dave's admonition is even more critical today as the AOG and the Endowment work together in a new business model to serve our Academy. In particular, it is time to consider an operating endowment patterned after that at West Point to help guarantee long term AOG stability. The Military Academy graduates have stepped up and created an endowment that is currently worth approximately \$25 million and, provides over \$1 million annually to support their AOG and Academy needs. Our graduates and friends should consider doing the same.

Gen. Goodrich also voiced the need for "access to Academy Senior Officer staff meetings and for personal consultations with the four Academy senior officers for interchange of information and recommendations." To be sure, your current AOG CEO has developed individual relationships with all of the members of the Academy Senior Staff and communicates informally with each on a regular basis. There is, however, no systematic and regular process for sharing information or com-

municating ideas which, in my view, would benefit both the Academy and the Association as the representative of the graduate community. I have spoken to the Superintendent about this issue and there are some administrative reasons why this approach is not currently optimal. He has agreed to consider options that will strengthen the lines of communication.

Another issue of high importance for the new AOG President in 1975 was the “re-establishment of personalized AOG contact with the Cadet Wing.” Dave understood and voiced the importance of “establishing, on a continuing basis, informal career discussions by graduates with cadet squadrons, particularly with first classmen.” He suggested topics around honor, ethics and professionalism as well as, “On being a Second Lieutenant in today’s Air Force.” The infrastructure for this contact is in place today. Many of the Character and Leadership programs sponsored and funded by the AOG such as NCLS, LIFT and ACES provide ample opportunity for personalized graduate contact with cadets. Additionally, the AOG Legacy Class Program gives the

40 year graduate class several options to spend time with the “mentors” cadet class over their four year experience. While many grads take advantage of these opportunities to interact with cadets, the reality is there are more occasions for contact than there are graduate volunteers. With well over 3000 graduates now living in the Front Range area, we should be ‘over subscribed’ for these opportunities but the opposite is often true. It’s our duty to step up on this issue and we should simply do our duty.

The final two issues that Dave addressed that are still challenges for us today are Membership and the Chapter program. His words follow; “Initiate an aggressive AOG membership drive-It is worth noting that only 65 percent of the total graduate body are members of the AOG.” Well, today that number has slipped to just over 58 percent so we have clearly moved in the wrong direction. Your staff has recently put together a campaign to address this issue. Your Board of Directors has approved a new tiered dues structure and we are initiating contact with the 42 percent of our graduate members who are not currently in the fold.

We have also totally revamped the Chapter program and rolled out the new campaign this past April. The initial results have been extremely successful. In just the past four months, we have added 18 new chapters to the ranks and are in discussions with graduates in 16 other cities about future possibilities. Let me also stress that we are not just interested in increasing the numbers. We want our existing and our new chapters to be strong, vibrant and self-sustaining units enthusiastically supporting the Academy.

As we move forward, my goal is a simple one; to address these issues in an aggressive manner so they are finally put to bed. I wouldn’t want a future successor to read this article and have the very same issues at hand. But simple does not mean easy and I have no illusions about the challenges ahead. We’ll only be successful if we can continue to build a stronger, loyal and more committed graduate community and that is a long term job. Keep the faith and Go Air Force! ✓

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