



the Air Force, had pushed hard for the establishment of an Air Force Academy. I sent Sen. Aiken my credentials and asked him to nominate me as a member to the Air Force Academy class of 1960. If I got in, I'd be a member of their second graduating class.

Weeks later I received good news in the mail: I had been nominated. Now it was up to the academy to choose from among the nominated candidates which students they would accept. Part of their selection process involved a physical, and that was the step that worried me most. I was fit from working my summer jobs and playing sports, but my injured knee still gave me some problems.

The physical took place at Westover Air Force Base (AFB) in Massachusetts, about ninety miles from Bennington. I spent the day, maneuvering through obstacle courses, duck walking and doing push-ups. One of the doctors took a liking to me, but a bunch of them kept evaluating and re-evaluating me. They asked me to do all kinds of things, and then they'd stop to check my knee. Being young, I didn't think my injury was that big of a deal, but they were concerned. They had a big meeting, and I got another piece of good news: they decided to pass me.

In high school, I never thought about flying. I was totally immersed in sports and dreamed of playing professional baseball. After I broke my leg, the dream changed. I tried to deny that the injury mattered, that there would be no contract with a team, but deep down I knew. So I decided to become a doctor instead. But now, on a whim, I was headed in an altogether different direction: to the Air Force Academy, followed by mandatory service after graduation. That didn't mean I couldn't one day still go to medical school, but for now I had stumbled onto a new course.

Cadet Life

IN JULY OF 1956 I got on a plane for the first time in my life and flew to Denver. I spent the night at a hotel and the next morning waited outside for the bus that would take me to the Lowry AFB, the temporary home of the one-year old Academy. A couple other guys were waiting outside with me, and like me were dressed in civilian clothes. *They're in great shape, I thought. They must be cadets.* I was right.

When we arrived, we carried our suitcases out to a line of other young men waiting. The first words I heard were, "Drop those bags, mister!" Speaking—or rather shouting, because



July 8, 1956, the day of Bill's departure for the Air Force Academy:
l-r: Barbara, Bob, John (front), Bill Sr., Dorothy, Bill



Bill with his Air Force Academy class, summer of 1956

that's all anyone did at the Academy—was an Air Training Officer, or ATO. Later, incoming freshmen classes were trained by upperclass cadets, but for the first couple of years they brought in military officers from places like West Point and Annapolis to act as surrogate upperclassmen and conduct our training and oversee the cadet wing. The ATOs lived in the barracks with us, ate with us, led daily physical training (PT) sessions, and chewed us out all day long. They were a tough bunch: some had fought in Korea, and some later went on to become generals. They were the sharpest of the sharpest, and they knew how to motivate us.

On July 9 I was one of 317 "doolies" sworn in, issued a uniform, given a haircut, and taught to march. We were each assigned to one of Lowry's World War II-era barracks and to a squadron. In the barracks, our rooms were sparsely furnished with a desk, a closet, and a couple drawers. The ATOs, assisted by the Class of '59, chewed us out all day every day. You wouldn't believe what we went through that first summer, or that first year. We stayed up late shining our shoes so they'd look just like the shoes the ATOs set outside their doors. We marched everywhere we went—including to the shower—and were constantly at attention, even during meals. It was hell.

At breakfast, lunch or dinner, it was the same.

ATO: "Cadet Kornitzer! Give me the principles of war!"



Bill studying in his dormitory room at the new Air Force Academy building