

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

**“Honor vs. Regulations”**

**An Important Victory for the Honor System and West Point**

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For  
LD720  
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No Honor System or Code can be “established” - in the sense that a bridge is constructed, or a building is erected. Nor can it be simply “built” and placed in position, as some automatic machine, to do some work mechanically. It must spring from the brains, and yes, the hearts of those who live by it.<sup>1</sup>

Cadet Robert Wood - class of 1929

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<sup>1</sup> *Honor System and SOP* (West Point, NY: The Center for the Professional Military Ethic, United States Military Academy, 1999), 5.



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In February of 1861 a fire started at the Cozzens Hotel near the United States Military Academy at West Point, and the Corps of Cadets were ordered to the scene to help extinguish the fire. The plebes were given the enviable task of removing the contents of the wine cellar from the damaged building. By the end of the night, the unavoidable had happened – authorities arrested two of the plebes for drunk and disorderly conduct. Since the normal punishment for drinking alcohol as a cadet was dismissal, the tactical department offered the plebe class the same opportunity to save their classmates that the previous three classes were afforded. If the members of the class would pledge abstinence from drink while they remained at the academy, West Point would reinstate the two plebes as cadets. The plebe class took the pledge, allowing the tactical officers to “relax their vigilance a bit, secure in the knowledge that teetotalism was in force throughout the corps.”<sup>2</sup> This benevolent exchange between the cadets and the tactical department of the Corps of Cadets is a poignant example of the voluntary nature of the early honor system and the recognition by Army officers of its power to change behavior.

The problem with the voluntary pledge was that its success soon had West Point’s administration looking for ways to expand this pledge into other areas of regulations enforcement. Major Alexander Bowman, the superintendent in 1864, used the pledge tactic in an attempt to end the hazing of new cadets. He required all the upperclass take a no-hazing pledge on their honor, and deprived them of all leave until they took the pledge.<sup>3</sup> This idea of using cadet honor to enforce regulations plagued and undermined the Academy’s honor system for the next 120 years. The brilliant success of the honor system in developing a sense of integrity among cadets made it attractive to those who used that system to enforce discipline within the

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Morrison, *The Best School in the World* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

Corps of Cadets. Various administrations of West Point introduced three major components of regulation enforcement into the honor system: the "all-right," the absence card, and the improper question. Regulation enforcement became a major influence in the code, increasing cynicism about the honor system while also making it difficult for cadets to break regulations without also violating the honor code. This trend of using the honor system to assist in the enforcement of regulations was not reversed until the 1960s, when a major change was made to the "all-right." By 1989, the Academy's elimination of the absence card marked the death of regulation enforcement by the honor system, allowing the honor system to re-focus on its original task - to foster a commitment to honorable living as leaders of character for the Army.<sup>4</sup>

The entanglement between regulation enforcement and the honor system has a long history, almost as long as the honor code itself. Since its inception as a "code of honor" in the 1820s, the cadet honor system experienced drastic changes in meaning, adherence, and enforcement. The early code was an oral tradition that attempted to preserve the reputation of the Corps of Cadets as gentlemen.<sup>5</sup> Cadets had to enforce this early honor system infrequently, only in instances concerning egregious acts of lying or stealing that brought discredit to their collective reputation. Enforcement meant running violators from the Corps by either "cutting" (silencing) offenders, military courts martial, or by the use of verbal and physical threats. While the administration could not publicly agree with some of these practices, tacitly it approved of cadets enforcing a sense of honor among their own.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the century, the honor code remained an informal system enforced either by court martial in serious cases or by "the cut" from the Corps of Cadets. The issue of using the

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<sup>4</sup> *Honor System and SOP*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Morrison, 83.

honor system to force cadets to obey regulations resurfaced in 1899. Superintendent Albert Mills recognized the power of the honor code when he sought to use it to end the rampant physical hazing of plebes during Beast Barracks. Faced with endemic hazing in the Corps, Mills directed the cadets to take a pledge to refrain from hazing for the rest of the year. The cadets took the pledge that year but rioted when forced to take the pledge again in 1901. This time, cadets moved the post reveille gun to the superintendent's porch and pointed it at his door, demonstrating their great displeasure over the anti-hazing campaign and having their honor code used to enforce it.<sup>7</sup> Despite this incident the tactic of using the pledge was successful in eliminating physical hazing, especially when combined with stiff punishments for those cadets who were caught hazing plebes.

Douglas MacArthur was appointed Superintendent of West Point in 1919 with the mission of modernizing his alma mater and correcting some of the shortcomings of its graduates in the First World War. One of his most lasting and important reforms was the codification of the honor code. Instead of an *ad hoc* vigilance committee, MacArthur instituted the cadet honor committee whose official role was to investigate violations and administer the honor system.<sup>8</sup>

Soon after this development, the Tactical Department made a concerted effort to improve the manner in which cadets performed their duties. The officers had cadets sign a certificate after conducting their tour as Officer of the Guard which stated that they had reported all violations of regulations committed during their guard. Cadet Elvin Heiburg (Class of 1926) noted that cadet guards would jangle their keys and sabers to alert all to their coming presence, and would keep their heads down during meals to avoid observing anything.<sup>9</sup> While cadets had been notoriously reluctant to report one another over the violations of regulations since the

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<sup>7</sup> *Superintendent's Special Study Group on Honor* (West Point, NY: USMA, 23 May 1975), A-16.

inception of the Academy, the use of the certificate meant that they had to declare on their honor if they had seen any violations. The certificate established for cadets a potential conflict between performing their duty to the fullest, or being dishonorable and not reporting these offenses. In many cases it was performing their duty that suffered, as cadets balanced maintaining their honor and not losing any friends in the Corps while on guard duty. The use of the guard statement might have increased cadet awareness of a duty concept, but the practice was more an indication of the general shift toward using the honor system to assist in enforcing the regulations.

A few years after the use of the guard certificate, a plebe resigned from the academy in 1929 because of a violation of the honor system – specifically the intentional violation of the “all right.”<sup>10</sup> In use at West Point since at least 1835, cadets gave the verbal phrase “all-right” to a room inspector, meaning those present in the room were authorized to be there and those absent were legally absent, or to a sentry meaning the cadet was within authorized limits.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1920s, the “all right” had expanded to mean that the cadet had not: 1) gone beyond limits, 2) had anything to do with liquor, 3) gambled with money or boodle checks, 4) had anything to do with narcotics, 5) had hazing formations with plebes, and 6) committed serious offenses not covered above.<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Robert C. Richardson, the Commandant of Cadets in 1930, wrote that this expansion of the “all-right” statement was being used to “teach a cadet the obligation of his word.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Theodore J. Crackel, *The Illustrated History of West Point* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 250.

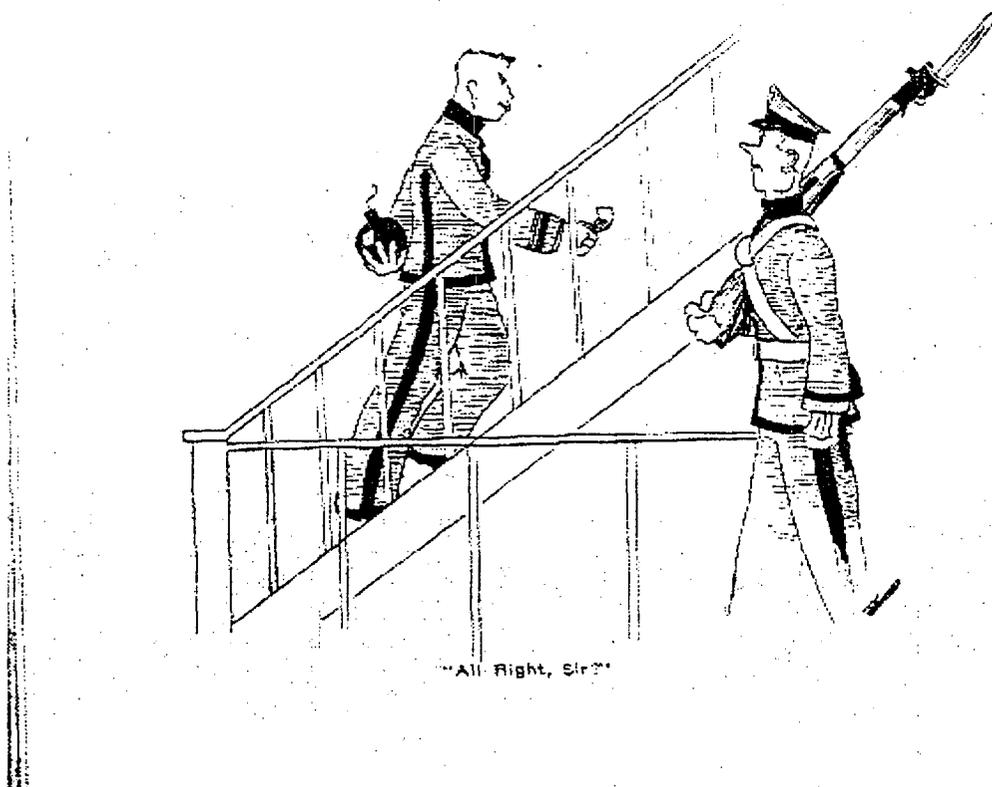
<sup>9</sup> SSSGH, A-17.

<sup>10</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes (1929-Present)* (Unpublished collection owned by the Cadet Honor Committee, United States Military Academy, West Point, NY), Notes from 1929.

<sup>11</sup> Dilliard, Walter Scott, *The USMA 1865-1900: The Uncertain Years* (University of Washington, Ph.D., 1972), 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, Notes from 1929.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Notes from 1930



Cadet humor – this cadet is obviously about to ignore this “all-right”, from *The Pointer*, 1942.<sup>14</sup>

This simple reason for the “all-right” did not preclude the need for explanations of all of the terms of the “all-right.” The Cadet Honor Committee later redefined the “all-right” as “to not follow a cadet on leave,” and that “hazing formations include – stair tours, push and pull, sitting on infinity, swimming to Newburgh, etc. It does not include telling a plebe to move his chin in.”<sup>15</sup> These constructions and lengthy explanations exemplified not only the growing complexity of the honor system by the 1930s, but also the intentional weaving of honor and regulations together in the lives of cadets.

Realizing how complex the honor system had become, the Honor Committee of 1933 compiled the details of the honor system into a single document for the purpose of clarification

and “to instruct the Fourth class.” They defined the “all right” in detail, to include where and when asked (room, lights out, the mess hall, crossing a sentinel’s post, and signing out). There was also an “all-right” for any announced inspections for “lost articles,” a system designed to fight what is known today sarcastically as “cadet borrowing.” The committee explained the function of the absence card, a card that cadets marked in their room as to their whereabouts, and what the implications of improperly signing out of the company area would be under the honor system. While these clarifications, later known as poop sheets, began a tradition of listing the do’s and don’ts of the honor system, it was this early recognition by the honor committee of the conflict between honor and regulations that deserves study.<sup>16</sup>

The committee finished its outline of the honor system with several warnings. It felt that the use of the honor system should apply to individuals but not to groups – “orders given to a body as a whole may not be covered by the honor code. Causing a company to sign they have carried out a company order ... is too great an extension of the honor system.” Along with these statements, the Honor Committee of 1933 eliminated bed stuffing and radio hiding as honor violations, describing them instead as violations of regulations. Finally, in its discussion of absence cards, the committee warned that, “the card must not be marked when any violation is intended.”<sup>17</sup> While this was a frank and fair warning to cadets concerning possible honor violations, the caution related the extent of the entanglement of regulations with the various systems that forced cadets to make official statements, several times a day, that could be self-incriminating.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Pointer* Vol. 19, #15 (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, March 27, 1942), Cartoon Section.

<sup>15</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, Notes from 1930.

<sup>16</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, Notes from 1933.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

The imposition of these systems in the 1930s began to have an effect upon the Corps of Cadets. The over-codification of the honor code, with its poop sheets of violations and non-violations, became very unpopular with cadets and continued to push cadets away from living by the “spirit” of the honor code. The chairman of the Honor Committee in 1937 reported in his notes that

The last two years have seen a decline in the interest of the Corps in the (honor) system. The loss may be due to the fact that the Tactical Department . . . has placed too heavy a burden on the system by its insistence upon including more and more regulations in the system. Our honor code is not designed to require a cadet to report himself for every violation of regulation<sup>18</sup>

Yet the “all-right” and the absence card made them do just that. In addition to these two areas, the “improper question” was a third area of consternation for cadets concerned that West Point “used” their sense of honor to enforce the regulations of the United States Corps of Cadets.

Cadets felt an “improper question” was taking advantage of the fact that they lived under an honor code to force them to reveal violations of regulations, which was also known as “using their honor against them.” The significance here, of course, was the honor implications of not answering truthfully to unfair and intrusive questions. A cadet who graduated in 1915 explained how he felt about this:

I can remember as my most unfortunate experience when I was myself a cadet, an incident where some light bulbs had been thrown into the area. The culprits were found by the lining up of the Corps and the querying of each individual as to whether or not he was guilty of this particular misdemeanor. Any such procedure or anything related to it would of course be *instantly repudiated by any responsible officer who had the good judgment to visualize its eventual effect on the honor system.* [emphasis added]<sup>19</sup>

General Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote this statement in a letter to the new superintendent, General Maxwell Taylor, in 1946 to reinforce his desire to see the West Point honor system

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Notes from 1937.

<sup>19</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, letter to Maxwell D. Taylor, 2 January 1946.

continue to be successful in a world that was experiencing many changes. Eisenhower's tone was clear- he did not approve of any use of the honor code that would degrade support for the honor system within the Corps. Eisenhower felt that the reason the honor system still worked was that the administrations at West Point "consistently refused to take advantage of the honor system to detect or discover minor violations of regulations."<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately since his graduation in 1915, the codification of the honor code and the installation of various systems unwittingly contributed to a system that was using honor to discover the violation of regulations on a daily basis. Eisenhower and others realized the major impact such a system would have on the cadet appreciation for the unique honor code that they were privileged to have.

Not long after the receiving the Eisenhower letter, Superintendent Taylor made an effort to establish a Duty Committee that would be somewhat analogous to the Cadet Honor Committee. The goal was to increase cadets' appreciation for doing their duty and following the rules of conduct that an officer must live by. The Honor Committee fully supported the removal of some of the regulation enforcement that had become such a large part of the Honor System and hopefully have it transferred to another committee. However the administration was forced to disband the committee due to a general lack of interest on several parties, especially cadets.<sup>21</sup> This probably had something to do with the fact that the Honor Code was very efficient at ensuring cadets lived honorably and obeyed regulations, at least above the surface.

Under the surface, the "all-right" was not always the honorable and forthright statement that it was portrayed to be. While most duty conscious cadets did not resent the "all-right", it could sometimes have an unforeseen impact in their daily lives. Cadets like Jack Craigie (Class of 1951) loved being in an environment where the "all-right" was a daily reminder of living

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

honorably. One night he missed an "all-right" inspection for missing articles during call to quarters while studying in the library. After returning to his room and going to bed, he was woken by the "subdiver" (subdivision inspector - a cadet guard duty) at taps and asked "all-right?" Craigie asked for what, and the subdiver told him it was for the list of missing articles posted earlier. Dutifully getting up, Craigie turned on the light to search for each item on the list to see if he mistakenly had one and finally gave the "all-right." The subdiver reported him for being awake and having his light on after taps. The punishment included losing a weekend with some friends and some girls in Philadelphia, a high price for a cadet with few privileges.<sup>22</sup>

Explaining his miseries to his friends, each shook his head - "You should have just said 'all-right' when the subdiver came in and none of this would have happened." While Jack Craigie disagreed with this attitude, he found it to be a prevalent one at times. A popular cadet attitude was to give the "all-right," and if you did have some "missing articles" then it would not be a lie because you did not truly know you had them. This disregarded the fact that cadets had a duty to check and see before giving the "all-right." It was not a large stretch to envision cadets who disregarded one part of the honor system (the "all-right") would skirt other aspects of the code, like "passing the poop." This phrase meant cadets would tell what questions were asked on a test to other cadets who had the same class later in the day or the next day, giving those cadets an unfair advantage over others. In 1951 "passing the poop" was prevalent enough that Jack Craigie was often worried whether someone was guessing about what was to be tested or had gotten "the poop" from someone who had taken the test earlier, which would have been an honor violation. Craigie graduated from the academy a little cynical about the validity of the

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<sup>21</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, Notes from 1946.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Craigie, West Point Class of 1951 (Interview by author, 12 October 1999, West Point, NY.)

honor system because of abuses he saw go unreported and unpunished.<sup>23</sup> He graduated in 1951, the year of another honor incident of national proportions that saw the Army football team decimated because of the identification of organized "poop passing" rings.

The 1951 cheating incident was an unfortunate episode for the academy. The academy claimed the moral high ground by insisting that it was not an overly ideal requirement to bar cadets from talking to each other about the same test given to the Corps of Cadets over a two-day period. Coach Earl "Red" Blaik, the coach of an Army football team crushed by the honor incident, felt otherwise. Criticized for his overly focused football ethic and for the elitism that characterized the football team within the Corps, Blaik nonetheless felt that the Academy had badly mishandled the honor incident. In August 1951, he commented on the honor incident in a public statement supportive of his players and critical of the recent administration of the honor system, saying "We have created an honor system purely based on fear of dismissal and the depth of such a system, because of the type of indoctrination, is so shallow that many cadets never fully understand the spiritual significance of the honor code."<sup>24</sup>

The invisible tensions and feelings that were underground in the Corps of Cadet again surfaced in 1962 against the "all-right." The chairman of the Cadet Honor Committee described it as "a violent corps reaction to the tactical department using the honor system (to enforce regulations)."<sup>25</sup> The cadet honor committee "formally protested the use of honor to enforce regulations" to the administration at West Point. As a result, in 1963 there was a major change in the "all-right," limiting the meaning to whether a cadet was in the appropriate limits.<sup>26</sup> The result of the "all-right" change was a marked improvement in the Corps' attitude toward the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Earl Blaik, public statement made on 18 August 1951, from the collection of the SAH, USMA.

<sup>25</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, Notes from 1962.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore J. Crackel, 252.

honor system. A survey in 1969 found much higher support than in the beginning of the decade, with a majority of cadets expressing satisfaction with the relationship between honor and regulations.<sup>27</sup> This included some satisfaction with the absence card, which had survived the purge of 1963.



A mess hall corporal asks for the “all-right” from a surprise visiting party to West Point in a 1944 *Pointer*<sup>28</sup>.

West Point used the absence card in conjunction with the “all right” in cadet rooms since approximately the turn of the twentieth century. Cadets marked their absence card with their exact destination each time they left the room. The card correlated strongly to various limits and privileges cadets had by class, and the “subdiver” inspected the card several times a night. Room occupants gave the “all-right” to the subdiver for themselves as well as any absent

<sup>27</sup> SSSGH, 12.

<sup>28</sup> *The Pointer*, Cartoon Section, 1944.

roommates. The chairman of the 1969 honor committee noted that a "good portion of instruction in honor goes toward the absence card" in the hope that this would keep cadets from improperly marking cards and violating the honor code.<sup>29</sup> The price of this emphasis on the absence card and lack of emphasis elsewhere in honor instruction would have a serious impact by 1976.

The EE304 incident in 1976 involved over one hundred cadets in the unauthorized collaboration of a graded homework assignment and was the catalyst for an intense examination of the honor code by members of the U.S. Congress, the news media, and even the Secretary of Defense. Congressmen debated whether the administration was administering the system fairly while some in the news media questioned whether the honor code had any relevance in today's society.<sup>30</sup> The aftermath of the EE304 incident in 1976 produced two separate commissions that made several recommendations to the Academy and the Secretary of the Army concerning the honor system at West Point. The initial group, the Borman Commission of 1976, firmly "endorsed the honor code as it now exists."<sup>31</sup> The commission recommended that "the honor code must not be extended beyond its intended purpose . . . nor should it be exploited as a means of enforcing regulations." The report made it clear that it felt honor education had been "inadequate" and that the administration of the code had been inconsistent "and at times, corrupt."<sup>32</sup> As a general report, however, there were no concrete recommendations about how to eliminate the enforcement of regulations within the honor code. The West Point Study Group, a comprehensive follow-up to the Borman Report in 1977, did recommend to the Academy the elimination of the absence card in an effort to streamline the honor system and promote the spirit

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<sup>29</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, Notes from 1969.

<sup>30</sup> John O. Edborg, "Continuity of Change? The Honor Code in a Turbulent Era 1971-1987." (LD 720 Graduate Paper, West Point, NY: November 1995), 4.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Borman, Report to the Secretary of the Army by the Special Commission on the United States Military Academy (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 15 December 1976), opening letter.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

of the code. While the Academy did have a responsibility for accounting for cadets, the Study Group rejected this line of reasoning. The absence card is “an implied vote of no confidence in the maturity of individual cadets. The Taps inspection insures all cadets are present or accounted for.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite implementing a majority of the recommendations found in both reports, the Commandant and Superintendent did resist the recommendation to eliminate the absence card. At a meeting about the Study Group recommendations, Major David Bramlett recorded the Academy’s position:

The Commandant is ambivalent. If the card is eliminated, then consideration will have to be made so that the institution meets its responsibility in accounting for cadets. USMA can live without the absence card, but some change may/would probably have to compensate for its loss.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, the absence card remained. The chairman of the 1979 honor committee eventually resigned in a dispute with the superintendent, General Andrew J. Goodpaster, over the absence card. The chairman’s replacement on the honor committee wrote “the absence card is a perpetual problem which must be reflected on every year.” After recommending that the honor committee give instruction to every class each year on the absence card, he described the card as “vitally necessary for the health of the honor system.”<sup>35</sup> This was a prime example of both the opportunity cost wasted in teaching about the absence card and the lack of focus on the what is really “necessary” for the honor system to succeed – a development of the spirit of the honor code. The administration in its reluctance to lose control over cadet accountability during their discretionary time once again overlooked the lack of cadet support of using the honor system to accomplish this.

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<sup>33</sup> *Final Report of the West Point Study Group* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), Tab L

Twelve years after the EE304 incident, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Carl Vouno, initiated the Posvar Commission. Wesley Posvar, a West Point graduate and college president, headed a commission whose purpose was to conduct a review of the changes in the honor system since the Borman Report to see if anything else needed to be done to ensure the health of the honor system.<sup>36</sup> One of the Posvar Commission's recommendations in 1989 was once again the elimination of the absence card, which it said was "perceived clearly by cadets as an excessive use of the honor code to enforce regulations."<sup>37</sup> The Posvar Commission found that although Corps of Cadet perception of the honor system as healthy was 63% by 1986 from 55% in 1981, 70% still felt that the honor code and system were still used excessively to enforce regulations. There were 23 pages of complicated limits definitions within USCC Regulation 600-1 concerning the absence card, an indication that the system was "much too complicated." The worst thing about the absence card was the fact that it functioned poorly as "an accountability piece . . . when did (the cadet) leave, etc."<sup>38</sup> These arguments won over the current superintendent, Lieutenant General David R. Palmer, who immediately implemented the recommendation. Palmer ordered the absence card taken down from the inside doorway of all cadet rooms in the fall of 1989; many cadets destroyed theirs in case the Academy had a change of heart.<sup>39</sup>

Two interesting anecdotes from the post-absence card period indicate the importance of the absence cards in the minds of cadets. A graduate from the class of 1986, upon learning that

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<sup>34</sup> Major David A. Bramlett and LTC William P. McKay, "Memorandum for BG Merritt: Discussion with USMA on Honor Point Papers of the West Point Study Group" (West Point, NY: 8 April 1977), 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Honor Committee Chairman's Notes*, from 1979.

<sup>36</sup> LTG David R. Palmer, Letter to General Carl Vouno, 14 May 1988, Collection of the SAH, West Point.

<sup>37</sup> Larry Donnithorne, *Preparing for West Point's Third Century A Summary of the Years of Affirmation and Change, 1986-1991* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, June 1991), 73

<sup>38</sup> *Superintendent's Honor Review Committee, 1986-88* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, March 1988).

absence cards had been eliminated, asked "What keeps the cadets on post?"<sup>40</sup> The expectation there is that the honor implication of falsely marking their card would keep cadets on limits. The daily effect that this had upon cadets on reinforcing a sense of honor is questionable. Cadet Pete O'Dea from the Class of '00 said that the only advice his older brothers (both USMA graduates) gave him upon being accepted to West Point was "just don't mess with those absence cards, whatever you do." Their warnings exemplify the dark aspect of the absence card; that instead of relying on a cadet's sense of honor, some cadets felt a real fear toward the card and the serious implications made every time they marked the card. Cadet O'Dea said that he was extremely relieved to find that the absence card had been gone for several years when he arrived.<sup>41</sup>

The elimination of the absence card in 1989 was the final removal of regulation enforcement from the honor system at West Point. There are still occasions of "improper questions" from time to time, according to the Special Assistant to the Commandant on Honor (SAH), Captain Brian Karinshak. These are usually due to the official questioning of cadets that goes beyond the standards of probable cause or reasonable suspicion. These are rare enough, however, that sometimes the SAH has to remind the cadet honor committee exactly what an "improper question" is.<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that the elimination of the regulation enforcement in the Corps of Cadets has been universally embraced as an improvement of the honor system at West Point.

The argument for having an "all-right" and absence card has always been to reinforce for cadets the importance of their word when making statements on their various activities. For some, the absence card was a daily reminder that they lived under the honor code and had to live

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<sup>39</sup> Author's recollection.

<sup>40</sup> Major David Fralen, West Point Class of 1986 (Interview by author, October 1999, West Point, NY)

<sup>41</sup> Cadet Peter O'Dea, West Point Class of '00 (Interview by author, October 1999, West Point, NY)

<sup>42</sup> Captain Brian Karinshak, SAH (Interview by author, November 1999, West Point, NY)

up to its high standards. Others argue that duty and honor are synonymous, and that to break regulations is to bring dishonor upon yourself - living honorably requires cadets to live up to regulations.

A professor at the Academy who is a specialist in organizational culture and involved in the "Honor Mentor" program for cadets returned to the Corps following an honor violation, made a decent argument for keeping regulation enforcement a part of the honor code. "What good is your honor if I can't rely on it?" He decries the "DMZ (de-militarized zone) that has been erected in the past few years between doing your duty and being honorable." In his opinion, new graduates enter the Army with the habit of breaking regulations with little remorse, having been taught at the Academy that you can violate your duty . . . but not the honor code. As for the elimination of the "all-right" and the absence card, he feels that shifting this responsibility to the cadets themselves will lead to a new tactical officer motto - "what we don't know won't hurt us."<sup>43</sup>

These are excellent points that have significant merit. We should be able to rely upon cadets' honor, and do every day at formations, academic tests and projects, and in the documentation of written work. The difference is between being overly intrusive and demanding that cadets make "official statements" about every thing they do, or trusting them in most areas and accepting their word when given as true in the many instances cited above. As for "what we don't know won't hurt us," it is true that we take a risk in relying on cadets to do the right thing. This does not relieve the staff and faculty of the responsibility of conducting normal inspections and punishing those who are breaking regulations and committing serious offenses. In the

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<sup>43</sup> Scott Snook (Interview by author, September 1999, West Point, NY)

closely regulated world that is West Point, it is nearly impossible to escape punishment for wrongdoing for long.

The West Point honor system has the goal of “instilling in cadets a strong desire to maintain an honorable lifestyle manifested in the spirit of the code.”<sup>44</sup> To do this requires an environment that does not encourage fear of the code, but a sense of ownership. The elimination of any practice that taints the honor system with any goal other than the development of integrity within the Corps of Cadets is a strong improvement. West Point closed a long chapter in the Academy’s history with the removal of regulation enforcement in the honor system, which can only strengthen the future of the nation’s oldest and proudest code of honor.

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<sup>44</sup> *Honor System and SOP*, 7.

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