



THROTTLE UP

USAFA expands efforts to address the demand for more pilots



USAFA

We've Got Spirit...

Cadets, grads execute various missions through USAFA's history

Since the very early days of the Air Force Academy, the spirit mission has been the subject of legend and lore. We recall such iconic sights as supposedly static aircraft not where they were supposed to be, entire offices moved outdoors, the planetarium transformed into an eight ball, and the now-outlawed bedsheets on the flatiron.

By Lt. Col. (Ret.) Steve Simon, '77

Typically, spirit missions are undertaken by Doolies in an effort to demonstrate to the upperclass cadets their initiative, creativity and, yes, spirit. They can involve weeks of planning and (appropriately) military-style precision timing and attention to detail.

The spirit mission, of course, is not limited to Doolies, or even to cadets. Graduates have been known to pull off a spirit mission or two. And not all spirit missions took place at the Academy.

Here, in their own words, are some of the best and most original spirit mission stories (edited for clarity and length), with one of mine at the end.

Hank Hoffman, Class of '63: One of the very first at the Academy campus had to be right after Basic Training in 1959. Alex Hartwick led a bunch of us Doolies into the Air Garden where Polaris Hall now resides. In those days, the only thing that it contained was the X-4 test aircraft, now returned to the museum at Edwards AFB Flight Test Center. This aircraft had no horizontal stabilizer. It was unsecured, and so small that

we could push it around, but the tail was too tall to go under the arch to the Terrazzo. Alex had figured out that putting a few Doolies on the aft fuselage like cowboys and pushing up on the nose wheel would lower it enough to push it out on two wheels. It stayed on the Terrazzo for a few days while they got a crane to lift it up over the wall and return it. Sure enough, a couple of days later it was back on the Terrazzo courtesy of someone else. Obviously the enormous crane was expensive, and the staff no longer found it funny.

Charlie Beading, Class of '75: In the fall of 1971, we had transitioned from Beast to academics. The football season provided a welcome diversion from the rigid discipline of our fourth-class year. No game was more important than Army. The Dirty Dozen Doolies decided it was time for an outrageous demonstration of our enthusiasm. Due to gym construction, there was equipment such as a bulldozer and dump truck on-site. Next door at the Field House, a Minuteman III was on a trailer, waiting to be erected as a permanent display. When

someone suggested parking it in front of Mitchell Hall with a huge BEAT ARMY sign draped over it, we started planning a covert op. The major logistical challenge, getting the missile from the Field House to the Terrazzo, seemed to have a simple solution: hook the dump truck to the trailer and tow it. After a little trouble getting the dump truck started, we were heading up



the hill north of the dorms. Things went smoothly until the driver, Mike Greene, had to shift gears. The engine stalled and we realized the truck had automatic breaks, which locked up. Then the clutch went out. Now we were faced with a heavy cargo stuck halfway up the hill, aimed at a parking lot full of Corvettes. We went back to the construction site and got the bulldozer. We chained the truck, trailer and missile to the rear of the dozer and tried to move up the hill. Our effort was futile. Shortly thereafter, a patrol car with lights flashing pulled up behind the missile. Before long, we were in the back seat of said patrol car, and then in the police station, where we were separated for interrogation. They weren't nearly as good as the upperclassmen we would later face in SERE, but we eventually took their advice and declined to answer questions without a lawyer. That ended the questioning, and around daylight Mike and I were delivered to our very unhappy squadron commander. The weight of the charges — two counts of civilian grand larceny for the truck and the bulldozer and misappropriation of \$2.5 million for the missile — settled in. God must have a sense of humor, though, because a visiting dignitary granted us immunity during the noon meal. (NOTE: This is an edited version of the tale told on the 75bestalive website.)

Dennis Mellen, Class of '75: The night before the Navy football game, Steve Groathouse and I got the brilliant idea to “borrow” a midshipman's uniform and wear it for the march-on. We smuggled the uniform in a laundry bag to the stadium, and once in the tunnel I put it on. Following our plan, we waited for the break between the brigade of midshipmen and the AF group. At that point, I rushed out onto the field pretending I was late to ranks trying to find my spot. I must have run around the brigade three times before finally stopping, throwing my hands up in despair and walking off the field through the tunnel. A group commander nabbed me by the collar and asked, “Are you one of us or one of them?” With “We will not lie, cheat or steal ...” echoing in my mind, I replied “One of us.” To which he replied, pointing to the VIP seats, “Boy, are you in trouble. Do you know how many generals and admirals are watching,

much less the television coverage?” He was right. (NOTE: This is an edited version of the tale told on the 75bestalive website.)

Michelle Nunez, Class of '99: Who could forget when the freshman Class of '99 painted the Terrazzo gold to match their class color? As part of the weeks leading up to Recognition, several members of the Class of '99 painted the marble blocks gold all around the Terrazzo on the only strips the freshmen could use to run on. While it was bright, the commandant, Brig. Gen. Lorenz, was less than amused. The next day, a PA announcement was made requiring the entire class of freshmen to report to the Terrazzo to scrub off the paint — unfortunately for them, the paint that was used was oil-based! It took many hours of scrubbing to get the paint off, and many more days before the gold tint would completely go away. That spirit mission was immortalized on our class painting by Mr. Broome, where he actually painted the Terrazzo gold!

Tom LaValley, Class of '82: I had wanted to do this since I was a Doolie. On the last day we marched into Mitchell Hall for lunch in May 1982, I finally pulled it off. I basically did it alone. For the previous week, I tried to figure out the time of day when there was dead silence on the Terrazzo during noon meal formation. I came up with 12:06 — after announcements but before the band began playing. I had a classmate and friend, Art Crain, who had a room that overlooked the Terrazzo on the Sijan side. I borrowed his room and hauled my entire stereo over there; 120 watts per channel cranked up as loud as it would go (about 1:30 on the volume dial on those old receivers), opened up his windows and put my speakers against the screens. It was all hooked up to a timer that went off at 12:06. The timing was perfect! It was a short segment of a comedy song. Everyone standing in front of Sijan at attention that day got to hear Steve Martin sing: “...but the most amazing thing to me is...I get paid for doin' this.” It was one of my prouder moments.

Bruce Buono, Class of '68: This spirit mission occurred between my third- and second-class years at Airborne training at Fort Benning in the summer of 1966. A

few of us decided we needed to make a show of force for the Air Force presence. We painted posters to place over the 34-foot jump tower changing AIRBORNE to AIR FORCE. We climbed the 250-foot tower and along the side of the structure tied on bedsheets painted to say AFA. Lastly we (I) climbed out the support structure where the parachutist would be dropped and hung a set of stuffed fatigues. All this was done in the middle of the night. The next morning, we were told our actions were dangerous since Army personnel had to climb up to take our mission equipment down. Go Air Force. A second mission was during my Doolie year before the Army game. I was part of a large contingent that broke into the academic buildings and placed desks on the roof of one of the “blue bedrooms” (auditoriums) spelling out BEAT ARMY. The building wasn't that secure and, by climbing out of insecure areas on to a rooftop, we could enter other areas. We passed out the desks to spell out the cheer on the lower roof. Again we were criticized, as we did some thousands of dollars worth of damage to the roof by walking on it.

Michael Ditmire, Class of '65: As an editor of the Dodo, a member of the Rally Committee and a devoted renegade, I helped conceive of and execute several Rally Committee raids, to include 1) sneaking two female models onto the field at halftime to serve as much needed cheerleaders for the first Army/Air Force game at Soldier Field in Chicago (1963), and 2) “stealing” the University of Colorado entrance sign and planting it next to the formation area the night before the game — resulting in honor hearings for our crew at the demand of the Colorado governor. We were all acquitted, but it was rather thrilling and highly unprecedented.



Edward L. Fisher, Class of '83: The Class of '83 was known for a resurgence of high class spirit, as was evidenced by the number and quality of spirit missions (along with “nukes” of upperclassmen, our singing of “Five Golden Rings” at Christmas time and, somewhat unfortunately, the '83-'82 brawl as Recognition week approached and '82 tried to block the '83 “mob” on the way to a required formation). The biggest spirit mission I took part in was our movement of the F-104 down the “Bring Me Men Ramp” and around the roads over to the front door of the chaplain’s house (near the southwest corner of Sijan Hall), pitot boom inches from the wood. If I remember correctly, this happened during the weekend of the Class of '69 reunion, and some members of that class joined in (although I could be mixing up two different nights of spirit). There was a moment of panic when we were on a downslope and the grounded jet started to get away from us. I was one of many doing my best to control the “Missile With A Man [Not] In It,” and so didn’t actually witness the moment when the pitot tube speared one of my classmates. I understand he was not too seriously hurt by the Starfighter. Undeterred and spirit unbroken, we pressed on. As we heard it told the next day, the chaplain was awakened by the Security Police that night and the vision of a large, shiny silver airplane pointed at him through the front door. Broadcast from the Command Post the next day: “Any cadets who removed the F-104 from the Terrazzo will report to the command post immediately.” I’m guessing no one reported. I sure didn’t!

Benjamin Wolf, Class of '00: On the 40th night before Recognition, of course we put a 40 out on Flat Iron, but that was not going to be enough for this group of over-achievers! We made our way out to Falcon Stadium with bedsheets (some white, some dyed blue) and tape, and altered Falcon Stadium’s “Air Force” to “P-40 Force.” That one made the Colorado Springs Gazette because it was visible from I-25. For as grateful as I am that we didn’t have cell phone cameras and social media when I was an LT, it would be nice if I could Google a picture of that!

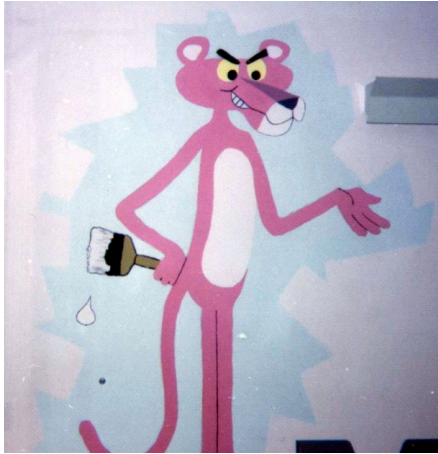
Jeff Lofgren, Class of '84: Our squadron was motivated to do something no one had ever done, so we devised a plan to put a trash can on top of the flag pole on the Terrazzo. That night we put on blackout and carefully watched the Wing CQ office to time our assault. We quickly went to the pole, and in a couple minutes had put a trash can on top of the flag pole. We all made it back without being noticed. The next morning, the trash can was there at morning meal. The next day, they brought out a crane to get it down. When getting the trash can down, they dropped the gold ball that’s on top of the flagpole onto the Terrazzo. So, you might ask, how do you get a trash can on top of a very tall flag pole? The secret is a broom stick, duct tape and a trash can.

Michael DeHart, Class of '75: It’s the fall of 1974. Our commandant is Hoyt S. Vandenberg Jr., a '51 West Point grad. The AF-Army game is Nov. 9. The Class of '75, CS-31 Grim Reapers, takes on an unprecedented spirit mission. We will “break into” the commandant’s office and move his desk and phone to the Terrazzo between the Wright brothers. Lock-picking is crucial, but we have Otto Dieffenbach III. On the Sunday evening of Army week, Otto — with Brad Mandeville (1953-2017) as lookout — “pre-picks” the rear library doors. After taps, Otto gets us into the library, and we work

our way to the comm’s office, where Otto picks the final lock. We strip his office down to the bare carpet, hand-carry his furniture and phone to the Terrazzo down the stairwell since freight elevators were locked. We hang a wall-sized poster that says, “Once a Grunt, Always a Grunt” and take our picture in front of it. We aren’t able to “obtain” an Army mule, so we get a bale of hay instead, which we spread all over his carpet. Finally, we find the official USAFA visitor’s sign-in book in the foyer and leave our initials for posterity sake. We pull it off without a hitch! We also place the toilet seat from his private bathroom on the center of his desk and put a cardboard star in the center, replicating a cadet badge. The next day, the commandant sits at his desk on the Terrazzo for a few hours in a terrific show of sportsmanship. Postscript: Before we break for Christmas, we again break in to leave him a small Christmas tree for being a good sport. Not surprisingly, this time we find a new unpickable lock, so we leave the tree in his foyer, spray a snowflake Santa on his door, and leave him a McDonalds gift coupon. We hope that spirit missions will always be part of the USAFA experience.

John Hope, Class of '76: After a pretty rough Doolie year, summer of SERE (POW and survival training) and jump school at Ft. Benning, we all got randomly assigned into 36th Squadron, Pink Panthers. What a fun



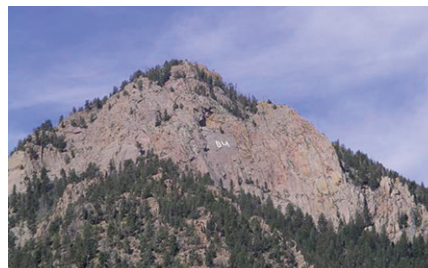


group! I had grown up in a military family as an only child, and was struggling with loneliness and academics on top of all the military stress when our upperclassmen “ordered” the three-degrees to get into work clothes and meet at the AOC office after taps. Our task was to paint the USAF major’s office pink while one of the artists painted a panther with a brush on one wall. We also painted a square on the ceiling where someone attached a handle and hinges purchased from a hardware store. We did all this between taps (2300) and reveille (0600). I recall we got done by around 0200. The prank was to have everyone but the cadet on duty out of the squadron area when the AOC arrived to check his office in the morning. It went perfectly and was quite the talk of the Academy for a few days.

Pat McAdoo, Class of ‘64: Our goal was to have a big, bright “AFA” at midfield for the big game at Folsom Field, Boulder, versus the CU Buffs about three weeks later. We had vetoed spray paint, because it would be found unless we sprayed just before the game. So we decided to sow some sprouting seeds that would be nice and green for the game. Ace Rawlins describes the caper: “This was probably the most highly organized and best executed caper from this group. We were no longer Doolies, but we didn’t have wheels to get there, so we enlisted the help of the 3rd Squadron firsties to provide the wheels and two volunteers to help sow the seed sprouts we bought from a local nursery. We rehearsed sowing the seed pattern down on the football practice field, and it all went like clockwork. The mission was right out of the Mission Impossible playbook. After infiltrat-

ing the stadium about 0300, the team sowed the seed sprouts. But one member was at the wrong end of one letter. So it would have been “AFB” or something. We tried to scoop up the wrong line of seed sprouts, then gave up and used the remaining sprouts on top of the “A” and sprayed the erroneously placed seeds with tiger pee. We were not gardeners or farmers, and did not realize that we had sprayed a high concentration of nitrogen on the sprouts. Three weeks later we marched onto the field, as was the custom back then, and looked down on the field. Our letters were not there! However, there was a nice bright-green dash right where our, um, noses were three weeks earlier.

Anonymous, Class of ‘04: The Thursday before graduation, my friend and I rappelled down the face of Eagle’s Peak and painted the numbers “04” in white paint, each number being about 50 feet high. When we got down off the face, the SF commander was waiting for us and personally arrested us. They took us into interrogation rooms, where they got the same statement from both of us: The paint was harmless, washable paint and would come off in the next thunderstorm. That’s when the SF commander came in and asked me to read the label on the paint: It said “30-year exterior



latex paint.” Mistakes were made (we had asked for washable paint at the paint store). We confessed to our mistake and pleaded for a chance to take it off Eagle’s Peak, but they wouldn’t let us go back up. Thankfully our AOC stood up for us, and we graduated with an LOA and had to pay for the cleanup (it cost \$2,500, and we raised the money through eDodo in less than 48 hours). Needless to say, we were the happiest people marching into the stadium on Wednesday.

Steve Simon, Class of ‘77: Many of us USAFA graduates spent our first years as

officers at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. As Cheyenne didn’t have as much as a shopping mall in the late 1970s, we spent a lot of time in Fort Collins, Colorado, 45 miles south of Cheyenne. As Colorado State University in Fort Collins was one of the Academy’s closest athletic rivals, we had developed a healthy respect for them. In 1979, the big white letter “A” on the hill behind the CSU football stadium attracted our mischievous attention. A group of us mused that it would be cool to add an “F” to the hill, changing the “A” for “Agriculture” to “AF” for “Air Force.” As luck would have it, the perfect occasion for executing such a clever scheme just happened to be coming up: the Oct. 27 Air Force at CSU football game. As we planned, we considered some obstacles: The letter “A” was much larger up close than we thought it would be; the surrounding terrain was steep, rocky and overgrown; and we would probably get caught and arrested, something not generally considered a good career move. Undaunted, we were determined to proceed. We rounded up 35 gallons of white house paint, sprayers, string and stakes. On the Friday evening before the big game, we walked the area and staked out where we would place the “F.” We reassembled the next morning and got to work with the sprayers. Our mission was to be finished by the time it was light enough for workers at the stadium and elsewhere in the city to see our handiwork. It didn’t work out that way. The staked-off area seemed to grow larger as we labored, the paint cans seemed to get heavier and the time seemed to speed up. The sprayers, supernaturally detecting our urgency and nervousness, repeatedly and persistently clogged up, further delaying the process. Fortunately, however, we finished our task without being detected and skulked back into town. The “AF” hovered over the stadium that day — and for several days thereafter, visible from as far away as I-25, until the “F” gradually faded into the hillside. We had done it and survived. Best of all, we weren’t even the prime suspects. As we walked toward the stadium just before kick-off, we followed a group of CSU students. One noticed and pointed to our creation. Another shook his head and muttered, “Damn ROTC students.” 🐾