

Branch Night

On the evening of 15 November 2017, 13 members of the class of 1968 representing 11 branches participated in Branch Night at Ike Hall, West Point:

Larry Jordan	Armor
Ed Lorentzen	Armor then Military Intelligence
Dan Adams	Field Artillery
Craig O'Connor	Field Artillery
Fred Shahid	Field Artillery
Steve Winsor	Engineers
Skip Greeby	Engineers
Tom Jewell	Infantry then Aviation
Dale Hansen	Military Intelligence
Bob Stroud	Military Police then Infantry
Bob Beahm	Ordnance then Infantry
Ralph Tucillo	Quartermaster
David Martin	Signal Corps

Background

Firsties can choose from 17 branches, which West Point categorizes as follows:

- Land and Air Maneuver (Infantry, Armor, Aviation)
- Fires (Field Artillery, Air Defense Artillery)
- Communications and Intelligence (Signal Corps, Military Intelligence, Cyber)
- Logistics (Quartermaster, Ordnance, Transportation)
- Personnel and Health Services (Adjutant General, Finance, Medical Service)
- Combat Support (Chemical, Engineer, Military Police)

In addition, other Specialty Career Fields are available, but only after commissioning: (Chaplain, Judge Advocate General, Medical Doctor/PA, Nurse, Dentist) and a limited number of members of the class can choose Medical Corps or Medical Service Corps as a branch.

Evening Events

Classmates gathered at the Hotel Thayer Patton Lounge prior to the ceremony in order to prepare for the coming evening. They then proceeded to the Commandant's house for a reception with various members of West Point command and staff, including Boo Corrigan (Athletic Director), Todd Browne (CEO of the AOG), the Supe, and the Dean. From there they proceeded to Eisenhower Hall for a photo taken with the Class of 2018 officers, led by their President, Marcos Arroyo. At 1900 hours the ceremonies began with an amusing and inspiring speech by our own Larry Jordan (then Chairman of the AOG).

Unlike the Class of 1968 "analog" branch selection a half century ago, Firsties now submit their branch preferences and a computer algorithm makes branch

assignments. The assignments are based on several factors, the most important of which is General Order of Merit (academic/physical/military/character scores). Company TAC Officers distributed an envelope to each Firstie, and then on the command of "Open your envelopes" all the Firsties simultaneously opened their envelopes (which had a welcome note and brass branch insignia inside) and all bedlam broke loose. It was emphasized that there would be no "blood pinning" allowed...but then, Branch Night wasn't exactly Airborne School or Ranger School.

According to the AOG, 80% of the men and 73% of the women got their first branch choice. Infantry had the largest number of slots, with 190 males and 6 females. Field Artillery was second with 125/19. Engineers was third with 94/30. After Engineers, the biggest branches for women Firsties were Military Intelligence and Adjutant General with 21 each. Many of the branches, like Signal Corps and Military Intelligence, had only about half of their Firsties going into the branch upon graduation...the other half would spend a few years in another branch and then move to their selected branch. Apparently, those branches now need captains and not so many lieutenants. The smallest branch was Finance with 7 men and 2 women. The AOG reported that 70% of the class branched combat arms, and 95% received one of their first five branch choices. Several weeks after Branch Night, the Firsties got to choose their first posts.

Our class was pleased to purchase the branch insignia presented to the Firsties of '18 and '68 classmates were on hand to witness the opening of envelopes and to help pin on the shiny new brass.



Lorentzen pinning on brass branch insignia

A few notes about my Grandson, Michael F. James, Class of 2018

Michael was born on his mom's birthday in Anchorage, AK, to the parents of two West Point graduates from the class of 1992. From an early age, Michael wanted to join the Army. As we were walking down the street, when he was three years old, Michael saw an Army recruiting booth. Without any hesitation, he ran up to the booth and started picking out Army souvenirs. The recruiters were taken aback, but Michael was insistent that he was going in the Army. Years later, as Michael was preparing for college, his focus had not diminished. He applied for West Point immediately after he finished his junior year in high school. When asked what his backup plan was, he stated that he did not have one. He was going to West Point. As

luck would have it, we were at our daughter's house when Michael received his appointment to West Point. He could hardly contain himself when he read the letter. He ran outside and did a few laps around the house and came back inside and hugged his mom and dad. It was so awesome to see his dream come true. I participated in several activities with Michael and the Class of 2018. Along with a large number of our classmates, I took part in the 2018 March Back after their plebe summer. I was able to march back with Michael's company and spend some time with him during the March Back. I attended the Affirmation Ceremony for Michael's class and was impressed with the motivation and enthusiasm of the class. My wife and I were there for Branch Selection night when Michael received his choice of Engineers. My wife Sallie pinned on his branch insignia that evening. Michael has done well at West Point. My wife is fond of saying that it took 4 generations of West Pointers in her family before we had a star man at West Point. - **Fred Shahid '68**



After the envelope opening, the whole group moved to the Ike Hall ballroom where branch officer reps were positioned at branch tables arranged with handouts (hats,

backpacks, tee shirts, mugs, etc., emblazoned with branch identification). '68 classmates spent the next hour or so speaking with the Firsties, visiting their own branch tables and enjoying snacks and drinks. The event ended around 2100 hours, but the Firstie party merely moved to the First Class Compound, where no doubt additional libations were still available.

As '68 classmates were leaving the celebration, the Class of 2018 President, Marcos Arroyo, approached them to express his gratitude for the Class of 1968 participation in the 50YAP. Other cadets had dropped by earlier in the evening to espouse the same sentiments.

Skip Greeby had worn his original Engineer branch insignia on his lapel, but traded it with one of the Firsties from Skip's old company (E-2). He requested that Firstie give Skip's Engineer insignia to a Firstie 50 years hence in 2068 during his own 50 Year Affiliation event. Skip reported that the Firstie was visibly emotional about the gift. What a terrific idea.

Skip Greeby's Engineering Insignia

As an attending classmate at the USMA 2018 Branch Night last November, I was able to meet with my E-2 heirs, aka Brew Dawgs! They were happy to see that a 50-Year affiliate and ex-E-2'er was still around after five decades. Having branched Engineers in 1968, I met E-2 Firstie Mathew Benjamin, a soon-to-be Engineer 2LT who will be going to Fort Drum as his first assignment. I presented Matt with my Castle worn 50 years ago, asking him to be sure to give it to a new USMA 2068 Engineer when he attends Branch Night 50 years hence. Visibly moved by my presentation, he promised to do so. Matt and I have communicated since, and I met him again recently at our Leader Challenge session this past March 2018. Joan and I will meet with him (and his parents) during our 50th reunion and his graduation. For me, this meeting and bond developed this year between Matt and me represent the very essence and purpose of our 50-Year Affiliation program. - **Skip Greeby '68**



Cathy Kilner of the AOG was particularly helpful in planning the event, and being a liaison between the '68 Class and the AOG. The AOG's write-up and video about Branch Night can be found at <https://www.westpointaog.org/westpointbranchnightclassof2018>.

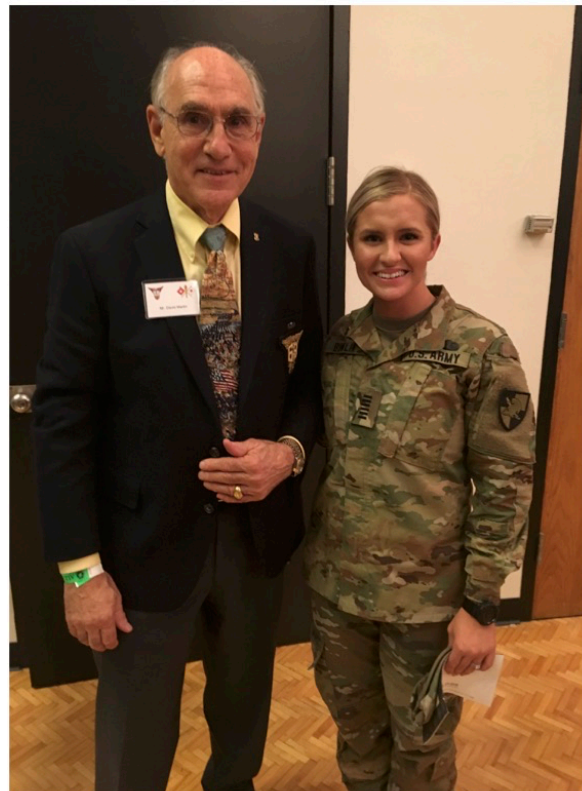
Several of the '68 classmates withdrew to the Hotel Thayer Patton Lounge to keep alive the Class of 1968 tradition of closing the lounge. A good time was had by all.



Skip Greeby with Company E-2



Pandemonium reigned after the opening of branch envelopes. (photo by A.Dinoto/WPAOG)



David Martin with Firstie Bailey Bowlin, 2nd Regimental Commander, who received her first choice, Military Intelligence



(LtR) Craig O'Connor, Dale Hansen,
Larry Jordan, David Martin



Cathy Kilner (AOG), '68 attendees with '18 officers

A Remembrance – OUR Branch Night

The Class of 1968's decidedly low-tech method for Branch selection did not include the computer algorithms used presently. Instead, the whole class sat together in South Auditorium while over 700 names were called in order of academic merit by an Officer in Charge (OIC). As each name was called the cadet would stand and announce his Branch choice. 50 years ago our choices were basically limited to five combat or combat support branches (Infantry, Artillery, Armor, Corps of Engineers, and Signal Corps). There were a smattering of other branches available including Military Intelligence, but the vast majority of the Class of '68 ended up with one of the five main branches. Those who desired Air Defense Artillery (ADA) had to first choose Artillery.

In front of us on the stage were huge boards with large slips of paper approximately six inches square. As each cadet in turn stated his choice, a slip of paper was removed from the board representing that branch. Engineers and Signal each had 60 slips and Armor had 90. Infantry and Artillery each had considerably more than 90 slips. When, for example, the last slip of paper was removed from the board representing Engineers, that meant that nobody else could claim Engineers as a choice. Essentially, there was no maximum for infantry and artillery, but there were minimum quotas to be met.

While the anticipation and excitement for the Class of 2018 was short lived with the simultaneous opening of envelopes followed by shouts of joy or groans of disappointment, Branch Night for '68 was an evening of prolonged suspense and excruciating waiting for some. I had my heart set on the Signal Corps, but my less than stellar class rank meant that I was in for a nerve-wracking evening. Once the Engineers and Armor slips were all taken away I noticed that the Signal slots were being taken more frequently than before. I was definitely nervous as the evening progressed, but luckily I was able to claim one of the last Signal slots.

When we had about three dozen classmates to go with Artillery and Infantry as choices, the officers on stage conferred for a brief moment. The OIC then announced that because the quota for Infantry had not been met, the remaining members of the Class of '68 would be "ranked" into the Infantry and we were dismissed. However, in a very classy move the next cadet in line put a halt to the dismissal when he stood up and shouted, "Sir, the remaining members of the Class of '68 demand that we be able to choose our branch. I choose Infantry!" The OIC quickly got into the spirit of the moment and started calling names again. Thus, the final classmates stood one at a time and declared, "I choose Infantry."

*Branch Night for '68 was slow, suspenseful, exciting, and in the end, poignant. – **Dick Steiner '68***