



'The honor code became a joke': a personal story of

A Cadet Involved

The Air Force ended its investigation into violations of the Air Academy honor code last week and announced that its official findings will be released later. Here is a personal, unofficial—and not unprejudiced—description of the scandal by one of the 105 cadets who resigned as a result of it. LIFE withholds his name.

A friend of mine at the Air Force Academy once said, "When I came here, this place smelled like roses; now it smells like garbage." That's just the way I feel today.

I'm one of the cadets who resigned from the academy for an honor code violation. It's all over for me now. I was involved, and there is really nothing I can say to excuse that. But there are some things I can say about the academy, and the honor code, that might help people understand how this whole thing came about.

To explain what it's like living

under the academy system is a little like trying to describe what it's like to walk barefoot on hot coals to someone who's never done it. There, in the "aluminum womb"—that's what we call the academy—every facet of your life is regulated, from reveille at 6 o'clock to the time you go to bed—which can be as late as 1 a.m. There's a whole volume of regulations known as "the cookbook," and the cookbook determines everything from the position of the clock on your desk to the uniform you wear. Infractions mean demerits. So

many demerits and you have to walk a tour—march around with a rifle for an hour. For more serious offenses you get confinements—that is, you are restricted to your room for the weekend.

If all the regulations are interpreted literally, it is simply not possible to live up to them. A while ago they began to get really tough on room inspections. You might walk into your room at any old time during the week and find an Air Force officer stretched out full-length on your floor with his head stuck up under the bottom of your



Air Force Academy cheating

Sizes Up the Scandal

On parade ground, Air Force cadets race into formation before marching to lunch. All of their activities, from

breakfast at 6:50 o'clock until organized study periods at night, are run off on a split-second schedule.

valet, looking for dust. Well, you simply can't afford to spend four hours every night preparing your room for that kind of inspection and still do your military requirements and your athletics and keep up your academics, too. So you get demerits and you get confinements.

Is it possible to lead a sane life under such restrictions—in one word, no; it's not possible. There are so many regulations and restrictions—many of them picayune—that you get into the habit of breaking them, because if you

didn't break them you'd never last at the academy anyway.

I'm not trying to say that respect for military discipline is not valuable at the academy. It's all-important—when it's properly instilled.

Not so long ago the units had a feeling of esprit—of pride. The cadets were responsible for running their own squadrons and handling much of the training, and they had some latitude for learning by making mistakes. They felt that they were being trained to be leaders. We had an honor code then, too, and I believe it worked.

It was a personal thing, a value.

Let me explain some things about the Air Force's honor code. First of all, it is far more rigid than the codes at the other academies. At Annapolis, for example, you aren't expected to turn yourself in—or your buddies—for an honor violation. At West Point, cadets aren't bound by the code when away on leave. But at the Air Force Academy you're *always* on your honor. The honor code says that you will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate among you anyone who does, and that's exactly what

it means. Period. There are no mitigating circumstances, no gradations of seriousness of offense. You can't lie to your girl friend, to a bartender, or for that matter, to your worst enemy.

Here's a little example of how it works. Outside each cadet's door is posted his name card with a little authorization card attached to it. When you leave your room for some authorized reason, you're supposed to mark your card saying where you're going. Now, let's say that your roommate goes to the latrine. He marks his card as

CONTINUED

After a rigorous week in the field learning marksmanship and map reading, cadets march back to academy.

SCANDAL CONTINUED

he should, but on the way back he stops in another cadet's room to bum a cigaret, and you find out about it. He has committed an honor violation because his card is considered to be speaking for him. Since he spent a couple of minutes of his absence in another cadet's room—an unauthorized place—he is, in effect, telling a lie through the marking of his card. And since you know about it, you are honor bound to turn him in to the Honor Committee and thus force his resignation from the academy for a code violation. If you don't do it, you have committed an honor violation yourself because you have tolerated his lie.

There was, however, another side to the honor code as it existed then. The A.O.C. (the Air Force Officer in Charge of your squadron) would never consider using the honor code against you as a weapon. As a lark you could paint the A.O.C.'s ceiling purple, and he wouldn't resort to the code to find out who did it. Of course, if he found a can of paint in your room, he'd be justified in asking you if you painted the ceiling and you'd have to admit that you did. But he wouldn't go through the squadron and ask each cadet if he was guilty until he found the man who was. That would have been considered an "unfair question." And you could refuse to answer on those grounds.

But then things began to change. We got a new commandant—General Robert Strong. Cadet officers were stripped of their authority, all the squadron training and procedures were standardized, orders came down from on high, pica-yune regulations proliferated, and the honor code became a remote and impersonal thing. It became less an ethic than a tool of inquisition for the squadron officers.

The code also deteriorated into a kind of joke—the basis of a little game that the cadets played against the officers. The cadets devised ingenious ways of obeying the letter of the honor code while toying with its spirit. One thing was called "Rerouting Form 10."

The Form 10 is the academy's equivalent of a traffic ticket. For any infraction of the rules—for not having polished the soles of your shoes (yes, we had to do that too), or for allowing dust to accumulate on your bedsprings—a cadet officer or the A.O.C. can

write you up on a Form 10. (Under some circumstances you are expected to write yourself up.) The Form 10 goes up through channels to a higher echelon, where your punishment is determined. All along the line there are opportunities for you or your buddies to get hold of this Form 10 and destroy it. But to destroy it would be a clear-cut honor violation. However, for a long time it was not considered an honor violation to get a friend on duty in the orderly room to remove your Form 10 from a desk and mail it to his mother or to Timbuktu or to a girl friend. There was one girl in Minneapolis, as a matter of fact, who used to get flooded with Form 10s.

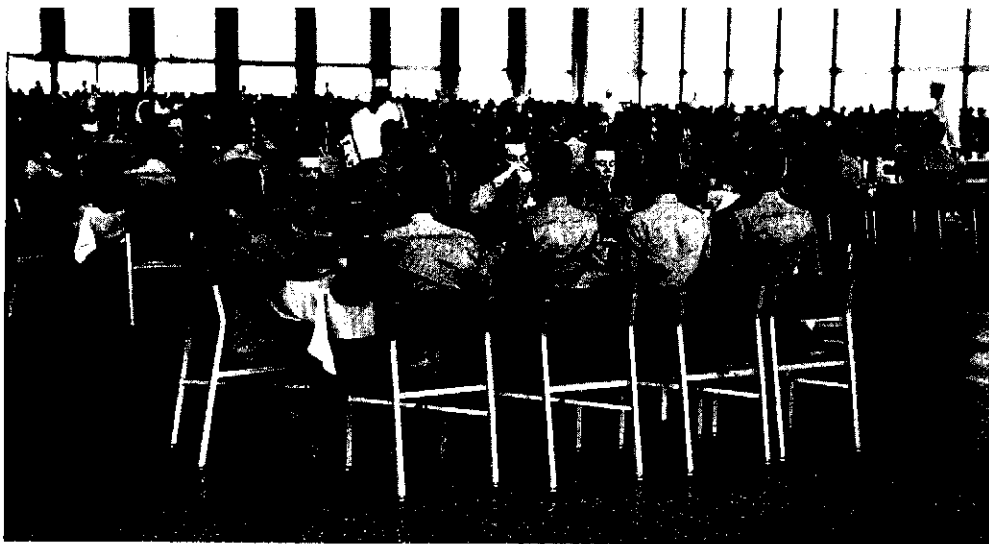
In the last year or so the increase in nit-picking made the cadets downright rebellious. There were a lot of "Dirty Purples"—little underground newsletters run off on mimeograph machines and secretly distributed to cadets. The academy has always had "Dirty Purples." Usually they just made good-natured fun of the authorities. These newer ones, though, were bitter.

The F-106 affair symbolized the way the administration dealt with us—and the way we responded. We had an airplane that used to sit in a place of honor on the Mall. It was an F-100, the first supersonic jet fighter the Air Force ever had, and it had become an academy institution. One day we got up to find that the plane had been carted off and replaced with a new fighter, an F-106. Everyone missed the old plane, and out of irritation some cadets went out one night and shoved the F-106 across the Mall. If the authorities had simply moved it back, that probably would have been the end of it, but the administration apparently felt that we had to be taught a lesson, so when they moved it back they



'More nit-picking made the





cadets downright rebellious'

fastened it down with heavy steel cables. Well, that was too much of a challenge to resist. A few days later the plane was moved again, cables and all. That really bugged the administration. So this time they not only put it back and cabled it down, they welded the nose wheel at right angles to the others, so that the only way you could move the plane was to pick it up bodily and carry it. And that, of course, is exactly what the cadets will do—someday soon.

Last winter the commandant got so exercised about these acts of rebellion that he addressed the whole academy and told us he was concerned about our "attitude of suspicion and resistance."

Distrust grew up between the cadets and officers within the wing, and the officers responded with cloak-and-dagger-style investigations of minor infractions, as in the case of the missing candy bars. Each squadron has a boodle room—a place where you can go to get a Coke or a candy bar. This has always been run on the honor system—you drop your money in a box and take your change. But last year, in one squadron, the money box kept turning up short, so an Honor Committee representative sat on the roof of an adjoining building with a pair of binoculars and watched what everyone took, then relayed the information via walkie-talkie to a confederate, who went into the room to see if the proper amount of money had been put in the box. With this complicated spying system they eventually turned up eight or 10 cadets who'd been stealing.

Academy cadets are a select

Razzing in the ranks, upperclassmen criticize military bearing of a "doolie," or freshman, during review.

Eating at attention, new cadets must keep braced while passing food and answering questions from seniors.

group of young men, and if there's one quality they possess to an unusual degree it's ingenuity. That ingenuity, like the fizz in a bottle of pop, has got to find a way out. And it did. The climate was right.

The G.A.P.—the Great American Public—has been given the impression that the scandal was the work of a crime ring. But it wasn't that way at all. The whole thing was far more casual and widespread.

Let's consider the business of breaking into the Academic Building to steal the exams. For years there have been cadets who've moved around in the academy buildings at night with the ease of Cary Grant in a cat-burglar movie. They know the underground tunnel system, they know the intricacies of the elevator system, they know every door and passageway on the grounds, and they can get in and out of locked buildings like Houdini. There are cadets who use ropes and mountaineering techniques to get up and down building walls, and who carry masking tape stuck to their bodies so they can tape back the latch on a door they've gone through to facilitate a quick escape. There was even a key made by one cadet, who was a skilled locksmith, that would open almost any door on the grounds.

In the past these forays resulted in nothing nefarious. Someone wanted to get at a mimeograph machine to turn out a "Dirty Purple," or to play a prank. Actually, getting at the tests was child's play compared to the stunts some of the boys have pulled over the years. The celebrated test papers had, in fact, always been accessible to anyone who wanted to go after them. Last fall there were some tests around. But cheating didn't become widespread until right before finals in December, when one of the cadets decided to set himself up in business. I don't really know how much he cared about the money.

Shortly before finals he started going into the Academic Building and making multiple copies of the tests, using carbon sets. As far as I know he never had any ring of henchmen or salesmen working on commission. The word simply got around, and if a cadet wanted a test he'd go see this guy or his roommate and buy a copy for \$5 or \$8.

How did people feel while all this was going on? Well, they felt great. We'd challenged the officers

CONTINUED

'You didn't fink on your buddies'

SCANDAL CONTINUED

in the biggest game ever, and we were beating them. We still had an honor code, but by then our loyalty had shifted from the academy to each other. It was us against the officers, and the cardinal rule of the new honor code was that you didn't fink on your buddies. You didn't worry about getting caught because if you added up all the people who'd used tests, or seen them, or had some idea of what was going on, I think it would include more than half of the cadet wing. And, of course, even those who simply knew what was going on and didn't report it had broken the honor code.

It was bound to happen, and last month some men turned up from the Air Force Office of Special Investigations. They wore civilian clothes and tried to be inconspicuous, but everyone knew they were there, and it was just a question of when they would move in on us.

According to some stories I've seen, a couple of second-classmen found out what was going on and blew the whistle on some other cadets. That makes it sound as if the honor code was really working, but someone who should know told me a different story: the cadet who turned in the first names was a guy who'd been involved in the cheating himself, who'd flunked out, and who finked on some guys he disliked as a parting shot.

One Monday night the OSI made its move, taking cadets out of formations and out of their rooms and interrogating them. From the nature of these sessions, you'd have thought that the academy had overnight turned into a nest of vice and corruption. The OSI men asked about homosexuality, marijuana peddling and prostitution rings. I thought it interesting that the Honor Committee itself was never involved in these investigations. It hardly could have been, because some of its members were involved in the cheating themselves.

A little later, when the authorities got an idea of how many people actually were involved, the word was put out that anyone who wanted to resign could leave without investigation. At the time, dozens of cadets I knew personally planned to do just that. I think that the hundred or so who have already left are only a beginning.

Academy chapel, where attendance is mandatory, is topped by aluminum spires, one reason for cadet nickname for campus, the "aluminum womb."

