



BG (P) Caslen's introduction.



CPT Ashby is congratulated by LTG (Ret.) Ted Stroup '62.



CDT Crabtree presents a cadet bust on behalf of the Corps.



## THE 2007 Nininger Award for Valor at Arms

By LTC (Ret.) James E. Johnston '73

On 26 September 2007, the West Point Association of Graduates (WPAOG) presented CPT Randall L. Ashby '01 the second annual Alexander R. Nininger Award for Valor at Arms. During a special Corps dinner in Washington Hall, WPAOG Chairman, LTG (Ret.) Ted Stroup '62, and Superintendent LTG Buster Hagenbeck '71 presented the medallion. The presentation and dinner ceremony was a stirring event that now has taken

its place in the annual sequence of WPAOG awards, alongside the Thayer Award and the Distinguished Graduate Award.

Cadet First Captain Jason Crabtree '08 served as master of ceremonies for the evening and the mood was a mixture of solemnity and enthusiasm. The Corps, dressed in white over gray, observed a moment of silence in memory of those who have died or have been wounded in battle, as well as in recognition of the soldiers

and members of the Long Gray Line currently fighting terrorism around the globe. The cadets also listened intently to Commandant BG Caslen's welcoming remarks, outlining the challenges facing this generation's leaders in Iraq.

BG Caslen also thanked Mr. Doug Kenna '45 and his wife Jean Kenna, who endowed the annual presentation of the award, named after LT Alexander R. Nininger. "Sandy" Nininger,



CPT Ashby spoke about his experiences in combat to the Corps of Cadets in Washington Hall.



Superintendent LTG Hagenbeck congratulated CPT Ashby and his wife Rhonda.



CPT Ashby with wife Rhonda, parents, sister-in-law, and two nephews.



A reception was held at beautiful Herbert Hall.



Dean BG Finnegan chats with female cadets.

who was posthumously awarded the first Medal of Honor of WWII, for his inspiring leadership in the war in the Philippines. Representing the Nininger family at this year's event was Mr. John Patterson, nephew of Alexander Nininger and a benefactor of the USMA Library.

LTG Stroup then enthusiastically addressed the Corps, noting that each generation in the Long Gray Line has had, and will continue to have, its wars to fight, suggesting also that the Nininger Award symbolically served to link past generations with current members of the Corps of Cadets.

CPT Ashby '01 then received the Nininger medallion from the Superintendent and the WPAOG Chairman, posed for photographs, and

took his place at the podium. He delivered a superb acceptance speech, and the Corps seemed to hang on each word. He noted that his Silver Star (received for three weeks of combat leadership during the attack from Kuwait to Baghdad in the spring of 2003), as well as the Nininger medallion, was a symbol of his soldiers' heroism more than of his own. Ashby then emphasized how appreciative he was of the opportunity to address the Corps in Washington Hall, where the shadows of other heroic graduates seemed to linger, graduates such as Lee, Grant, and MacArthur, as well as David Bernstein, Joe Lusk, and Andy Houghton, more recent graduates who have given their lives in the ongoing Global War on Terror (GWOT).

CPT Ashby then described the determination and heroism of his soldiers: SSG Dan Reed, who conducted critical bridge recon under heavy indirect fire; SGT Scott Barker, who emplaced explosives to crater a key road while carrying shrapnel in his leg; and SPC Jesse Blancarte, who performed heroic first aid on his comrades following an RPG attack. CPT Ashby went on to emphasize his soldiers' extraordinary efforts over the three weeks of continuous combat operations. In closing, he focused on the importance of discipline and teamwork in combat, and echoed the Commandant's exhortation to the members of the Corps that they be well prepared to lead their soldiers in the battles they would fight in the years ahead.

Currently concluding company command with the 4th Engineer Battalion in Ft. Carson, CO, Ashby will join the Department of Military Instruction (DMI) faculty in 2008.

In its second year, the Nininger Award has taken a position as the inaugural event in a series of DMI-sponsored junior leader panel and branch activities that culminated this year in the Combined Arms Tailgate on Saturday, 29 September 2007, following the Army football victory over Temple University at Michie Stadium. ■