

Accordingly, the Board of Trustees, with Davison's and Stromberg's endorsements, approved the initiation of a non-serial publishing program, with part-time staff and a budget. Though small in design and scope, the program, nevertheless, gave the AOG an important new dimension to its potential for assistance to the Academy, a dimension which, under appropriate circumstances, could be pursued to the Academy's benefit.

During the decade of the '80's there was one additional, major interface between the Academy and the AOG. Though it had not resulted in expanded AOG support by the beginning of the '90's, it was especially illustrative of the sort of assistance the Academy might ask of the AOG and the seriousness with which the AOG considers such requests. This case is important not only because of its scope and potential importance but also because, like the Academy's request for an expansion of fund raising in the mid-70's, the AOG declined to provide the requested support. This case was the Superintendent's request that the AOG raise funds for, create and operate at West Point a "Leadership Institute" for the Academy.

Early in Palmer's Superintendency he guided through Academy committees and the Department of the Army a formal statement of the Academy's "purpose," from which flowed the Academy's "mission" statement. This "purpose" statement emphasized, among other things, the role of the Academy in developing leaders. In apparent concert with this two part approach to the Academy's reason for existence and as part of an overall staff reorganization, Palmer created an office reporting directly to the Superintendent to oversee leadership development in the Corps of Cadets, thus attempting to centralize control of and responsibility for that important part of the cadet experience. But there was another, significant element of Palmer's ambitious goal; that was to create at West Point a "center" which through its activities would influence the development of national leadership, a "grand design" which would both reinforce cadet leadership training and make available to the nation the finest leadership laboratory in the world - the Corps of Cadets.

Before the proposal was made to the AOG Palmer engaged a prestigious Washington firm to work with the Academy staff to fully develop the concept and a comprehensive and persuasive presentation. Thus, when the President and staff of the AOG first knew any of the details of the concept, it was not only being proposed by the Superintendent but also it was presented in a form and tone which made its

acceptance by the AOG and its success at first seem predetermined.

Davison was initially intrigued by the idea of creating at West Point what could become the premier "think tank" for leadership in the Army and in the country. While Palmer took the position that the project was something the AOG could do, indeed, should do, Davison was convinced that it should be undertaken only after more detailed study proved the project feasible and only with the enthusiastic endorsement of the AOG Board of Trustees.

Accordingly, he appointed a committee composed of the best qualified graduates on the issues involved and persuaded "Shy" Meyer '51, former Chief of Staff of the Army, to chair the committee. (It was later that Meyer became Chairman of the West Point Societies Committee.) Among the committee members was Walter F. Ulmer '52, former Commandant of Cadets and then President of the Center for Creative Leadership, itself in the forefront of institutions involved in the study of and education about leadership.

Not since the controversial Position Committee of 1971 had an AOG committee examined so thoroughly and inwardly the real nature of the AOG and its relationship with its members and the Academy. Ultimately, the Committee decided and recommended to the Board of Trustees that the cost of developing and operating such an institution would place it beyond the AOG's capability for fund raising and that superimposing such an institution onto the Military Academy, while consistent with and reinforcing the newly stated purpose of the Academy, would quite probably detract from the accomplishment of the Academy's prescribed mission.

In a tension filled meeting of the Board of Trustees, with Palmer present, Meyer reported the Committee findings and conclusions and recommended that the AOG decline the Academy's request to establish the Leadership Institute. Davison had decided earlier, during the course of the Committee's study, that the AOG should not accept Palmer's challenge and the Board supported its President and Committee by voting against the proposed institute.

In the Superintendent's request and the Board's denial the AOG showed an organizational independence which was rare in Academy-AOG relations. Based upon the AOG's demonstrated effectiveness and potential the Academy had asked its alumni organization to establish and operate an entirely new institute at West Point, a task involving capital fund raising and capital and operating expenditures of hundreds of millions of dollars. The AOG, on the other hand, taking

the request with a seriousness which initially suggested likelihood of acceptance, at the final count gave its parent institution an unqualified and, in a way, very sad negative response.

The response was "sad" in the sense that in an ideal world of Academy-AOG relations, it seems that the AOG should provide support, not decline to do so, and to feel compelled to decline because it has been asked to do something it cannot do is not a "happy" conclusion. Contrarily, again in an ideal world the Academy, embodied by the Superintendent, should (some might say must) exert the greatest possible restraint in asking the AOG to undertake a serious, major activity which the AOG cannot accomplish. For the Academy to do so suggests that the Superintendent does not know his alumni organization very well and places that organization, the AOG, in the awkward position of telling him so - not the formula for future trust and understanding.

Similarly, and of equal importance, a situation could arise where the AOG, confident of the important role it has come to play in support of the Academy, might offer to help, indeed, insist on helping, the Academy in a way which the Academy either could not, for legal or official government reasons, accept or because the Superintendent believes such help would not be in the Academy's best interests. The AOG would be seeking a relationship which the Academy could not accept. In such cases the AOG must exercise restraint in asking the Academy to agree to accepting the help. As the Superintendent and his staff have a need to know and coordinate with the alumni organization well enough to avoid formal AOG rejection of significant USMA requests, the President of the AOG and the Board of Trustees must avoid placing the Academy in the awkward position of having to refuse to accept formally proffered AOG assistance. Either way, there is a loss of trust and understanding and a very real risk that the full potential for graduate support of the Academy will not be realized.

Even though the AOG declined to accept the Leadership Institute project, its story is appropriate as a major illustration of the supportive relationship of the AOG to the Academy. It is appropriate because in the midst of literally hundreds of "yeas," many unheralded, which the AOG has returned to the Academy, this reluctant "nay" was developed in thoughtful, exhaustive study and for valid, substantive reasons. And, the use of this example gives increased significance to the appropriately routine and unquestioned support which West Point has received from its graduates through the AOG.

The Leadership Institute is also appropriate as a major illustration because the AOG's negative response to the Superintendent's request may not be final. As West Point's preeminence in leadership development, nurtured so determinedly and with such success during Palmer's superintendency, continues to flourish in West Point's fertile leadership environment, an institute such as that proposed, studied and rejected may become as natural a part of West Point's evolution as private fund raising became in the 60's and 70's. Then, if the Academy cannot establish a leadership center for whatever legal or other reason and if such a center is considered essential to the continuing realization of the Academy's purpose on behalf of the nation, no doubt properly informed West Point graduates, acting through an appropriate organization, will do what is necessary for the Military Academy's welfare, as they have done in the past.

CONCLUSION

INTIMATIONS OF THE FUTURE

This brief history of 20 years in the life of the AOG has addressed the peaks of activity, the defining events and actions which tended to reshape the organization and point it toward the future. A reader, hopefully, has found several themes. Among them are: the continuing, enthusiastic graduate support of the Academy; the uncommon degree to which the Academy and the AOG maintain the fragile balance of a support/supporting relationship; and the capability and willingness of the AOG to change or reorient its direction in response to valid and relevant Academy initiatives.

One suspects, and some may know, that, pervasive and significant as they were during this 20-year period, these characteristics were not completely new when the President of the AOG, with the Academy Superintendent's support, set out to reorganize and redirect the Academy's alumni affairs in 1970. So, what did underlie all of the change and activity? What can we understand about what happened to the AOG? And, how might that understanding be applied to the future?

The reader will recall that in 1970 there were two alumni organizations at West Point. One, the AOG, was a membership organization with a constitution and governance arrangements which were responsive to and representative of its members. The other organization, the WPAF, was a foundation, also, with a constitution and governance arrangements, but which was responsible primarily to the Academy. In 1970 the AOG acted like an alumni membership organization. The WPAF, except for sharing the publishing function with the AOG, acted like the foundation it was; that is, it raised or accepted funds to finance projects and activities of the Military Academy.

However, as noted earlier, the developing fund raising environment at West Point in the late '60's and the dictates of sound management and organizational considerations, left little doubt that the alumni affairs arrangement which had served the Academy so well for almost 25 years was in need of change. Changes in publishing responsibilities through the consolidation of all Assembly and Register of Graduates publishing under the AOG, was straightforward and took

advantage of the AOG relations with graduates, classes and societies.

The transfer of the foundation function to the AOG was, again as noted earlier, more complex and far reaching. First of all, while there was close legal scrutiny by both the Academy staff and by the AOG of the proposed AOG assumption of the foundation functions of the WPAF, the concept was always expressed in terms of fund raising for and custody of private funds for the Academy, not in terms of the AOG's becoming the Academy's foundation. The real issues were: the AOG had the legal capability and the will to raise and maintain private funds for the Academy, and that became the preferred course of action in 1970.

Looking back, one may see that with changing administrations in both the Academy and the AOG and thus with changing interpretations of the relative responsibilities and changed circumstances, the preferred solutions of 1970 may not remain responsive to the issues which must be addressed in 1990 and beyond.

The fund raising program which was adopted by the Academy and the AOG in 1970 and which remained relatively unchanged in purpose and tone until the mid-to-late '80's was primarily the vision of Paul W. Thompson. That vision was, however, shared by other alumni leaders and the changes which resulted were unequivocally supported and executed by the Academy under Knowlton's Superintendency. The program was, above all else, based on the presumption that Congressional appropriations would provide all of the funds which the Academy would need in order to accomplish the mission which the American people established for the Academy through their duly elected representatives. Private funding through the AOG fund raising program would provide "icing on the cake" or "the margin of excellence." A criteria which was arguably more objective but perhaps less restrictive was that private funds should be solicited only for projects and activities which will not be, or are unlikely to be, financed with appropriated funds.

But, always the goals were modest, the constituency was primarily graduates and the means to be used were controlled by policy. The organizational arrangements and procedures reflected unerringly the assurance Thompson gave General Clay over lunch in New York in 1970. This assurance was given tangible expression in the organizational and procedural arrangements for the West Point Fund Committee and the fund raising staff relationship with the Academy staff.

The West Point Fund Committee was to be an AOG committee, but with members, including the chairman, to be appointed with the concurrence of the Superintendent. And, importantly, there would be the West Point Fund Advisory Committee, a USMA committee, to propose projects and activities for the fund raising program. The Superintendent's position with relation to the West Point Fund Committee was not defined; but it became routine for him to attend and participate actively in meetings. Significant actions under consideration by the Committee had the Superintendent's prior understanding and agreement. The collocation of the Academy's fund raising liaison office with the AOG fund raising staff, both offices maintaining attitudes of maximum responsiveness to both the West Point Fund Committee and the Superintendent and his staff, was essential to assuring common understanding and concert of action between the two separately governed organizations, one governmental, one private.

By the mid-to-late '80's it became apparent that for whatever reason, valid or invalid, the fund raising tone and concept began to change. The amount of funds to be sought by the Academy were not modest, at least by previous standards; while West Point classes were to be targeted for increased emphasis in the program, the amount of funds to be raised seemed to point to a broader constituency than just alumni; and increasingly, appointments to West Point Fund Committee membership became more a function of the AOG and less a concern of the Superintendent. Perhaps most important, by the early '90's a reorganization of the Academy staff saw the Academy officer with primary responsibility for coordinating the fund raising program moved from his collocation with the AOG fund raising staff to the Academy headquarters building, thus increasing the natural difficulties associated with private fund raising on behalf of a government institution.

The circumstances which accompanied the AOG's assumption of fund raising responsibility in 1972 were changing, and there are risks involved in continuing indefinitely the organizational arrangements which fit so well those 1972 circumstances.

The most serious risk and the one from which others may stem is that the sheer volume and scope of the fund raising effort and the concomitant difference in target emphasis will so occupy the attention and effort of those responsible for governance and management that other responsibilities and functions of the AOG will become increasingly overlooked and less effective. The overall effort may become too large and too diverse for a single governing body and single

staff. The significance of the fund raising mission with its necessary goals, large staff and importance to the Academy will dictate that compensation of fund raising personnel be higher than others performing similar but less critical functions. As the fund raising program becomes larger and more complex there is a risk that the West Point Fund Committee, the members of which are all volunteers and many of whom are also Trustees of the AOG with other alumni responsibilities, will of necessity leave to the professional staff policy decisions concerning the substance and direction of the fund raising program. Weakened by a decreased capability to control effectively the broadened scope of activities of the organization, the Board of Trustees and West Point Fund Committee would need ever stronger staffs, for both the development and implementation of policy.

In sum, the "foundation" function might outgun the "alumni membership" functions, bringing with its ascendancy an increased urgency for civilian Trustees and leadership of the AOG, leadership which the conventional wisdom might say is more effective for fund raising than active duty or retired military leadership. Indeed, in the absence of strong AOG leadership and control of the fund raising effort, as well as other AOG activities, to the degree that a vacuum exists it will doubtless be filled by a strong Superintendent with responsibilities to the Department of the Army and Department of Defense.

Surely this scenario is descriptive of a fund raising program which has run amok, which has moved beyond orderly administration and control. But, just where is the break point? When and how does an organization, commercial or charitable, decide that one part of its business is too large or too important in relation to its other parts for the whole to be effectively managed as one organization? How does an organization define "too large" and "too important?"

Phrased another way: Under what conditions should the AOG decide to create a separate organization, a foundation, to conduct private fund raising for the Academy? Some would say never; that it is preferable to maintain a modest fund raising effort, and that under the AOG. But, like the Leadership Institute or a fully developed book publishing operation, the time for a "large" fund raising program may come, indeed, may have come. When, in the judgement of responsible Academy and alumni leaders, that time arrives, they may decide that the foundation function should be organizationally separate from the other alumni functions of the AOG.

A West Point Fund (WPF), Incorporated would be created and would function like a foundation, with a separate governing board and separate staff. Probably, there would be cross membership between the governing boards of the AOG and the WPF, and efficiency would suggest that management agreements would permit the AOG to perform defined, selective support functions for the WPF. But the operational requirements of the fund raising program and governing policies would be separate from other important functions, under focused supervision of a responsible governing board and responsive to the funding needs of the Academy and the AOG.

Certainly, some of the issues which arose in the early '70's as a consequence of the AOG/WPAF dual responsibilities could recur, but not necessarily so. And if they did, they would, no doubt, be resolved then by 21st Century Superintendents and alumni leaders who might be reminded of the '70's but who would more likely recall the conditions of the '90's which caused the Military Academy and the AOG to decide that it was in the Academy's best interests to appeal to alumni and the private sector for contributions not only to provide a margin of excellence but also to complement Congressionally appropriated funds for the accomplishment of the Academy's mission and purpose.