

Interviewer

We're here with General David Huntoon in the Superintendent's Office at West Point. It's June 26, 2013. Good afternoon, General.

LTG D. Huntoon

Good afternoon—nice to see you.

Interviewer

Good to see you. When you were first a cadet here, did you ever imagine that you would one day return to run West Point?

LTG D. Huntoon

Absolutely not. I had a much shorter planning horizon in those days. I think I was able to see as far as the Saturday ahead of me, and so no. I did think about serving in the military. I came from an Army family, and so it was second nature for me to want to come to the United States Military Academy. But no, I did not anticipate returning—certainly not in this august position. A great privilege to be here.

Interviewer

Can you give us an outline of your career, just so we have the background against which to look at your service here?

LTG D. Huntoon

Sure. Graduated in 1973, of course, Second Lieutenant of Infantry. [0:01:01] And then I had a series of assignments in Infantry units as a Platoon Leader Company Commander, Staff Officer, that took me from the Third Infantry in Washington, D.C., to Fort Lewis, Washington, by way of the Infantry Advanced Course. Commanded my Company with the Ninth Infantry Division out there in the State of Washington, and then I went to Germany, where I was involved with the fielding of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle, which had just come into the Army's inventory. And we first provided that to the forward units in the United States Army Europe. Went to a Bradley Fighting Vehicle Battalion in Aschaffenburg as a Battalion Operations Officer. Once that was complete—and that was a four-year tour overseas—I went to the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth for the Standard Course, which we called CGSC. I stayed an extra year.

There was a new program called the School for Advanced Military Studies, or SAMS, which afforded a small group of officers an additional opportunity to study the profession, and to study the operational art of war fighting. So I was able to stay for that program, and then I was assigned to 18th Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where I served as a Plans Officer, Deputy Chief of Plans, and then the Chief of Plans for the Corps. It was a very interesting time, but it afforded me the tremendous privilege to participate in two campaigns. One was the campaign which became Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama, 1989-1990, and then of course Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. So Bragg's a very busy place, high operational tempo, and was a great place to begin to apply the skills I'd picked up at Leavenworth in the SAMS program. * {:.time} 0:03:03 After Bragg, I was selected for Battalion Command. I commanded my Infantry Battalion in the Republic of Korea, at Camp Casey, and then spent an additional year as Chief of War Plans in the CJ3 Directorate there at the Combined Forces Command Headquarters in Yongsan, Seoul, Korea. Came back and was selected for the War College, and I asked to do a fellowship, and that wound me up at Stanford University, at the Hoover Institution, where I had a terrific year studying public policy. In fact, I was very fortunate to have as one of my mentors there Admiral James Stockdale, who is a great hero of the Vietnam War—prisoner of war, had gone on to active service and wound up commanding the Naval War College for a period of time—great experience at Stanford. * {:.time} 0:04:01 I was selected for Brigade Command, my O-6 or Colonel of the Command, and I commanded The Old Guard. That's the escorts of the President, the Army ceremonial organization in Washington, D.C. And I was very lucky to be there at a time when we did the second inaugural for President Clinton. From The Old Guard, I served as the Executive Officer to the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Dennis Reimer, for a period of two years.

Then I was selected for General Officer, and as a Brigadier I went to Fort Hood, Texas, where I was the Assistant Division Commander at the First Cavalry Division. Then I went to Leavenworth for a second time, this time as the Officer in Charge of the Command and General Staff College, known as the Deputy Commandant, for two years—another extraordinary experience in leader development. After Leavenworth, I was assigned to Washington, D.C., to the Pentagon again, and this time as the Director of Strategy, Plans, and Policy for the U.S. Army for a period of a year.

And in that period I was involved in the preparation for Operation Iraqi Freedom. I went to the Army War College as its Commandant after the Pentagon, and I served for four and a half years at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which was a tremendous privilege. And of course I was responsible for the programs there for all the students selected for Senior Service College, coming actually from all services Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, Coast Guard, and from about 45 nations around the world—grand experience. Returned to the Pentagon after my time at Carlisle, and I served as the Director of the Army Staff for General George Casey, who was our Chief of Staff at the time, and I did that for two and a half years. And then in July of 2010 came here to the United States Military Academy to serve as the 58th Superintendent

Interviewer

So when did you find out you would come to West Point?

LTG D. Huntoon

Just a couple weeks, actually, before the change of command. I had a discussion with General Casey, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and he asked me if I would be interested in taking on that position. And I said, “Absolutely. I would be very honored to do so.” And so a couple months later, I packed up the family, and I recall on a Friday afternoon, having worked that morning in the Pentagon, I drove up here to the Military Academy, and a couple days later, took command from General Hagenbeck, who is the 57th Superintendent, at the time.

Interviewer

So how did it feel, in terms of you had been here years before, decades before, as a kid *

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LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah.

Interviewer

And now you come to—

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, tremendous sense of honor, certainly a great privilege to return to this place, and I often thought in those first couple weeks how things had changed and things had been awfully familiar. What looked familiar to me that I was concerned about was the state of the barracks. From the outside, our barracks are these iconic examples of military gothic. Of course, Pershing Barracks, our oldest, built in 1895—magnificent architecture from the very end of the previous century. Nevertheless, inside didn’t look very different than when I was a cadet here in the early 1970s, and so that told me immediately that we needed to work on quality of life for the United States Corp of Cadets. That really became my first priority. Things that were different also, of course, there’s lots of positives that I saw in the infrastructure.

This magnificent new Jefferson Library here, which is one of the best libraries I believe in the United States, was only about two and a half years old when I returned in 2010.

Wonderful structure—tremendous need for a first-tier library in a school and an institution like this. Other changes I saw in the athletic infrastructure, certainly in Arvin Gymnasium, which is magnificent. So all those things were some measures of change, but there’s an idea of West Point I think that’s, if not timeless, it certainly is familiar, which is the commitment to leader development excellence. And I felt that was clearly present here—the presence of very talented men and women on staff and faculty, in roles as

professors, teachers, tactical officers, coaches, doctors.

All committed to best preparing our kids to take on the leadership responsibilities they will have. All that was something I would have expected, and I was very pleased to see it. It was certainly in place, in large measure. The presence of female cadets was a change for me, of course, from my time as a cadet, but of course I had been back for reunions, conferences, over my career, and so that was not a surprise, but a positive, certainly, and a great plus, of course, for the institution. So I think it's always going to be a mix of the familiar and the new, and I think intuitively I sensed a strong capacity for adaptation and innovation, which is critical, I think, to the health of any first year academic institution, especially given all the changes going on in our profession, and certainly in the world. *

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Interviewer

Okay. I'm just wondering "was there anything other than women, say, about the cadets' experience, as you got to know what it was like from the perspective of the cadets here, that was different? Or was it really substantially essentially the same? Was that core ideal" *

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LTG D. Huntoon

Well, I think there is a tremendous commitment to serve, and I mean there are the obvious superficial differences. This extraordinary capacity to do any means of information technology, which is transcendent in these generations "I would've expected that. I certainly saw that in every unit that I served in of the U.S. Army. Bright, talented, fit "I think fitter, brighter, more talented in some ways than perhaps the classes that I remembered as a cadet. Certainly very competitive, and the data certainly supports that the metrics in terms of the qualities we are able to engage here are in fact better than they were 40 years ago, which would've been my class. *

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A humbling sense, to me, of an understanding that these generations, the classes that I've been privileged to serve with at the Military Academy, are very much aware of the likelihood that they will serve in a combat situation. That they are, in many ways, the young men and women of 9/11, who, with their eyes open, were willing to come to the United States Military Academy, and to serve here for 47 months, recognizing they were going to get a world-class education. They'll be pushed, they will push themselves, but at the end of the day, when the graduation is complete, they will take on very serious responsibilities as leaders in the United States Army. So I think that's sobering, and impressive.

My generation I think certainly felt that same sense of commitment to service but there is an immediacy here that is quite breathtaking. That these young men and women always know of someone ahead of them who's in theater, or perhaps has just returned. They go into class every day and are instructed by officers, principally, who have just come back from multiple tours overseas, so they know it. It's not, you know, the elephant in the middle of the room that's unspoken. They intuitively understand that they will take on these responsibilities, the burdens and the privileges of leadership, in a time of conflict. And I find that to be pretty inspirational, so that's one big change, I would think, from my time.

Interviewer

That's pretty significant. That's a

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah.

Interviewer

So as, you know, as you established yourself here, and you got to know the institution better, did you develop a vision of the West Point that you would be Superintendent of? *

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LTG D. Huntoon

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

And did you set goals for yourselfâ€”

LTG D. Huntoon

Yes.

Interviewer

That you wanted to accomplish?

LTG D. Huntoon

Yes, and we did this in a very mechanical way if you think about it. Thereâ€™s nothing remarkable about the manner in which we do leader development here, and itâ€™s been done for many, many years in any organization, which is to do an assessment. And then in some occasionsâ€”which I did, I brought in a very small transition team. Three trusted contemporaries that advised me as they looked at different areas hereâ€”the military domain, the physical domain, and certainly the academic domainâ€”and provided some recommendations. And I considered those, and then based on my own assessment experience, discussions with pretty much all the senior leaders here at the Academyâ€”and some of that had taken place prior to my arrival.

We set up, and I use the collective pronoun here, I think very importantly, because I certainly canâ€™t singly set the path of this institution. To begin with, it works. This Academy is iconic internationally as a center of leader development excellence. And so when you come here to serve as the Superintendent, I think youâ€™re always trying to strike a balance between sustainment of excellence and the need to always provide opportunities for innovation, adaptation, which I think are always necessary in any organization. And as I mentioned before, especially so given the rate of change in the world todayâ€”so we, as a group, I think collectively looked at a number of areas. Everything from the governance processes here at the Military Academy to the role of the United States Corps of Cadets to the manner in which we were telling our story, the manner in which we do strategic communications.

A very important issue for me, coming from the position in the Pentagon, was ensuring that the United States Military Academy was linked always to the United States Army. To support of the soldierâ€”to an apprehension and understanding of what our Army was doing today. And that became a principle priority for us here. So if I were to rank them, I would say commitment to the United States Corps of Cadets. That is the mission, after all, and we always start with the mission here, to educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets, so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character, committed to the values of duty, honor, and country. The remainder of that mission speaks about a commitment to serve as an Officer in the United States Army and for the nation. So I think we always started with the mission.

We felt that in general terms the Military Academy was on track, but we were always looking for things that we could do to improve, sustain excellence here, and we did this collectively. So after the transition team met with me over a period of several weeks, we established some priorities, and then we, having already talked to the team, the leadership of the academic departments, military departments, and physical departments, all the other community leaders, Garrison Commander, we went back to them in small forums and large forums, and we talked about kind of the way ahead. These werenâ€™t huge turns of the shipâ€”these were relatively small things. It was kind of an emphasis on priorities, and then some things that, you know, we wanted to establish pretty rapidly, so I think thatâ€™s probably the pattern that most Commanders use in any organization. I think it served us pretty well here.

Interviewer

So what, for example, did you try to accomplish quickly?

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, again, coming from the Pentagon and understanding the long lead time it takes to acquire appropriations, and having a sense leaving the Pentagon that the Army was headed for a decline in its fiscal resources as we came out of the two major campaigns,

both in Iraq and Afghanistan, as I looked around, and I mentioned before that the Academy was in an extraordinary and interesting position. For a number of years, it had and continues to be ranked very highly by most reputable organizations which assess colleges and universities in the United States—Forbes, U.S. News and World Report, the annual surveys of Princeton Review—which assess, you know, everything from quality of life to the academic programs to the infrastructure to the curriculum. * {:.time} 0:17:58

And so we’ve been ranked by any number of standards in the top five, certainly top ten of any public college or university in the United States. And that’s a terrific—it’s a wonderful message about the quality of staff, faculty, infrastructure, support from graduates, support from the Army, support from the nation. But as I mentioned, when I crossed this street, Thayer Road, which divides the academic domain from the cadet barracks, I saw a fascinating chasm here. And so entering into these 19th and early 20th century barracks, I found a great need for improvement. And it was clear to me that if we didn’t focus on the sustainment of a commitment to quality of life for the cadets, the quality of the rest of the program would be so out of sync that we would perhaps begin to lose the numbers of applicants, which were steadily going up in the past decade. So we began a series of discussions with the United States Army about providing two things. * {:.time} 0:19:00

One was a very clear need for new cadet barracks for the first time in 40 years. The Army, for the past two decades, has been doing an extraordinary job of focusing time, attention, and resources, most importantly, to fix its troop barracks after a lag of about 20 years in being able to do that. And as the Army had begun to close down that program successfully and raise the standards in every post, camp, and station, we believed it was our opportunity to raise our hands and say, “Look, we’ve got a great program up here. It has national rankings at the very top. But the quality of life for these great cadets is slipping every year. We don’t have enough sustainment, restoration, and maintenance dollars in our budget to stay up with the natural decline in infrastructure.” So we met with senior leadership in the Army, both civilian and military, and we told that story for a period of several months. * {:.time} 0:20:03

And we also had the opportunity, with the support of the Army, to tell that story up on Capitol Hill, where our dollars come from. And over time, I think the message was successful, and the measure of that, very candidly, is here we are in June of 2013, three years hence, and we are about to receive an appropriation. We’ll be able to literally turn dirt in a couple weeks for the first new set of cadet barracks in 40 years. And there are nine sets of barracks here at West Point already—every one of them needs work. We’ve just taken down all the base furnishings and moved cadets out of Scott Barracks, the first of nine barracks that we will begin to fix over the next nine years, one a year. And the Army’s going to provide the appropriate dollars to do that over the next many years. * {:.time} 0:21:00

And that’s a significant advancement for the Academy, but one that’s tremendously needed because of overcrowding conditions, and the need, as I mentioned, to sustain the natural decay in any infrastructure with sustainment, restoration, and maintenance work. So I think we got after that one pretty quickly. We took a look at governance here at the Military Academy. That one fundamentally affirmed the base models that were present at West Point and made one change. The most important governance organization at the Military Academy is called the Academic Board, and it is all the senior leaders of West Point. The Superintendent, the Commandant, the Dean, who the Dean is the Chair of the Academic Board, but it’s all the Department heads and other senior Officers who are responsible for their own domains at the Military Academy, the academic, military, and physical domains. And that’s the principle means by which we assess how cadets are doing. * {:.time} 0:22:00

We make policy changes. We speak to any number of issues here at the Academy. Our assessment was that was working well. There was another form of governance that addressed kind of day to day policy issues, and that was a separate organization, ex parte from the Academic Board. And I took a hard look at that, and I looked at cycles of history at

the Military Academy, when we had a Policy Board, when we didn't have one. I came here, there was a Policy Board, and it was my assessment that this was an organization that we just did not need. That it was just extra meetings, more time management requirements, and so we decided to discard that. And I believe certainly in the past few years that's probably been the useful step forward. We talked a little about curriculum. You know, the major elements of any academic institution, staff and faculty, the students, curriculum, and infrastructure. Curriculum always merits a continuous review.

Goodness knows given the changes in our Army, the nature of the profession, all the other external stressors and elements of change, you have to keep looking at what we're teaching. And we did that—we had a—you know, there was a standing organization that the Dean had that reviewed curriculum. But we also about two years ago began the process of bringing in an external review committee of some very senior leaders in education in the military who could tell us what should you do to best adapt the United States Military Academy for the needs of the Army in the next 20 years? And so they reported out to us about a year ago, and we're beginning now to make some of those recommended changes in our curriculum. So those are just some of the initial changes we made here. One of the other ones I might mention—there are several, but. * {:.time} 0:24:00

The Military Academy's governing organization—that is to say, its principle staff here—over time had become quite small. And when I came to the Military Academy, I felt that the Command, this direct reporting unit which reports to the Chief of Staff of the Army or senior military leader and the Secretary of the Army, the leader of our service, merited a stronger Army staff, not unlike the staffs that I've served on for many, many years throughout the United States and overseas. That we needed a strong G-1, G-2, 3, 4—the standard functional staff areas—and so we did that—we strengthened the nature of the United States Military Academy staff. And I think over time that's also proven to have been a positive step here. It allows for a greater conveyance of the intent of the Command, its mission, its vision. * {:.time} 0:25:02

It allows for I think more effective communication with the principle subordinate elements, represented by the domains that the Dean has responsibility for—the Academic, the Commandant, the Corps of Cadets, and the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics, who is responsible for all the Division I NCAA programs, which are quite considerable here. I would mention one other element here, and I'll return to it later, which is increased emphasis on the international programs. The Military Academy is authorized 60 international Cadets who can come here for all 47 months. In other words, they come in just like freshmen from the United States from their own country. We bring in about fifteen a year, and at the end of the four-year experience, they too will graduate and become commissioned Officers in their own countries. And we took a hard look at that program, thinking about the American Army's experience in the past decade.

Its commitment to coalition warfare, allied participation, which was so key in these two major campaigns, and we wanted to make sure that we had a strong, robust program, that was not only maximizing the numbers we could have, but also connected to the national security strategy literally. We made increased connections with the military commands around the world that represent the United States government, and we asked them, "Tell us about the key nations in your domains. What allies would you like to see present here at the United States Military Academy?" That became an additional element as we selected Cadets for entry to West Point, so the international presence has been very important. Over time, that makes a huge difference. The presence of international Cadets here sends all kinds of messages to U.S. Cadets. * {:.time} 0:27:04

And as trust and confidence is built through day to day presence in classrooms, through athletic competitions, through the normal social events that Cadets participate in, friendships are built which 10 years, 15, 20 years down the road can make a huge difference in the resolution of conflict, or simply in strategic policy disputes, because of the

connections that are made at a place like West Point. So we thought that was an important element here at the Military Academy. So those are some of the things I think that we focused on initially. Some of them certainly took a lot of time. Dollars take time to work their way up the Hudson River. And of course, in the middle of all this we've been dealing with issues, most recently regarding fiscal uncertainty, and some other things that have required us to adjust.

I would just say on balance that I came here with an expectation that things would be done to a very high standard, that there would be elements of extraordinary excellence that have marked this place for over two centuries, and I was very pleased to see that that was for sure happening. Then it just became an opportunity to see what the team could do collectively to improve its standing, as it always must, as it always must be an institution which is innovative, which stays current, which always responds to the needs of the Army. And I think we've done a very good job here, and I commend the team for that. * {:.time} 0:28:51

Interviewer

So I want to explore a little bit more this issue you just raised about dwindling resources, which I mean they've been bad. It's been a problem since 2008, 2009 when you came in, and 2010, and then even worse with sequestration.

And I'm wondering what your approach has been if you've faced budget cuts, do you use a scalpel, or do you do broad cuts across the board?

LTG D. Huntoon

Right.

Interviewer

How do you think about that's what's your approach?

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, I think we knew across the Army for a number of years now that cuts were coming, and we talked about it. We talked about everything from reduction of the size of the United States Army, whether that's overall soldiers and the active Guard and Reserve, or the numbers of formations that we see now beginning to be reduced as the Department of Defense budget has been cut back. And of course, in the past couple weeks, literally in the first of March, as sequestration came to life, we knew that we would receive cuts. In fact, we have a significant cut in our operational funds. * {:.time} 0:30:02

And as does the Garrison, that organization which supports us, that works for the Superintendent as a key element here, certainly in everything we do. But also works in a dual way for another General Officer, the Commander of the Installation Management Command, but it actually works quite well. Nevertheless, we have had cuts. So when you have cuts, the easy thing would be to just do a salami slice approach, but it's not useful because, as I mentioned before, we always begin by going back to the mission that's our baseline. The mission tells us what we should focus on. And so if the focus is quite as simple as preparing the Cadets to become leaders of character, to be the Lieutenants who will command their staff sections and platoons, and then hopefully continue to serve as professional Officers in our Army, that's our baseline. So we did what I would describe as tailored cuts, having been reduced by about a third in our basic operational budget. * {:.time} 0:31:04

And so that would be, for example, cutbacks on temporary duty that is to say, travel of staff and faculty unless it was very clearly connected to the baseline mission of the Military Academy. Academic institutions should do lots of things the teaching mission, the research mission, the connections and collaborations and partnerships with like-kind institutions, and with agencies of the United States Army, the Department of Defense, and the United States government organizations like DARPA, or the Department of State, or perhaps Homeland Security. And so those are important, but when you're cut a third, you have to go to baseline, and baseline is the mission. So cutbacks took place in travel, in conferences, which are very important in an academic institution like West Point. Although we sustained some that were very, very important to the future of our Cadets as

Lieutenants, we were required to cut back on others. * {:.time} 0:32:06

And we did it in a very deliberative manner, as a team. We had all the senior leaders gather, and they took a look at the portfolio of things they had done on a regular year with full funding. And then they were told, "Okay, if you have to cut back by about a third, what things will you do?" And they knew they were required to do so. And so I believe that the team did a very good job in proposing the cuts, and then we were able to make the right decisions to go forward. An example of that in the military domain this summer—we have a thing called Cadet Troop Leader Training. Cadets who are rising seniors and rising juniors have the opportunity to serve for a period of several weeks with an active Army unit as Lieutenants, to see what it really is like to command a Platoon, or to serve in a staff section. And we've been able to send Cadets around the world for years—Korea, Germany, and certainly most of the posts in the U.S.

This year for the first time we're not sending them overseas at all, because of budget cutbacks, and that's not a disastrous piece, but it's a measure, a metric of the cutbacks here. So we have had to cut back in travel, conferences. Some of the training has been curtailed in terms of the number of days. But we will continue to execute the mission to standard, and for me that means on the 25th or so of May of every year, we'll continue to provide the Army with the 19% of its commissioned Officers. That comes to about a 1,000 plus brand-new Second Lieutenants, who every year gather at Michie Stadium and go through a spectacular graduation ceremony, and then immediately are commissioned as Officers in the United States Army, ready to lead soldiers. * {:.time} 0:34:01

If we can just focus on that outcome, I think we'll do just fine, in spite of all the fiscal uncertainty that we're facing right now.

Interviewer

You mentioned that there were curriculum changes recommended—

LTG D. Huntoon

Yes.

Interviewer

And that you started to implement them.

LTG D. Huntoon

Right.

Interviewer

I was wondering what those are, and also whether they've had much to do with the changing emphasis in the kinds of warfare. * {:.time} 0:34:30

LTG D. Huntoon

Sure.

Interviewer

We're starting to see computer-based warfare, I guess, robotic warfare.

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah.

Interviewer

Drones, that kind of thing.

LTG D. Huntoon

That's a great point. Everything we do, as we just noted, has got to be—comes back to that baseline mission. The baseline mission is to get these youngsters ready to the extraordinary responsibilities they have as Lieutenants, so reviews of curriculum will always kind of begin there. What does the Army require in the future—what does the nation require from its leaders of character

And that's hard to do. I don't think we do a good job in divining the future in our country, and no less so in our military when it comes to the nature of future conflict, but we do think about it all the time and we adapt. As we come out of 12-plus years now focused on counterinsurgency doctrine, and we are reintroducing ourselves across the Army to the

full spectrum of operations. The need to be prepared wherever the President of the United States directs, wherever the government of the United States tells us we have to go, and in what manner we should support our national security strategy, we've got to be ready. So that's everything from humanitarian relief to general war, and that requires all kinds of skill sets, so we're always adapting. The military curriculum, our Cadet summer training in general is the most important time when Cadets focus on that.

We are always looking at the manner in which we teach critical thinking in our academic program. Let me make a point about that, too, because it goes to the heart of your question. Change is constant. We don't know where we're going to fight in the future. One of the purposes of the United States Army is to fight and win the nation's wars. The Military Academy has had an extraordinary record for two centuries now of producing great young men and women who are able to do that to a very high standard, and so they've got to be ready. If we don't know where they're going to serve in conflict, then I think our obligation is always to prepare them to be creative problem solvers and critical thinkers. And we do that in the academic domain, the physical domain, and the military domain. Let me give you an example. Certainly you can teach critical thinking skills in a classroom.

You create problem sets, case studies, in everything from nuclear engineering to English and philosophy that get to the human dimension, to the physical dimensions, the laws of physics, the laws of chemistry, the mechanical and civil engineering programs. And you always create, here at West Point, programs where there is often not a single answer where Cadets are put in an uncomfortable position, and out of their comfort zones, as bright as they are. And so they have to look at problem-solving from lots of different perspectives. That's a great way to build critical thinking and to build creative problem-solving skills. Lieutenants face ethical challenges all the time. They have opportunities very rapidly after they finish their post-graduation schooling in the Army to get into units that often deploy into different cultures and different language settings.

And they have to come to grips with all kinds of challenges. And we may not have prepared them for the specific geographic place, but if they know how to think critically and to solve problems creatively, they will likely succeed wherever they're deployed. In the athletic domain, we do this also. We have a thing called the indoor obstacle course. Every Cadet has to pass it to graduate from West Point. It's a very tough program inside of Arvin Gym where we run through tires, we jump on ledges, we run around at a high speed, we do rope climbs, and we do this timed. And all men and women at West Point have to do this to graduate, and so it's tough physically. But we have taken our lead in the nature of the obstacles by studying what it is soldiers do in combat. We think about the manner in which soldiers conduct patrols at high elevations in Afghanistan, the manner in which they may move very rapidly across obstacles in those parts of the world.

And we brought back those ideas to this indoor obstacle course—that's part of adaptation to the contemporary operating environment. And finally, one example in the military domain that I think kind of captures all of this. Every year we do a big competition here called Sandhurst. Sandhurst is the Royal Military College of England, and we have a partnership with that school and have had for many years. We have a competition of about fifty-five nine-man squads. They come from the United States Military Academy one per company, and we have thirty-six companies here. They come from ROTC units, like Penn State or Western Kentucky, or some other program in the United States. They come from overseas. So this past year, for example, we had teams from the People's Republic of China, from the United Kingdom, from Canada, from Australia, from Chile, from Germany. And so it's a very intense competition over several days—they have time to prepare, they have a general sense of what they're going to be asked to do, but there are many unknowns, and so the example of critical thinking here and adaptation is captured I think by a very simple obstacle. One of the first obstacles in the obstacle course for Sandhurst is a simple A-frame, plywood A-frame, and let's take a break for just a second. Yeah. [Break in audio] Yeah, the Sandhurst competition, its very first obstacle in the obstacle

courseâ€”think of a simple plywood A-frame about 25 feet in length and about 15 feet in height. And so this nine-man Squad will approach the obstacle, and the Squad Leader alone will go up and read what the mission is, the task to get through this.

And what makes this different for us, in addition to the fact that the Squad has to go up one side, go down the other side, and they have to bring with them sand bags for each member of the Squad, is that only the Squad Leader can see the task and the obstacle, because we blindfold everyone else. And so the idea is that weâ€™ve created a new condition here thatâ€™s one which requires a critical thinking response on the part of not just the leader, the Squad Leader, but the entire team. And they have to reorganizeâ€”theyâ€™ve now had a decrement in their capacity to execute the missionâ€”but they will accomplish that mission. And I just remember the first year that I observed the Sandhurst obstacle, that I saw six teams there in the space of about an hour and a half go through that first piece. And every one of them did this obstacle in a different manner. And I thought that was a wonderful statement about the capacity here at the Military Academy to create critical thinking skillsâ€”imagination, creative problem-solving skills that in the long term can make a difference, as leaders of character.

We try to do that, again, in all the domains here. The academic domain, certainly you can induce creative and critical thinking skills, but you can do it in the physical domain, and you can do it in the military development domain, all the time. And I think thatâ€™s very, very good for us.

Interviewer

Do you feel that the curriculum at West Point has been keeping place with the evolving demands of the War on Terror, and theyâ€™re changing all the time?

LTG D. Huntoon

Right.

Interviewer

And did you have to make any changes to try to improve or perfectâ€”

LTG D. Huntoon

Right.

Interviewer

Curriculum?

LTG D. Huntoon

Thatâ€™s a great point. You know, the pure academic curriculum is assessed every couple years by Middle Statesâ€”thatâ€™s our accreditation board. But theyâ€™re looking strictly at, you know, literature and philosophy, nuclear engineering, civil and mechanical engineering, behavioral science and leadershipâ€”all the standard classic academic domains.

The larger mission that weâ€™ve spoken about here is preparing these Cadets for their leadership responsibilities, so yes, we have to be assessed all the time by military Officers to get a sense of the preparation of those Cadets to truly become Officers in the United States Army. We do that in a lot of different ways, and we do it in the academic curriculum, the athletic domain, and certainly in the military domain, in principle measure. And so weâ€™re always looking at lessons learned from the most recent conflict. We on a continuous basis bring back Platoon Leaders, Company Commanders, Battalion Commanders, Brigade Commanders, General Officers who are currently commanding formations in theater. Either they come to the Military Academy as they are coming back for a short period of time, perhaps briefing in Washington, theyâ€™ll come up here.

Theyâ€™ll talk to us about what itâ€™s like to be a leader in combat.

Or we can do live video teleconferences with letâ€™s say 1/2 of the seniors at West Point and the Division Commander of one of our forward deployed combat units. And so in many, many ways, through a variety of means, we are continuously engaged in whatâ€™s happening in our Army. And then over time, weâ€™re always looking at ways to adapt the summer military training program, so that itâ€™s not just about counterinsurgency, it

covers a wide range of operations that the Army may ask its future leaders to conduct. And we are always looking at ways to alter the physical development. If there's new skills that may be attendant on the battlefield that we should be doing here, that matters. And then of course in the academic domain we're always looking at ways to improve the curriculum so that it is first-tier academically—that is to say, in the development of critical thinking skills.

But also connected to the nature of conflict in the world today. Let me give you an example of the academic program where it's been I think quite remarkable in the last couple years. Actually, for about 17 years we've had a focus here on cyber-education at the Military Academy. And increasingly, that program has developed, matured, expanded. All Cadets are required here to have a fundamental core study of cyber at the Military Academy, and then there are some remarkable new programs for Cadets who want to specialize in the cyber domain. Cyber warfare is an extraordinary new dimension in international warfare. I know the United States government is concerned about it, and rightly so, and so here at the Military Academy we have expanded programs within the Electrical Engineering Computer Sciences Department as a Center for the Study of Cyber. And we are actually looking at the creation of a Cyber Center of Excellence for the United States Army here at the United States Military Academy over the next couple years. Increase the faculty, increased Cadet programs, and additional collaboration with other services and with other elements of the United States government, so that we can make sure that our Cadets are truly prepared for these new changes in warfare. You mentioned the business of drone warfare and unarmed aerial vehicles, and all these kinds of things. We study these all the time, on a continuous basis, in the classroom, in our summer military training, as we send Cadets literally around the world to serve in military units in the summer. They are seeing, learning, participating in some ways with all the new dimensions, the new technology, and the new approaches to war fighting—and they bring that back with them before they depart.

And the final thing that we do here to prepare them in the curriculum for their military leadership responsibilities is a program called Officership, and that's a core academic course that every graduating senior has got to complete. It's a one-term course in the senior year, and it literally addresses what it is like to be a Platoon Leader in the first part of the twenty-first century. What is it like to command? What are the ethical dilemmas that one would face in these kinds of years? What property accountability issues might you have? What is going to be the future of the United States Army and its Brigade Combat Team structure? How will changes in demographics in the United States affect the nature of your formations in the future?

So these are all covered in a remarkable program, which is taught by professors of English, professors of mechanical engineering, tactical officers, members of staff. It's a multi-disciplinary approach that brings operational experience and academic credentials to best prepare Cadets for their future as Lieutenants. So in many, many ways, we're always looking to adapt all the time. We can't wait till the end of the year and do a, "Okay, so what are they doing overseas right now? Maybe we could get ready for the next semester." No, it has to be continuous, and we have the programs and the means to do that here at West Point.

Interviewer

Looking back at the history of West Point, it started as really an engineering school, I guess

LTG D. Huntoon

Absolutely.

Interviewer

In 1802, right?

LTG D. Huntoon

That's right.

Interviewer

And it was 180 years later that you have I think your first English major, in the '80s, I think.

LTG D. Huntoon

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

And so I'm wondering how you feel the role of liberal arts is—how important is the role of liberal arts education here now? And also, given the current financial considerations, are the liberal arts and humanities less—difficult to defend, or is that something that you have to worry about?

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah. That's a very interesting question. It's a great question. Actually, about 50% of our Cadets are studying what might be considered the traditional liberal arts disciplines, and the other 50% are studying science, technology, engineering, math skills, the so-called STEM areas. All Cadets of course receive the Bachelor of Science degree—all Cadets. But much of that is accomplished in the first 2-1/2 years, and after those first couple terms, Cadets then begin to move in the area of their field of study, their concentration. And you're right, 40 years ago, it was pretty simple.

We had very few electives here. But today, Cadets have extraordinary opportunities to study everything from nuclear physics to kinesiology, which is our latest field of study—37 different areas of concentration—that's just the academic programs. So there is a striking balance between the so-called liberal arts and the science, technology, engineering, and math skills here that works, because there is a base curriculum that incorporates, includes all of those disciplines in the first two years. And then they begin to diverge after those first two years are complete. In fact, there's an astonishing really pre-graduate level, some cases graduate level, work done in the senior years here by our Cadets. Is it difficult to defend? Absolutely not—the nature of conflict today is complicated.

0:51:01

It's complex. It is volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous. And those conditions require critical thinkers and creative problem solvers, and those future leaders come from both the liberal arts domains for sure, which deals with the human dimension in large measure, and also of course with the science and mathematics skillsets. So I think this remarkable blending at the Military Academy of both sets of disciplines gives us the leader that the nation must have, given the demands on our professional arms today. It works.

Interviewer

Okay. This is kind of a related question. In the year before you came here to serve as Superintendent, there was a—some people were saying, you know, "We should shut down the Military Academies."

LTG D. Huntoon

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

"We can save money. ROTC is just as good." And I think the education of the Cadets is a pretty expensive proposition compared to the education in say other public universities. So I'm wondering, is that something that anybody ever seriously entertained, and do you feel—I mean is that an argument that has to be made, to defend these Academies?

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah. It's a great question. I think the answer is in the cycles of history, we're always going to be questioned, I think particularly in eras when we are coming out of major conflict. When the Department of Defense is going through a period of downsizing it's a reasonable question to ask. What is the value added of a United States Service Academy? And I would say the answer is it's extraordinary. West Point provides about 19% of the commissioned Officers for the United States Army.

The vast majority come from ROTC, and then to a certain extent from Officer Candidate School programs. But we have an extraordinary opportunity here at the Military Academy in

about I would say four kind of traditional areas, where we provide I think some very special value added to the nation. I'd say the first thing is it's very difficult to say that you can take the Cadet at the United States Military Academy and compare that to you know the freshman at any other college or university. This is a Military Academy. It serves a different purpose. Ironically, though, the costs are actually pretty close. If you think of ball-park costs for a good college and university in the United States of about \$50,000.00 a year for tuition, for room and board, that's pretty close to what an expense would be for a Cadet over four years. So the idea that there is some great economic benefit in not having a Military Academy is not a sound argument.

It really is the same economic cost, but there are great advantages that we can provide to the nation, and have, certainly, for over two centuries. And those include, first and foremost, the nature of Cadets. West Point is about Cadets. The mission is about developing leaders of character. It's about educating, training, and inspiring them in a way that creates values-based leaders, not just to serve as Officers in the Army, but also over time to serve as servants of the nation. So they're going to be bright, and fit, and focused on the values of the nation, and they're going to be successful leaders in whatever discipline they ultimately pursue. That's an extraordinary benefit for the United States of America. And so Cadets will be very successful Officers in this extraordinary profession that we have.

That is to say that to serve, to lead soldiers, the sons and daughters of America who wear this uniform, and who will protect the freedoms of this country. To serve on the front lines to represent that first element of any review of a nation's needs, which is its very existence its security that's what Military Academy graduates do. And they do it in the most remarkable ways. And we're very fortunate here, as I mentioned, to see an increase in the numbers of youngsters coming in here. Last year we had about 15,500 applicants for the 1,200 spaces for this new entering class of 2017. They come from every state in the Union, by law, because every Senator and Congressman has the opportunity to nominate Cadets to come to West Point, so that's a wonderful message about the richness and the diversity of the United States of America, all here at West Point every economic strata and so that's a very positive element that we provide for the United States Army and for the nation.

They come, as I also mentioned, from many countries around the world, and that's an important element here at West Point that, as has been mentioned before, over time builds trust and confidence, and partnerships that can make a difference in allied concentrations in the future. But there are other aspects of the goodness of this place that are difficult to measure. Here's another one intellectual capital a very important part of our vision. West Point provide intellectual capital not just to the Army, but to the Department of Defense, and to the U.S. government, and to the nation, writ large, in collaborations with think tanks, with the United States Congress, with other like-kind first-year institutions around the world, in a manner in which classic collaborations and partnerships are done between first-year academic institutions.

We are able to provide research to support the soldier for the United States Army. Not just research done by staff and faculty, but research done in collaboration with Cadets as part of their senior projects, which we call capstone projects. If you were to come here in April on what we call Capstone Day, you would be astonished by the level of academic expertise, thoughtfulness, maturity that is briefed by every senior at the Military Academy on capstone projects. They range in things and areas from ways at looking at demographics in some of the developing areas of the world, to the creation of an exoskeleton for a soldier that will better allow that soldier to carry the burdens of a soldier's load in the most difficult terrain in the world.

It is about the creation of a bionic foot, which is a project that's been going on here at West Point for six years now, for soldiers who may be amputees, and who need a prosthetic which takes into account all the most current advances in technology. So there are hundreds of other projects that we do here in research that makes West Point not just

on that Capstone Day, which seniors brief, but throughout the year, linkages to our government, to our Department of Defense, to our Army, that advance the cause of the soldier. And I think that idea, that West Point is a remarkable source of intellectual capital here for the nation, is an important way to measure its contribution to the United States. Then there's another one, what we call the Second Graduating Class. Everybody knows the first one, in late May, as we said "those 1,000 Cadets become Second Lieutenants.

But there's another graduating class, and that's what we call our rotating faculty. We have 55% of our faculty here are uniformed Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers, who come from all over our Army, and increasingly they come to us from having served two, three, four, in some cases five deployments in combat in the current campaign. So they have strong operational experience as leaders of character. They come from all commissioning sources, too. Not just Military Academy, but an actually increasingly large numbers of graduates of our ROTC and OCS programs. But they all come to us also through credentialing in first-year academic institutions. They go to the best possible schools in their own disciplines, whether they're in engineering disciplines or in the so-called liberal arts. So what you have standing in front of the Cadet, which is remarkable, at the Military Academy, are large numbers, every day, of soldier-scholars.

It's an extraordinary role model for the Cadet in the four years here. But then something special happens every year. Just as Cadets graduate, this group, this core group who teach for three years, leaves West Point. That core group departs. They go back to the field force, back to the Army from where they came, and they are more educated. They've been teaching. They have become subject matter experts in their own disciplines. And they convey all that knowledge and experience, plus the leader development time here with Cadets, into active Army units. And that's a very, very powerful aspect of the Military Academy. And then I would say the final thing is something that West Point I think has provided for the Army for many, many years, and that is we think of ourselves in many ways as the bedrock of the profession, which is to say we have a tremendous focus here on leader development, on values-based leadership, on ethics. And this becomes a center, and a place where the Army turns as it begins to reconsider to examine on a continuous basis what truly matters for leaders of character in the United States Army, regardless of commissioning source? We have a remarkable Center of Excellence here called the Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic, which deals with these issues. Internally it deals with the administration of our Code of Honor, but externally it deals with things like what should be the value set, the way ahead, for the Officer Corps in the next decade? In fact, we just did a project for the Chief of Staff of the Army on that topic "how should the Officer Corps review itself as it comes out of these campaigns? What changes should take place in its culture? West Point was the natural place to gather leaders from across the Army to discuss this, because we talk about it all the time.

In the academic program, in the athletic program, in the military program, we are always focused on doing well, but doing well with a baseline of values "the values of our Army. So Cadets provide extraordinary leadership skills, and have for two centuries, in a very focused way. They don't come to school and commute home. They are here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There are very few breaks where they actually leave the Military Academy. And even when they leave, they're on cultural immersion programs around the world, adding to their portfolio of leader development skills, getting stronger, getting more prepared to lead troops. Or they're in internships in the nation's capital, in elements of the United States government. Or they're serving as Lieutenants in an Army unit, to prepare for their own near-term future.

And those are extraordinary and very unique opportunities that we can do here at the Military Academy, so that's the Cadets. Then there's the intellectual capital we spoke about, this magnificent staff and faculty. Both soldiers and scholars, who provide

support not only to Cadets as great teachers, coaches, and mentors, but who also contribute back to the Army in research projects for soldiers, for the Army as an institution. Thereâ€™s the graduating class of Captains, Majors, who have come here for three years well-equipped to teach and coach and mentor, and then they go back to the Army, the field force, and continue their successful careers. And finally, itâ€™s this idea that our focus on ethics, on the warrior ethos, on values, underwrites everything that we do at the Academy. It begins with our commitment to a Code of Honor, which we carry through the rest of our lives here as we wear this uniform, as we are citizens of the nation.

And I think this combination of elements is what makes West Point truly unique.

Interviewer

Iâ€™d like to follow up on the leader development system. I understand that there was an old Cadet system, and that you replaced it with a new system? Can you describe the difference between the twoâ€™

LTG D. Huntoon

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

And explain what you were aiming to doâ€™

LTG D. Huntoon

Sure.

Interviewer

With the improvement?

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, first of all, we collectively, the team, made changes here, and thatâ€™s important because of course that establishes that extraordinary richness of the community here. And then over time, as we move in one direction, youâ€™ve created ownership, which is so terribly important in the success of any organization. And so one of the initial assessments we did for the Military Academy was, okay, we have a reputation for leader development thatâ€™s known worldwide.

What does it really consist of? And so we had a very good program called the Cadet Leader Development System, very much focused on the United States Corps of Cadets, and in many ways, we saw that as kind of an internal program. But I was concerned about the manner in which it was being spoken about. If you have a structured leader development system, then it occurred to me that everyone here in the community should be able to stand up and explain what it was like, and what did it really mean, and how did it grow Cadets from freshmen to seniors, from plebes to first classmen, from Cadets to Officers, over time, which would be the focus of any leader development system at the Military Academy. And I found that I had different responses as I spoke to staff and faculty and coaches and mentors and civilians here. There was some inability to articulate it in a manner that I felt was sufficient, useful.

And that is to say the team, as we looked at this, felt the same way. And so we thought, â€œWell, lookâ€™ leader development is not just about in Cadets here. This is a community at the United States Military Academy, so itâ€™s the Corps of Cadets. Itâ€™s the staff and faculty. Itâ€™s the Garrison community. All the great people who every day make this place run to a very high standard. And so there were some elements missing, and we simply expanded the paradigm, the model, the framework of the leader development system, took away the word Cadet, and substituted the two letters WP. So itâ€™s now the West Point Leader Development System. Most importantly, it means that everyone has responsibilities here to coach, teach, mentor, develop. The primary audience remains the United States Corps of Cadets. Thatâ€™s the basis for everything we do at West Point, our Cadets. Thatâ€™s our mission.

But it also says that you know, staff and faculty, and coaches, and Tactical Officers, and Tactical NCOs, and Chaplains, and members of the community writ large â€“ graduates, friends of the Military Academy, the American public, everybody has kind of a role here in the leader development system of the Military Academy. So we simply went about

redefining, resetting what we looked for in a graduate of the Military Academy. And then we took all those other elements and tried to define I think more clearly what their role was. And so it was an expansion of a very good leader development system to begin with, and I think one that now is more inclusive of the team here, and one I think very confident over time will be more easily conveyed when the question is asked, "So what is this leader development system at West Point?" I think everyone will have a stake now in it, and can say, "Well, my role is to do this to best prepare these Cadets to lead soldiers."

Interviewer

You mentioned the Honor System, and I was wondering about the way that, since the cheating incident in '76, the punishments is meted out. I mean there's been a change, is that right, in the way that that's done, and I was wondering what your philosophy of dealing with honor violations is.

LTG D. Huntoon

Right. You know, I start by telling you that the Honor Code is quite simple. A Cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do. And then there's a system which supports this. It is fundamentally a Cadet system. It's their system, and it's run by their Cadets. Cadets hold other Cadets accountable for this ethical system, this Code of Honor. It's been terribly important to us at the Military Academy, of course, for so many, many years.

It harkens back to the comment made earlier about ethics that underwrite everything we do at the Military Academy. It's something we're enormously proud of, but it's something we not only must live, but must be held accountable for. This past year I did another thing, which is I was concerned as we looked at the Honor System that on a regular basis we've got to find ways to assess how we're doing. How do we see ourselves? It's not easy in any profession to have, you know, that kind of overt, candid sense of self. And I think particularly so in a very conservative culture, and the military's a conservative culture, for good reasons. Structure matters. We want to get to the objective on time with the right resources, and to accomplish the mission to standard.

So what I took a look at was a program that had been here about a decade plus ago, which was a Superintendent's Honor Review Committee. And this is a program that I chair, and that on a regular basis assesses and looks at issues in the Honor System—not the Code, but the System—to make sure that it's working. That it is respected by the Corps of Cadets, by the staff and faculty. That if there are issues about the system itself, that we should get after those. One element that you addressed was the nature of judgments we make. What constitutes the basis for separation from the United States Military Academy? Are we too hard, are we too soft, is there a balance that should be struck? I came back to the Military Academy and found an approach to leader development that was different than when I was a Cadet. When I was a Cadet, we had what I would describe as an attrition-based leader development system.

It was quite simple. If you violated the Honor Code in almost any fashion, you were most likely going to be separated from the Military Academy. And so it was quite rigid, quite structured, and so in the past two decades, that system has altered, and I think for very good reasons. It is now truly a leader development system. So Cadets are certainly held accountable for the base premise of the Honor Code, but we also take into account the human dimension. Cadets make mistakes, and they are particularly prone to making mistakes in the early part of their four years here, and we take that into consideration. We consider the level of their mistakes. We consider their character, the forthrightness that they present when they speak about these errors that they make in judgment. We consider how long they've served at the United States Military Academy.

We consider the severity of the violation of the Code of Honor. We take all those into consideration, and so yes, there is a leader development system that now allows for Cadets to have violated perhaps one element of the Code in a manner that is not very significant, and they are allowed to remain here. But they do it in the manner that also

provides them with reprimands, with a structured program, most importantly, which we call the Honor Mentorship Program. This is very interesting. What we do is we require Cadets to literally write, over a period of months, under the close watch of an Officer mentor, a series of essays that speak to the violation that the Cadet made, and the manner in which they now approach the mistake.

And it is written in a way that puts that violation in the context of the Code and the values of the Army, and the day to day life here at the Military Academy. It's an extraordinarily rigorous program. It's assessed, graded, evaluated, coached by an Officer who's working with that Cadet, separate from the Tactical Officers in the Company. And at the end of that multi-month period of honor mentorship, that Cadet has taken a very, very hard look at himself or herself in a manner that does one of two things. Either they will have accepted their error and be much stronger for having done this rigorous self-examination, or they may opt to depart. The vast majority of our Cadets stay. They want to be here. They want to contribute. They want to be leaders. And they take full advantage of this error in judgment, this violation of the Code of Honor, and they pour themselves into a recommitment to the values of the Military Academy, and the values of the Army.

That's a much better approach. We need these young men and women. They are bright, and fit, and we selected them for a reason. Let me give you a sense of the brightness and the fitness. So the 15,500 Cadets who are coming in this year from every state in the Union, you know these are valedictorians. Actually, we have 100 valedictorians in the current plebe class. They're scholars. They're athletes. They're Captains of organizations, clubs, athletic teams. They are what America would like to have leading their soldiers, their sons and daughters. So we will want to provide them as many opportunities as we can, within reason, to graduate. We want to coach them, mentor them in classes. We want to teach them about ethics. And when they falter, we want to give them an opportunity to recognize this and move forward.

So it's much better. Attrition has passed. We are much more focused on leader development. And I fully support this system. I have seen it work here.

Interviewer

Sounds like a very good development to me, but.

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah.

Interviewer

During your tenure here, the West Point staff and many other offices and departments experienced a major reorganization that tried to mirror the HQDA staff elements"

LTG D. Huntoon

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

Including termination of dozens of positions, and realigning staff function and missions. In your career, especially as Director of the Army Staff, how did this reorganization at West Point compare with other transformations the U.S. Army has experienced, and did you have a road map, is there a road map that you can follow?

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, I think it's not just the experience of change at the Headquarters Department of the Army, which is continuous, I can assure you, and certainly will increase in this era of fiscal uncertainty. But it's change in any organization. There isn't a structure in the Army that doesn't have, you know, from the Division level up, a G Staff, a General Staff. And so when I came here, I felt that the opportunity to convey the message of the Command, the intent of the Command, its focus on the mission, would be best supported by a more traditional General Staff structure. And so we've increased, for example, the number of Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers and civilians in our G-3 staff in particular. That's operations central to the day to day mechanics of the Military Academy. We created some other staff structures that we felt were important in strategic communications, and in transparency, and in telling our story, those things which are

common at higher-level Headquarters. And I think what it did was it has brought us all together more closely.

We have very strong pillars here at West Point, and they are the traditional ones, the academic pillar, the military development pillar, and the athletic pillar. And each one represents, you know, a domain where Cadets have got to spend lots of time. Time management is a huge challenge for Cadets here, but it's also a huge challenge for Army Officers. They learn quickly how to manage their time. But in each of these three domains, it would be easy, without a strong central staff, to coordinate, to communicate, to most effectively represent the Command intent of the Military Academy, and also represent to all the external audiences we have what we're after. And so I think there's been great progress in the past three years in bringing to life this General Staff at the Military Academy, and so there's, you know, one Chief of Staff. Colonel Stafford is the current Chief of Staff. And so when I came here, there were actually a couple Chiefs of Staff by name, by title, in some of these domains.

And I think just the precision of language matters, and so with one Chief of Staff, there is one voice for the United States Military Academy's one General Staff that not only provides direction, but must know all of the things that are happening in each one of the domains of the Academy. So is change hard? Change is very hard. It's always hard in any organization, in any hierarchy, in any structure. But again, this was a movement that was done not by fiat, but by the collective discussion of how we could best structure the Military Academy in these past years, and I think it's been a very positive step for the Command.

Interviewer

You've mentioned a couple of times strategic communications.

LTG D. Huntoon

Yes.

Interviewer

I'm wondering what is that, exactly?

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah.

Interviewer

What are your target audiences?

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah.

Interviewer

In terms of strategic communications?

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, that's a great point, and you know, strategic communications is really quite simple. It's best telling the story of whatever Command you serve in. Telling our story is terribly important here, and we have such an extraordinary story. I mean this is two-plus centuries of the most remarkable accomplishment for the nation of our graduates. This Center of Excellence for Leadership Development, which is recognized literally around the world—we have military to military engagements with many military academies in, you know, in Asia, and in Europe, and in Latin America, and other places.

And so if we're going to sustain this record, and if we're going to adapt and innovate, and if we're going to be able to tell the story of the Military Academy so there's no doubt about its validity, its basis of value for the nation, its added value, then strategic communications is very important. And it's not just the Public Affairs shop—in fact, that's a sub-element.

It's the ability for everyone here—the G Staff, the academic staff, the military staff, the athletic staff, the community, the Garrison, people who work in the mess hall—to be able to say, “Look, I know what the mission of the United States Military Academy is. I know what our focus is—the United States Corps of Cadets.” It's a recognition that

weâ€™re living in a time of reduced resources, but that the Academy is adapting by focusing on its base mission. Itâ€™s a series of themes and messages that are conveyed in a repetitive manner, but that are tailored to the near-term requirements that the Army places on us, and the resources that are afforded to us. Itâ€™s, again, as I said at the very beginning, itâ€™s just simply telling in the best possible manner the story of this remarkable place. West Point, when you come through these gates, confronts you with this extraordinary palpable sense of history. When you stand on the Plain, itâ€™s the great parade ground for the United States Corps of Cadets.

And they are magnificent as they come out of those sally ports from the arched gateways in each of the barracks on Saturday mornings for the American public. They send messages about competence, and professionalism, and discipline, and order, which are all the right ones for our profession. But there are other elements on that same terrain that bear witness to the power of this institution. The statue of George Washington, that equestrian statue, is a great message about 1778, which is when this place actually begins. Weâ€™re the oldest military installation in the United States. Thatâ€™s where George Washington actually was, on horseback. Thatâ€™s where he set the first camp of the United States Army in 1778 here. He describes this place, the west point of the Hudson River, as the anchor for the United States Military, because of its great strategic positioning here, as we set the great chain across the Hudson River in a very successful attempt to block the British from dividing the colonies, north and south.

As we set the fortifications designed by the great architect Kościuszko, the great Polish patriot, who becomes the first engineer for the American Army in George Washingtonâ€™s staff. All these things speak to you when you come to West Point, so itâ€™s the history. Itâ€™s the current mission, which is so critical to the Army and the nation, to develop leaders of character for the 21st century, for all the changes that are taking place. Itâ€™s this combination that is so powerful, itâ€™s so compelling. Itâ€™s about human beings. Itâ€™s about Rhodes scholars, Marshall scholars, Hertz fellows, great young Cadets who are not just bright and fit, but who are values-based leaders.

All these stories need to be told to a high standard, and I think this idea of having a focus on strategic communications to so many audiences is essential in the 21st century. Especially, I think increasingly, to your point earlier, in an era of declining resources. Weâ€™ve got to tell our story to the highest standard. What are those audiences? Certainly itâ€™s to our Army, the value added to our Army. Itâ€™s to the Department of Defense. We are also in continuous contact with our counterparts at the Naval Academy, Air Force Academy, the Coast Guard Academy, the Merchant Marine Academy, those other four Federal academies. We have collaborations and partnerships in which we share messages and best practices with great colleges and universities around the United States. With research centers that are important to the staff and faculty. We have often and on a regular basis communications with a Presidentially-appointed Board of Visitors. Congressmen, Senators, Presidential appointees who serve in an advisory capacity to West Pointâ€”we want to tell them whatâ€™s going on. We are often up on Capitol Hill, speaking about the things that are happening at the Military Academy, and expressing appreciation for the support of the Congress because itâ€™s the basis for our revenue and our appropriations. So the fundamental audience, though, is quite simple. Itâ€™s the American people. Our mission is to support the people of the United States of America, and we must sustain a continuous level of communication with them. As we make change here, as we sustain excellence, thatâ€™s fundamental. This is Americaâ€™s Academy, and so we never want to be isolated in this beautiful place, you know, an hour and ten minutes north of Manhattan. We want to be connected all the time to our Army, to our government, to the United States Congress, to the graduates, but most importantly, to the men and women whom we serveâ€”the American people.

Interviewer

In the recent period, in addition to defending the nation the military has found kind of smack in its agenda fighting sexual harassmentâ€”

LTG D. Huntoon

Absolutely.

Interviewer

Sexual assault, PTSD, or post-traumatic stressâ€”

LTG D. Huntoon

Right.

Interviewer

Increasing rates of suicide. And wondering how you see West Pointâ€™s role in helping ameliorate those challenges.

LTG D. Huntoon

Yeah. I think we play a tremendously important role. We talked already about the intellectual capital here in the United States Military Academy, which not only serves this place, but serves the Army and the nation. And also the role that Cadets will bring as they become leaders in the commissioned ranks of the United States Army. So it has to begin here immediately.

In fact, it does. Literally within the first three days of a Cadetâ€™s initial orientation as a new Cadet at the Military Academy, we talk to them about values immediately. In fact, thereâ€™s a moment I would describe as the 37th minuteâ€”the moments that Cadets leave their parents, literally, in Eisenhower Hall. They go through a set of double doors, and they begin that journey of transformation from civilians to new Cadets. Itâ€™s a very intense first day, Reception Day. Itâ€™s about to come up on the first of July for the Class of 2017. And they get on a little yellow school bus for what is probably to their mind at that moment the longest bus ride of their life. Itâ€™s actually quite short. Brings them to Thayer Hall, the academic buildings, and they go through a series of orientations, and one of the very first orientations is about their Code of Honor. And the Code of Honor is given to them on a card, but itâ€™s not about putting it in your pocket, and through the miracle of osmosis, you know, it becomes a part of your life.

We get at these issues early, and we do it on a continuous basis at the Military Academy. And so if we see something here that could be a best practice, something that is done well that we can share with another service academy, or with our Army, then we are going to do that. In fact, we just had recent conversations with senior leaders in the United States Army about some of the prevention and response programs for sexual assault and sexual harassment here at the Military Academy that may be useful to the Army writ large.

Iâ€™ll give you one example which is relatively new, and itâ€™s unique â€”cause itâ€™s about Cadets taking ownership. So the Army, of course, has its structured formal program to address these issues, which we call SHARP, and that is issues speaking to sexual assault and sexual harassment, which are intolerable. Sexual assault, of course, is a criminal offense.

And so approachability is facilitated, because these are young men and women who are contemporaries of all our Cadets, and who are known to understand these issues, and can serve as resources in case something comes up, thereâ€™s a question about this, something perhaps thatâ€™s not being done right, or if thereâ€™s a need for a response to take care of a Cadet. And weâ€™re quite taken by this program. We have great confidence that over time this is going to be a powerful way to get after this. It will take time to eliminate sexual assault, sexual harassment. We know that. But we are after it in a number of different ways. And we like this CASHA program because it springs from Cadets, and because theyâ€™ve brought us some great ideas, and itâ€™s their ownership, after all, of this issue that in the long run will lead to success.

So I think those kinds of things that we can share with the United States Army, with other service academies, with other colleges and universitiesâ€”â€”cause we address issues like this, social issues, in the context of dealing with many of the schools and universities in this geographic area, which have similar programs. And we borrow from them as much as they may be borrowing from us when it comes to best practices.

Interviewer

Okay. So you've been doing this for three years. It's about to be handed off to somebody else. Do you have any recommendations you'd like to make to your successor?

LTG D. Huntoon Oh no. You know, I have enormous confidence that the next Superintendent will make change that's appropriate for his or her time here as the Commander of this remarkable place. So I have great confidence that's what the Army does. It has this wonderful system of command, and its changes of command. And so the opportunity to have a new approach, new perspective, new vision, new ideas, works. West Point I think, for every leader in the future, it's always going to be about striking a balance.

It's that balance we talked about at the very beginning between the sustainment of excellence, which has marked this place for over two centuries, and the requirement always, always to adapt. Just as soldiers must adapt to changing conditions on the battlefield, the United States Military Academy must also adapt all the time in order to sustain its excellence.

Interviewer

Okay. So you're near the end of your career, 40 years of military service?

LTG D. Huntoon

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer

What are your plans now?

LTG D. Huntoon

Well, first of all, I've been so fortunate to have served wearing the uniform of the United States Army. It's been such a great privilege. And the greatest honor, of course, is to have been here as the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy.

I don't know yet what will happen next, and that's okay. I think that's the nature of the profession of arms, and I think the only thing I am certain of is I feel very compelled to find some way to continue to serve. That's the nature of our profession, and I'm compelled to do that, and I certainly look forward to an opportunity to do so.

Interviewer

Good luck with that.

LTG D. Huntoon

Thank you.