

FRANK S. BESSON III

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Dear John,

This letter is to recall for you John, Mary and your sons, some early happy experiences we have had together. It primarily addresses our times as H-1 Company Classmates and close friends at West Point and early years in the Army. And it highlights the impact of West Point on your life.

When we first met in July of 1955, I knew that I had met a fellow “son of the south” as well as a son of the West Point Class of 1932 , as I am. Our Dads had faced together the same daunting challenges of Beast Barracks and Plebe year that we were about to face.

John, I know you decided at age 12 that you were going to West Point, following in your father’s footsteps. Your record as a Plebe, unlike your Dad’s, was filled with hurdles. Academics were OK, as you had a year at North Georgia College prior to West Point. Your idea of discipline and deportment, however, coming as they did from the tradition of Southern gentility and trust, along with your deep Southern voice, were often at loggerheads with the somewhat archaic upperclassmen’s Plebe system.

You persevered, however, largely by embracing the Plebe advice of General Douglas MacArthur: “On the fields of friendly strife are sown the seeds that on other fields, on other days, will bear the fruits of victory.”

You won the Brigade Boxing Championship in your Yearling year. The next year, you nailed the Navy kickoff returner on his twelve-yard line at the inaugural Army-Navy 150-pound football game in October 1957. You competed with the Rifle Club for three years. In 1958 you were promoted

to Corporal and finished your cadetship in 1959 as an accomplished, well-liked and respected First Sergeant. Well done, John!

At graduation, you elected Field Artillery, and shortly thereafter your warrior spirit came out in “going to the sound of the guns.” You volunteered, and were selected to go to South Vietnam to train the new Army of Vietnam Ranger companies. You, Bruce Porter and Fred Malek were, in 1961, the first of our Class to come under enemy fire. John, you were confidently proud that your aspirations and West Point experiences and training for combat were standing you in good stead.

Later, as a Captain, your calling changed and you applied for and were accepted as a Foreign Area Specialist, focusing on southern South America and the Spanish language. Studying the history, economies, politics, languages and culture of all Latin America became a central part of your interest in the Army and life. You often said you were pleased that both of your sons, Brian and Chris, have followed you somewhat into the Latin America field. You mentioned also that Mary, your “Marie,” shares this deep interest. You added, “thanks to Marie, our stucco, tiled and beautiful retirement home in Nellysford, Virginia looks very Mexican.” You nicknamed it “Guadalajara del Norte.”

Our group of bridge players, started by our wives, has met in each others’ homes for New Year’s Eve for 40 years. Many involve special costumed themes. Always joining in the spirit of such evenings, John, you arrived as a Pashtun warrior, swashbuckling pirate, and Gaucho leader, always a good looking, striking figure, according to the ladies. You seemed to always get more than your share of hugs and kisses at midnight. You certainly showed your warm and lighter side on those occasions.

John, we have all witnessed your love and devotion to your ideals and particularly to Mary, your family and friends. And, just as General MacArthur expressed his sentiments for the Corps in his farewell address

to West Point , we might hear you say in that deep southern voice, “When I cross the river, my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps.”

John, we bid you a loving farewell.
Frank and Elaine