

Introductory Remarks for
Rick Atkinson
During the Class of 1966 40th Reunion
15 Sep 06, Eisenhower Hall
West Point

If you had any doubts about what to expect at this reunion, they should have been erased yesterday afternoon as we stood on the Plain and watched the tribute to our Alma Mater and our Class. Most of those around me were moved by the spectacle, the sights and sounds of the parade that rekindled memories of our own campfire and bivouac days. The impressive music of the band was a rhythmic reminder that our cadet days were tied closely to bugle calls and drumbeats.

If you really want to put our 40th reunion in perspective, a classmate near me at the Review reminded us that in 1966 we marched to honor the Class of 1926 at their 40th reunion! Now if that doesn't make you feel like an old fogey, little else will.

And then this morning as the Jenkinses, McCallums, Champis, and Lisses shared their very personal experiences with the Class, it brought back to me the truly diverse and talented people in our midst. I want to thank them again for taking the time to inspire the rest of us to find ways to always help others regardless of our health, wealth, or station.

As your scribe, I can tell you that those stories are universal in our class. I am constantly impressed and humbled since I hear wonderful stories from many of you of how our lives are unfolding and what “passions” we pursue as we finish one chapter of our lives and move to the next.

As our outgoing class President, Rusty, mentioned this afternoon in the class meeting. I have been privileged and honored to serve as your scribe—or chronicler of our class for many years. This, along with having a fascinating curiosity of history in general and West Point in particular, I have concluded that our 40 years can be summed up into four identifiable decade increments based on what has been and is now important to us during these four decades.

The first ten years were about AMBITION! We were new to the Army, eager to leave West Point and anxious to get started in our new profession.

The next ten years were about FAMILY and CAREER! Our families were growing so we turned to parenting, while still being committed to CAREER. This was universal to the class, regardless of whether you remained on active duty or had shifted to other career interests.

The third decade was about beginning to look toward the NEXT CAREER. What were our plans for work and family after the service?

The fourth decade, that brings us to this 40th Reunion celebration, is/was about how to further ENRICH OUR LIVES through continued involvement in helping others, enjoying our grandchildren, maintaining our health, and truly appreciating our spouses.

The next decade will be about LEGACY---what will the Corps of Cadets remember about our class and how will history remember us as group long after the final bugle call? For many classes, the LEGACY period is the most durable and important to the contributions we have made to our families, our Alma Mater and our nation.

Our speaker tonight has been a remarkably successful “scribe and chronicler” of our Class. Rick Atkinson is an Army brat. As a matter of fact his connection to our class is through Mike Fuller. Mike’s parents assisted Rick’s mother when she was pregnant with Rick.

As some of you may recall, **The Long Gray Line**, was the offshoot of a series of articles Rick wrote about our Class for the *Kansas City Times*. The series of articles, “Blood Brothers,” was so widely acclaimed that it resulted in the book.

Many of you may not know that Rick was approached to allow the book to be reprinted ten years after its original publication—a highly unusual request and demand for a book in the genre. It is appearing on more and more college campuses as we get farther from the Vietnam War and younger generations become interested in hearing different voices rather than the voices that have reined supreme on most college campuses for the last 40 years.

The true magnetism of the book, to college students, seems to be the human side of those in our class. It fits compactly into a growing trend to examine the social history of those of our generation who took a different path in the 1960s.

When I got the assignment to introduce Rick, I talked with Dave Petraeus, '74 who spent considerable time with Rick in Iraq during the 101st's first tour. Dave had nothing but praise for Rick regarding their time together, as did the next Screaming Eagle commander, Tom Turner, '74---a high school mate of Rick's.

Many of us know that while Rick completes work on the next volume of his WWII trilogy, he remains employed by *The Washington Post*---a point not lost on either Rick or classmates as we disagree occasionally---as all people of good faith will do from time to time.

So Rick, we will accord you a “non-attribution” pact tonight on your remarks if you will do the same for us until our 50th reunion!

Ladies and gentleman---Pulitzer Prize author Rick Atkinson!