

I-Day 2004 – One Dad's Experience

I want to share some of our I-Day experiences with other parents, especially those that weren't able to be on the yard.

The night before I-Day it was obvious there were plebes-to-be in the town! Cropped hair cuts on gals, guys with clean white athletic shoes, but mostly it was the "look". A look that is difficult to describe, but you'll know of what I speak when you visit the yard. You probably already know. You don't need to see them in uniform to pick them out in the crowd.

We got back from dinner to find a stuffed teddy bear coin bank with blue and gold ribbons on the bed. Someone at the Marriott understands why their rooms were at capacity and that those guests will have reason to return throughout the next four years. Thank you, Marriott it was appreciated!

An early evening and off to bed by 10PM. Our son slept like a log! I only wish we did as well.

An early morning rise brought beautiful weather and an uneventful breakfast at Dahlgren.

As we approach Alumni Hall - Can the line be that long? We are here 45 minutes early! We can't be late! We weren't.

Chaplains and officers worked the line smiling and greeting taking our minds off of what we could have forgotten or the now repetitious and annoying reminders to our son of what he should remember to do.

A couple pictures, a hug, a hand shake and he left into the cold entrance to Alumni Hall.

A mother's tear, but not long or deep or dark. Not it is not for pain, or sorrow, it is a GOOD-bye drop. You did not have to be at I Day to experience this.

We walked around the back to see plebes being taught how to stand and salute and the heave ho of backpacks into a truck. I hope that the bubble wrap on his calculator will do its duty.

Then it was off to shopping, much too much shopping at the Mid Store. We won't be

here that often and we need an 2008 T-shirt and we should buy another one for him and we need a sticker for the car - Much too much shopping. Look at the Christmas decorations and the shot glass and the... But the proceeds go to fund the Mid's activity fund. Yes, but much too much shopping!

Outside the Mid store, the trucks are delivering both the sea bags full of 60lbs of issued gear and those poor backpacks are being thrown off the truck to a waiting group of Cadres who have formed a bucket brigade up the stairs. Behind the truck, the bus arrives and out the doors flow the newly shorn plebes in their white works and Dixie cups. They are "encouraged" to pick up a bag and follow the Cadre to Bancroft Hall, a short distance if the bags were not so heavy and bulky. We see many plebes struggle and other plebes helping them lift the bulky bag one more time as they again struggle to keep up.

Off to Hospital Point for lunch around 11 allowed us to pass by Alumni Hall again.

There were still plebes with hair standing line inside the building, but the line outside had disappeared. Across the bridge we were greeted by many friendly faces. We can't hear "don't worry, he'll be fine" too many times! We weren't really hungry. However, we realized we needed something to eat, as it would be a late dinner, so we downed a hot dog, some chips and a soda. It was very much appreciated. Thank you Alumni Assoc, Class of '58 and USAA! We pulled a couple of chairs under the trees by the water. The shade and breeze made it comfortable and our feet were due a needed rest.

A member of the class of '58 walked over, greeted us and reminded us of the "great fraternity" our son was joining and the opportunities he will have and thanked us for raising such a great son. It was the right message at the right time.

We traveled over the bridge again and past the parents still waiting to see if they can catch a glimpse of their favorite plebe as they leave Alumni Hall processing to the waiting busses. We decline the inclination to join them and walk over to the YP boat.

We explored the ship from aft to stern (Starting to talk Navy!) We found out the reason the stairs are called ladders. They are steep!! The answer to the question of "How many heads are bumped getting up and down?" was simply answered "a lot". The sleeping quarters were tiny. The bunks stacked three high were small and narrow. And we thought the cabins on the cruise ship were small!!

Our feet told us that we should take a break again. We gladly complied and took a walk to Dahlgren Hall where we began the day about 6 hours ago. We joined parents looking at close circuit television of the barbershop and one of the stations where gear was being issued. One lucky mom saw her son!!! It was 3 hours after he had entered the building and he was still in his civilian clothes!

1300, it was back to Alumni Hall for us. We had a meeting place and time designated for the parents from Platoon 28 who had met through the USNA Parents Organization listserver. It was nice to meet "the folks". We always felt good when we met the parents of our son's friends. This was no different. There wasn't a lot of time, nor was it necessary to spend hours, but it was a comfortable feeling - getting introduced and sharing thoughts, backgrounds and stories.

The concert before the presentations highlighted not only the band and patriotic songs, but also a Midshipman with a wonderful voice.

The presentation to the parents by the USNA management emphasized that they take the responsibility for our children very seriously. That responsibility not only includes growing them physically, mentally and morally. It includes their safety. This was another reassuring message that made me feel more comfortable. However, one bit of great news is that every night the plebes will have 8 hours sleep in air-conditioned rooms!

There was plenty of time between the end of the presentation and the beginning of the swearing in ceremony, but we decided to go get a good seat and sit. The time went fast as we chatted with a friendly mom from VA. Before too long it was 17:30 (more Navy talk!) and the plebes began marching from the two wings of Bancroft Hall to their seats in the court. I was well positioned to get good shots as they marched in, so I began taking pictures, hoping to get some to share with other parents, especially those that couldn't be there. We were lucky, our son emerged from the door closest to us, and I got a couple nice shots, but no smile of recognition. However, I knew he saw me. I'm tough not to notice.

The Cadre marched out and surrounded the plebe class of 2008. It was very impressive! Then every thing stopped. Everyone was in place. The band stopped playing. The band played again and stopped again. What was the problem? Looking at a watch, we saw that it wasn't time to start. This is an interesting perspective on the importance of time at the USNA. When it was time, the ceremony started and ended shortly after a loud "I do" from the class of 2008.

Meeting our son after the ceremony was what we were waiting for since the time he left us in the morning. All those questions and unspoken concerns would be settled. As they all look so similar in their uniforms and "Dixie Cups", we figured he could find us better than we looking for him.. But of course we kept our eye out for him and then as promised, he arrived smiling ear to ear and gave Mom a big hug and Dad a strong hand. He downed a mass quantity of liquid and few breakfast bars and then began to answer our barrage of questions.

- Yes, he is fine.
- Yes, he had a Sub sandwich for lunch around 1PM.
- Yes, he likes his roommate.
- Yes, the air-conditioning is on in his room.
- No, they haven't taken anything away from him. But they haven't given him anything from it either. His backpack is still unopened in his room.
- Yes, he likes the other guys in his company.. "and there are some neat girls there too", he offered
- No, he doesn't know who is in his squad yet.
- Yes, he remembered to "Sir" every time.
- Yes, he helped someone with their bag.
- He also offered -
 - These pants really are too long!
 - Please send me some cardboard to stiffen the nametag on my shirt.
 - The soft cover Brief Points sucks. I'm losing pages from it already!!!
 - I only got yelled at once. I didn't offer a greeting to a superior.
 - Look, my knuckle is bleeding from holding the canvas bag the wrong way.
 - You can see my room up there on fourth floor!
 - We are going to be the color company. So far, we've done more than the other companies.
 - Boy, do my feet hurt!
 - They had a hard time finding my vein today. I guess I should have had more water at breakfast.
 - Oh yeah, they didn't have my medical records signed off when I got there, so I had to run them to a couple of places before I moved on. (He told us this in the most mater of fact manner! We would have jumped out of our skin, if we had know this during the day!!!!)

I don't remember just how the question was asked, but his answer summarized the conversation and put any lasting concerns to rest.. He said. "Phfff, it is what I expected, I'm having fun!"

We had time to walk down to where people were offering cell phones to Plebes whose folks didn't make the trip to I-Day to find his roommate from Colorado. He couldn't find him, but he recognized another person in his company. I've never been more proud to be introduced as his Dad!

One last hug from Mom and Dad and he took off. There were no tears in any of our

eyes! It just felt right.

Mom and I were tired, hungry and thirsty. We walked downtown and were lucky to overlook the harbor area at dinner. Mom wrote her first letter and we put it in a post box outside the restaurant.

Driving home, we didn't say much. We were mellowing in our thoughts of the day and our son's future. When it was 9:45 we knew our boy was in bed and he would get more sleep tonight than we were going to.