REQUIEM

/ deacon '65

On Saturday, 24 October 1964, the United States Air Force Academy lost its first graduate in combat. Not only was he the first Academy graduate to be killed under enemy fire, but he was also the first cadet to take the oath of allegiance in the first entering class.

Lt. Valmore Bourque took the oath with the Class of 1959, but he graduated with the Class of 1960. His mission while in Viet Nam was combat support in C-123's. His specific mission on the 24th of October was a resupply drop of high explosive and ammunition to Special Forces. He was flying lead in a flight of three C-123's when his ship was hit by ground fire. Although the other two planes were hit, they managed to limp home. Lt. Bourque was posthumously promoted to captain and awarded the two highest Vietnamese Air Force citations. The Academy can look with pride on Captain Bourque's record as an officer. He was an aircraft commander and was recently made a mission commander, a great distinction for so junior an officer.

Captain Bourque's death marked the first Academy graduate to die in combat. He is not the first graduate to die, nor will he be the last to do so under enemy fire. But his sacrifice epitomizes the sacrifice each and every cadet voluntarily swears to make upon entrance into the Academy. Moreover, the death of Captain Bourque illustrates more vividly the true mission of the Academy. This does not include excellence in academics, physical education or military training alone, but rather in a willingness and responsiveness to give up whatever is necessary, including the life itself, for one's country.

While at the Academy we are still a long step from participation in the mission of the Air Force. In effect we are training ourselves—mentally through academics, physically through athletic programs, and professionally through military training. However, often our vision as to where we are going, or why, is clouded by problems of immediate concern with regard to academics, physical education or military training. To us, Captain Bourque is not only a symbol of why we exist, but he represents these characteristics each one of us should try to emulate. He realized his responsibility; he undertook the mission in full realization that he might not return, and he prepared for the untimely conclusion. In preparation for this assignment to Viet Nam, he requested that should he not return, he would like to be buried in the Academy cemetery. Our vantage point of Captain Bourque and what he contributed to our further development can best be summarized by the somewhat unrenowned philosopher John Berrill:

Lt. Valmore Bourque

"I am like a man journeying through a forest, aware of occasional glints of light overhead, with recollections of the long trail I have already travelled, and conscious of wider spaces ahead. I want to see more clearly where I have been and where I am going, and above all, I want to know why I am where I am and why I am travelling at all."

LOOK

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