

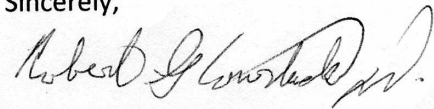
Dear Lt Col Pollard,

I received your thank you note back during the spring. Maj Cline handed it to me as I was putting the finishing touches on my service dress for the SAMI and needless to say, it was immediately pushed to the back of my mind. By the time that I graduated I was getting ready to respond to you but your contact information was buried in the bulk of documents that I retained. I found the pertinent folder when I was packing to move to Vance AFB and thought I had better send you a response.

At any rate, I was glad that we were able to acquire the shoulder boards that you asked for with relative ease. Assuming you went through with your plan, I hope your uniforms will make excellent addition to the Hill AFB museum (I believe that was where you said they would be on display; I could be mistaken). I am currently going through in-processing at Vance AFB and expect Undergraduate Pilot Training to begin on 21 December- which is about a month and a half earlier than I was originally informed. Between then and now, I will split my time between casual duty here at Vance and various TDY schools (Introductory Flight Screening and Air and Space Basic Course). I am excited to broaden my experience from the Academy and am looking forward to finally getting some powered flight under my belt. I expect pilot training to be difficult (the fighter/bomber track is very difficult to get these days), but I am willing and ready to put out the effort to succeed.

Looking back at your visit in the spring, I would like to thank you and your class for coming out to the Academy. It is monumentally inspiring to be in the presence of the first graduating class. Between your stories and the accounts of your class mates, I feel that escorting you has given me a unique and fleeting understanding of both the Academy's and Air Force's history. As a Fourth Classman, I remember many of my peers talking about how they wished that our Academy had the same level of tradition and history as *those* other two schools. I understood their sentiment at first, but over time I came to realize that they were idolizing the early graduates of those institutions. Their heroes, like Grant, Lee, Farragut, Pershing, etc... were likewise near the beginning of their particular schools' history. It occurred to me that from your class to mine, we are the equivalent. Though few Air Force Academy graduates have gained the popular renown of McArthur, Eisenhower, and others, I would argue that it has more to do with the circumstances of the times than the specific qualities of their educations. Furthermore, the other academies picked up their trade late in the game, after mankind had millennia of practice. I bring this up because my time escorting you proved the concept in action. Your class not only provides the beginning of an Academy legacy but was integral to the maturation of a whole new form of warfare. Although the Second World War had to be fought by graduates of West Point and Annapolis, the increasing significance of Air Warfare in modern war meant that a dedicated school was needed. The Air Force Academy and your class were the answer to the question. I do not know if you are aware, but to many of us, your class is composed of heroes and giants. You set the bar high for us and I hope that we can make the grade. I would consider myself fortunate to someday have even a small fraction of your renown, clout, and reputation. Two hundred years from now, Fourth Classmen at the Air Force Academy won't fret about their school's monumental heroes in history because they will have you to look to. And maybe if we make the cut, they'll throw the Class of 2009 in there with the Class of 1959.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robert G. Courtade, Jr.", written in dark ink.

Robert G. Courtade, Jr.

2Lt, USAF

P.S.- You can contact me at R_Courtade@hotmail.com