

The AOG Chapter President's Conference took place on 15 September 20. Due to the COVID restrictions in place at the Academy, we were forced to hold virtually through a Zoom webinar. Here are the notes I took from the speakers of what's going on with the AOG and the Academy and where we're looking to go in the future.

The first speaker was LGen Mike Gould ('76), the CEO of the AOG and Academy Foundation. He began the conference by talking about the benefits we're already seeing by combining the AOG and the Foundation under a single CEO. What he's seeing:

- Increased efficiency between the two organizations
- Elimination of duplication of effort and expenses
- Better financial security for both

He commented that the direction for the future is to engage and reach out to all grads to keep everyone aware of the issues and ongoing activities. Some points he also made:

- Many may be aware of a BLM video made by some cadets. He emphasized, as did the Superintendent, that there is NO official support for that.
- The AOG will not engage in policy issues relating to the Academy or the USAF in general.

The mission is to get more grads involved not only in the AOG but also in supporting the Academy. Some ideas:

- More/Better support for Athletics, especially when they come to the local area
- Chapter Competition (yet to be defined)
- Awards for participation, community outreach and support

He spoke on philanthropy and the focus of it is to educate and train cadets to be better leaders as soon as they pin on their bars. The Academy is getting the job done now but isn't achieving the level of excellence needed. The program is still in development, but some key points are:

- They need volunteers.
- They want ideas.
- Using the chapters to help develop this is key
- Plan is to start in fall 2020/early 2021, but rollout has been slowed by COVID.

One success has been the fundraising effort to make the Cyber Innovation Center what it needs to be rather than just meeting the minimum capability.

- The Foundation wrote a check for \$16.8 million to the government for upgrades that will make the facility capable of providing the training to "fight the wars of the future."
- They start building this fall.

He spoke about a bylaws change that will be included in this fall's AOG Board elections. Currently, bylaws changes have to be approved by a vote of the graduates. This cumbersome process takes too long, and currently too few grads even vote (less than 25% for last proposed change). So, the proposed bylaws change will permit approval of a change with a 2/3 vote of the AOG Board. The goal is for grads to speak through their Board reps rather than the challenge of trying to convince a sufficient number of grads to vote.

He spoke of the upcoming upgrades to Falcon Stadium. Not much has been done since the stadium opened, and it really shows. The planned upgrades include club seating, field level suites, better concession sales venues, better restrooms, better seating for all. Once it's done they will move the cadet seating area from the corner where it's been since who knows how long to the center of the stadium seating area. Other improvements will allow semis to be able to get onto the field to provide the capability for outdoor concerts and other large audience events. Fundraising will start soon, since this has to be all donor funded. Plan is to complete it by 2026.

Finally, he left us with the BIG question that the AOG is asking of all grads: What have you done for your Academy lately? It's on us as the graduates to help make it better for tomorrow's leaders.

The next speaker was the Commandant of Cadets, MGen Michele Edmondson. She spent almost her entire talk on the impact on COVID at the Academy and what they did to overcome the obstacles to be able to move forward with training and educating the cadets. Highlights of some actions:

- In March, lower three classes were sent home.
- Firsties stayed so they could continue to press toward completing their courses and graduate.
- Everyone attended through virtual learning.
- Graduation was moved up six weeks. The Class of 2020 completed academic requirements early and graduated in April. Vice President Pence was going to attend virtually, then decided to make the trip. That alone made it special for the class.

What they had to deal with since:

- How to do BCT and be COVID complaint while still getting the mission done.
- What to do about summer programs
- Recognition for the Class of 2023
- Ring ceremonies and dance for the Class of 2022
- Bringing back the entire wing for fall academics

The Comm emphasized how hard the whole team worked to develop plans that not only could work but that would still permit the academy's mission to continue successfully. She emphasized time and again how it was a whole team effort, from the leadership to the staff, and especially the cadets. They were involved in every aspect of the process, and she commented more than once that many of the ideas they implemented came from the cadets. She is very proud of that. Some things they had to do/did:

- Create a quarantine and isolation (Q&I) area for those cadets who test positive (they use the top two floors of Sijan). For BCT, they used the Vandenberg Tower.
- Develop and implement a realistic, effective testing program.
 - All cadets tested on arrival. Only 1-2% tested positive.
 - Everyone had a two-week restriction of movement (couldn't leave the Academy grounds, limited to no contact with others)
 - Those testing positive entered Q&I for two weeks. Challenge here was to keep them involved, especially the Basics, so they didn't fall behind or feel left alone. They had over 200 in Vandenberg Tower at times during BCT. Now same issue with the rest of the wing for those in Q&I in Sijan.
 - Random testing. They do 15% per week, and the positive number is very small.
- Comm commented that BCT didn't look like it did for the rest of us:
 - Masks worn 24/7
 - Jack's Valley march done in two groups to allow for distancing space in the valley.
 - Only stayed for five days but completed the program through busier and more focused schedule
 - Did not see an increase in COVID cases during this time
- Develop a plan for virtual learning and reinstating airmanship programs.
 - That has been a challenge.
 - Virtual learning for upper classmen is going better than it is for Doolies.
 - The issue there isn't that they aren't learning as much as what they are losing of the Academy experience: team building camaraderie, the basic institutional identity as we developed as a Doolie. They aren't getting much of that, and the Comm is concerned that they might have a larger than normal attrition rate. The staff and the cadets work hard to address that. Results TBD.

Throughout this time, she again emphasized that the cadets are more than doing their part. They are coming up with ideas on how to cope with the current situation, how to improve morale, getting cadets out of their rooms, finding/developing new things for cadets to do on the USAFA grounds, developing new ideas on how to make it better. Due to the success rate they've had, they were able to open up the area some. They initially gave day passes to cadets, then allowed overnight passes to the local area over Labor Day weekend. Results of testing since then should be back this week. If the numbers stay low, they'll keep it open. If there is a large increase, they'll have to tighten it up.

She commented that USAFA is WAY out in front of other colleges and even the other service academies. West Point and Annapolis don't allow any privileges at all. She said she gets calls and interest from a lot of colleges as to how we are doing what we're doing and how it is working. Her point was the USAFA developed a plan, executed the plan, and modified it as necessary to continue to move forward. As she put it, the whole world is watching, including the USAF in general.

Karina Ross, Director of Constituent Services was next. She announced all the Distinguished Chapter for 2019/2020 year, and we made the list. She walked us through the new Chapter guide that can be found on www.usafa.org/chapters. It details the requirements to become a distinguished chapter and ways that AOG can help chapters fulfill their mission to support the cadets. As a result of the merger of the two organizations, the AOG is changing from fiscal year reporting (Jul 1 – Jun 30) to calendar year reporting. From now on, distinguished chapter reporting and planning will use that period. She emphasized that they are there for us to use to help reach out to grads to make our chapters and, hence, the AOG more effective.

Michelle, Bergeman, VP of Alumni Relations was next. She primarily discussed ZoomieLink and some upgrades to make it more effective. She discussed a new Ambassador program they are putting together. Details to follow . . .

BIG NEWS!! Air Force - Navy and Air Force - Army games are ON! Navy game is 3 Oct and Army game is tentatively schedule for 7 Nov.

Final speaker was Marty Marcolongo ('88) President and COO of the AOG. He commented that with the merger his position as President of the AOG goes away. His big issue was working to develop among the cadets, starting when they are Doolies, a culture of service. Cadets are being taught that it is a privilege to be at the Academy, and every grad owes it to the country, the USAF, and the Academy to pay it back. The AOG is looking for chapters to support cadets, to help instill that culture of service to community, etc., that service doesn't stop when you leave the USAF. It lasts for a lifetime. The outcome of this effort will increase the Academy's reputation, not only within the USAF, but throughout our communities and the nation as a whole.