

# What Killed The Dodo?

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In 2004 *The Dodo* became extinct. Unlike its mentally challenged distant cousin, *raphus cucullatus*, which disappeared from the island Mauritius in 1693, the modern *dodo usafagus* was literate. These unfortunate creatures became victims of climate change.

The publication *Dodo* was born on October 19, 1957 at the Lowry Air Force Base campus, a four-page mimeographed hand-out proudly displaying the subcaption "A cadet publication for cadets."

Early *Dodos* were mostly updates on athletic teams, biosketches, and notices about trips, visits from dignitaries and social events. Monitored by a lone officer, it contained pretty harmless and routine stuff sprinkled with a few jokes and locally produced cartoons.

## Dodo Changes

After the USAFA move to Colorado Springs, *Dodo* was given a small operating budget and

accordingly changed its title to a snootier *The Dodo*, simultaneously decreasing the narrative on athletic teams and upping its humor count. As could be expected of any campus publication with an excess of men, favorite items of satire were mystifying academic courses (economics was a favorite target), beer, and women. Additional locally topical items were the weather, the infamous Cadet Food Acceptability Report Form O-96, and the cadet area terrazzo – a sagging civil engineering boo-boo which has been (and still is) under repair since the day it was laid.

By 1961, *The Dodo* had shifted into almost total humor. Cadet Mike Ditmore, '65, was an accomplished amateur artist who contributed gentle but sharp-eyed humor at the USAFA architecture.

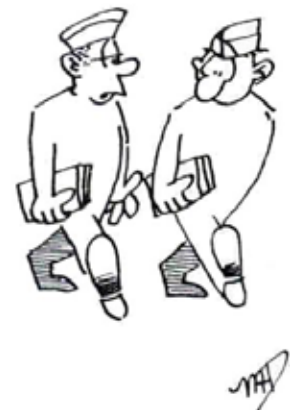
By 1962, under the editorship of David Samuel, '64, *The Dodo* began including photos of departmental secretaries and cadet girlfriends. Appealing PR photos of female celebrities such as Ann-Margret and Mary

Tyler Moore appeared regularly. Against all expectations, the Commandant, Brig. Gen. Robert Strong emphatically endorsed *The Dodo* as a great morale builder. His only broad advice to the editors was (1) Don't publish anything contrary to Air Force policy, (2) No nudity, and (3) Don't do anything stupid. The publication went through a remarkably abbreviated chain of review with little censorship. Volunteers contributed scores of hours to this weekly outlet. Dave Samuel said he considered his editorship a rewarding duty to contribute to Wing morale.

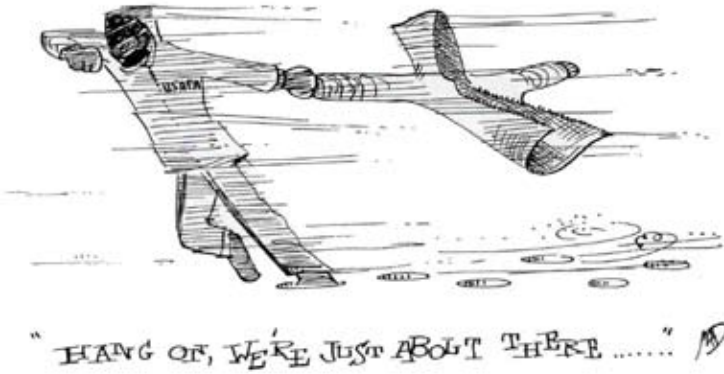
So enraptured with morale was the Wing that cadets went on midnight ventures placing banners, airplanes, and automobiles in unlikely USAFA locales. David Westhrop '62, and his Austin-Healy Sprite were headlined in a 1962 issue posing in their new-found parking spot under the display F-100 in the cadet area.

The locally Xeroxed *The Dodo* became an unofficial cadet humor and satire pub rank-

L to R: The original 1957 *Dodo*. One of many comments on the Terrazzo.



Yea, where ever it stops rolling they put a drain.



L to R: Classic ditmore view of USAFA weather. 1991 holiday greetings from the Reddens.

ing decidedly below the traditional national campus humor publications as the glossy Alabama *Mahout* and Stanford *Chaparral*. Cadets were constantly reminded that *The Dodo* was only for cadet readership. So, quite naturally I and others passed on copies to friends and parents who nevertheless found most of the publication pretty clever.

Everyone, Even Generals Participate

*The Dodo* marched on for several decades as a weekly hard copy. It continued to track and satirize public fads such as lurking, stuffing telephone booths, single unmarried parents (and, yes, there were some such cadets), streaking, Batman (reified as the regulation-loving Stractman), and The Simpsons. In the late 1980s, the top leadership of the Academy was so impressed, they actually posed for humorously captioned photos. A memorable 1991 final page and tribute to the popular Commandant, Brigadier General Joseph Redden, pictured him as a proud family patriarch. (I am told he enjoyed the joke.)

The Academy was never viewed as a normal institution. Touching on the policy of “Commitment” whereby 2<sup>nd</sup> Class cadets committed themselves to an Air Force career, *The Dodo* suggested changing the aluminum imperative above the “Bring Me Men” ramp to a chilling clause from Dante’s *Inferno*.

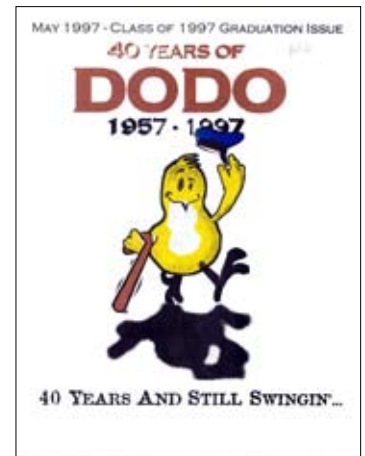
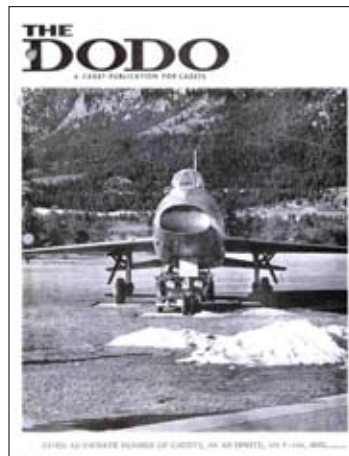
By 1997 it was time to pop the champagne corks, and *The Dodo* celebrated its longevity with a splashy 26-page color 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. Like Superman, *The Dodo* was apparently bulletproof.

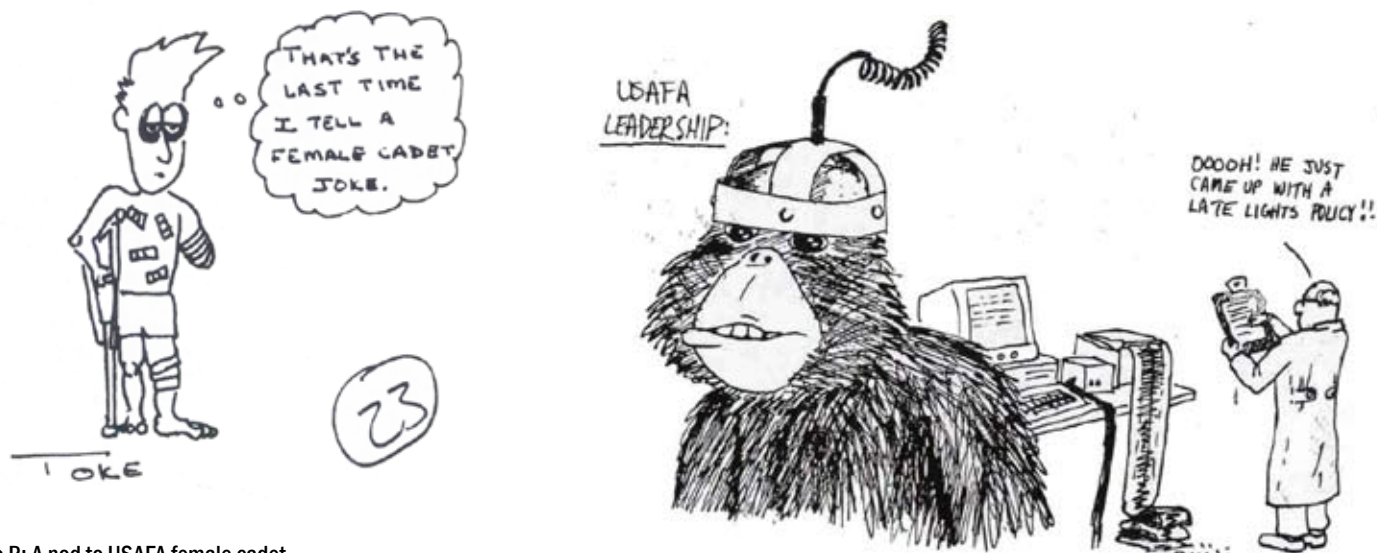
**Clouds on the Horizon**

Naively unaware, *The Dodo* had its vulnerability to kryptonite. That vulnerability was the dreaded phrase *Political Correctness*. Cadets and staff were well aware of sexual harassment policies, and so references to gender differences were to be avoided. Figure 7 illustrates *The Dodo* shyness to gender-specific humor. Pinups were out, as were, apparently, mother-in-law jokes.

Sometime about 2002 the Superintendent and staff, with guidance from the Pentagon, began cracking down on underage cadet drinking, so *The Dodo* references to beer began disappearing. The list of taboo items kept growing. In 2002, an unsigned email was posted to Public Affairs Advisor, to wit: *The Dodo* “... did not meet the standards of Air Force Publications as discussed by Training Wing Senior Leadership.” Henceforth, *The Dodo* would have to go through five levels of official review with censorship ending at the Commandant’s desk. In 1992, *The Dodo* was also passed up to both The Department of Behavioral Sciences and the Center for Character Development and was promptly labeled “cynical.” Mysteriously, the publication was not passed instead to the English Department. Mark Twain without his insightful cynicism and satire would still be piloting steamboats. Cartoons like the 1991 gibe against late-lights policy were also history. ▷

L to R: Dave Westthorp '62 finds his Austin Healy creatively parked. Cadet salute to commitment. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary *The Dodo* cover.





L to R: A nod to USAFA female cadet equality. USAFA late lights policy.

The Commandant, Brig. Gen. Gilbert remained in favor of rescripting *The Dodo*, and he and his shop spent countless hours trying to reach a middle ground, but the search for middle ground was derailed.

### The Tempest Breaks Loose

The Superintendent continued his efforts to curtail and discipline cadet alleged alcohol and drug abuse, but in 2003 he and the Commandant were blindsided by anonymous accusations they had ignored warning signs of sexual harassment and assault on female cadets. Congressmen and senators demanded quick action, so both the Superintendent and Commandant were relieved of their duties and admonished. A new policy, kindly named Agenda for Change, was brought into action by the new Academy leadership.

### The Agenda for Change

The Agenda for Change was a blunt “fix-it” document directing policy changes at USAFA. Of the 19 mandated items on cadet life, 14 items specifically dealt with sexual assault issues. The other five items dealt indirectly with the same issue. Rightly or wrongly, the controversial “Bring Me Men” logo over the Cadet Ramp had to go, and it was replaced by the Core Values logos.

*The Dodo*, of course, was necessarily implicated as a villain, and *The Dodo* staff devoted supranumery hours attempting to read the Commandant’s mind. Cadets were admonished and disciplined for their efforts in trying to publish, what was by 1961 standards, a pretty bland document. The final break was contained in another anonymous email to

Public Affairs stating, “The Dodo is being used by the media to misrepresent cadet activities and is counterproductive to what the Academy is trying to accomplish in a culture charged with the Agenda for Change.” In other words, blame the media.

By mid 2004, Cadets made more unsuccessful efforts to restart *The Dodo*, but it was already dead on arrival. Editor Terrence Mitchell, ’05, and staff put together a lengthy 32-page scrubbed-down issue with a pleading letter to the new Commandant for approval. Approval never arrived. In a final act of 2005 desperation, cadets tried publishing a *Dodo* calendar, something similar to the old *Contrails* calendar. This time, another blunt anonymous email came down from the 34<sup>th</sup> Training Wing, “No *Dodo* anything.” And that was the end of that.

### Will The Dodo Rise Again?

*The Dodo* survived as the electronic *eDodo*, first published in 1998 by unnamed graduates. Having transmogrified into a sometime ugly, sometime insightful, platform for complaints from disgruntled cadets and graduates, the publication was firewalled, un-firewalled, and then re-firewalled from the cadet internet. Although *eDodo* continues today, it is obviously no longer “A cadet publication for cadets.”

In early 1945, Sergeant Bill Mauldin, a cartoonist for the European *Stars and Stripes* was called in on General George S. Patton’s carpet. Patton had accused Mauldin of breaching good order and discipline by reputedly satirizing officers, thus giving aid and comfort to the enemy. General Eisenhower, a great fan of

Mauldin’s enormously popular works, intervened and told Patton to back off. Eisenhower believed Mauldin was a great morale booster for the common soldier. For his services to country, the witty 23-year old Mauldin was awarded the Purple Heart, the Legion of Merit, and—by the way—the Pulitzer Prize.

Alas, in 2004 there was no Eisenhower to run interference for *The Dodo*. There were certainly no Pulitzers or Legion of Merits awarded to *The Dodo* editors -- just some dubious Purple Hearts. *The Dodo* had fallen victim to climate change in a hard rock reality that ultimately nothing trumps politics. There is local talk of resurrecting *The Dodo* as a Phoenix, but it has never gone beyond talk. There is a saying that resurrection is a whole lot harder than giving birth. ▣

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