Alumni Wreath Laying

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A wreath was placed at the base of Col. Sylvanus Thayer’s statue by First Captain Daine Van de Wall with Superintendent Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams, West Point Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Love and West Point Association of Graduates President and CEO Todd Browne in attendance during the Alumni Wreath Laying ceremony Tuesday on the Plain. The event traditionally honors the Long Gray Line and classes in attendance during Graduation Week. However, this year, due to COVID-19, members of the Long Gray Line and classes were not able to attend.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION AND PHOTO BY JOHN PELLINO/USMA PAO
USMA Teammates,

As you are aware, our country is experiencing civil unrest. During these unsettling times, I want us to recommit to eradicating racism from within our ranks by treating all people with dignity and respect. We must show one another the kindness and compassion necessary to build cohesion and trust in our community.

The oath to support and defend the Constitution binds us together as one team, dedicated to defending our Nation and upholding its values. We strive to embody these ideals and aspire to live by our core values of duty, honor, and country. Every word, every action, and every attitude should uphold those values so that we may live and lead honorably. The Nation looks to West Point as an example of what is possible when people from diverse backgrounds unite and aspire to honorable living.

Consider how your words, actions, and attitudes impact other people. Are you building up others and making them feel valued? Are you strengthening trust within the team? Are you extending forgiveness, and actively listening to other points of view? Are you inspiring others to greatness? If so, encourage others to do the same. If not, then choose to improve—immediately. Muster the moral courage necessary to confront and solve problems with effective, honest, and empathetic dialogue that seeks solutions rather than sowing seeds of division and disunity.

I am proud to serve alongside you as we pursue excellence while respecting the dignity of our teammates. Together, let us show the Nation that their trust in us is well placed.

Very respectfully,

Darryl A. Williams
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
60th Superintendent
West Point holds wreath laying to honor members of the Long Gray Line

By Brandon O'Connor
PV Assistant Editor

Each year on the Tuesday before graduation, the U.S. Military Academy honors the members of the Long Gray Line by laying a wreath at the base of the Col. Sylvanus Thayer statue that overlooks the Plain.

The wreath laying is traditionally performed by the oldest graduate in attendance and precedes the alumni review parade. This year, there was no parade and the ceremony took on a different form as West Point adjusted to the new conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The wreath laying was originally scheduled for May 19 but was delayed a few weeks along with the graduation ceremony, which will take place Saturday.

The delay caused a fortuitous occurrence where the wreath was laid at the Thayer statue on the 235th birthday of the man who is known as the “Father of Military Academy.”

“Knowing what Col. Thayer has done for the academy and specifically for the dean side and the impact that he had, it’s only fitting that we could come out here and celebrate him on his birthday,” First Captain Daine Van de Wall said.

The ceremony was more intimate than in years past with the large crowd of hundreds of Old Grads replaced by a small party that included Superintendent Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams, West Point Command Sgt. Maj. Jack Love, West Point Association of Graduates President and CEO Todd Browne and Van de Wall, who filled in for the oldest graduate and placed the wreath. They were joined by members of the West Point Band, which filled in for the cadet choir that typically performs at the ceremony.

Many of the traditional graduation week events have been canceled or adjusted this year due to the global pandemic, including the ceremony which will take place on the Plain this year for the first time since 1977.

Although Tuesday’s wreath laying was performed differently than it is traditionally, Van de Wall said it was still important to hold it because it was a chance to show that no matter the circumstances, West Point and the Army will continue fighting and performing their duties.

“Graduation signifies getting to be part of the Long Gray Line and all those people who came before us,” Van de Wall said. “It’s definitely sad that we couldn’t have the oldest living grad here to do this for us, but it was an honor for me to get to fill that person’s shoes.”
‘The Army is changing’

Current female cadets will enter the Army with more career options than ever

By Brandon O’Connor
PV Assistant Editor

It was a simple answer to a question, but the implications of the words carried the weight of history.

Talking over video chat due to the global pandemic that threw the spring semester at the U.S. Military Academy into chaos, Class of 2020 Cadet Elizabeth Cross detailed her unique journey to West Point, which first took her to a military preparatory school in Philadelphia after she wasn’t admitted to West Point the first time she applied.

It was a difficult year, but her heart was set on attending West Point, so she persevered through the adversity before earning a spot in the Class of 2020.

She talked about her four years at West Point, the challenges she’d overcome—such as a cracked femur that sidelined her during Cadet Basic Training—and the moments during training each summer when she fell in love with the academy and the Army way of life all over again.

Then came a familiar question asked of the current and former female cadets who have walked through the granite halls of West Point along the banks of the Hudson River: “Do you think you’ve faced any different challenges at West Point because you are a female?”

Tracing the history of women at West Point across 40 years, the varying answers to that question told of the struggles women have faced, but also the progress that has been made.

The women in the Class of 1980—the first to include female cadets—were able to say unequivocally they were treated differently because of their sex. They spoke of the assaults and harassment they faced both at the academy and once they entered the Army.

Brig. Gen. Cindy Jebb, who now serves as the Dean of the Academic Board at West Point, arrived two years later as a member of the Class of 1982. Looking back at her cadet career she said, “I think it’s safe to say we were probably all sexually harassed.”

Only a decade after women first graduated from West Point, considerable progress had already been made. In the summer of 1989, Kristin Baker stepped into the role of first captain, becoming the first female cadet to lead the Corps of Cadets. She said she felt largely accepted by the Corps during her time in the role, but that equality quickly dissipated once she received her diploma and left West Point behind for the Army. There, she soon realized she was a “second-class citizen” because so many doors were closed to her due to the restrictions on what roles women could have and which branches of the Army they could serve in.

When Baker and many of the 5,140 women who are members of the Long Gray Line entered the Army, they knew their career paths were limited. They couldn’t go to Ranger School. They couldn’t serve in the infantry, armor or a myriad of other roles. So, the reality was they could never aspire to one day become...
Chief of Staff of the Army or fill many of the senior roles in the Army.

The first of those doors opened in late 2014 when women were allowed to apply to Ranger School for the first time. It was West Point alumni who led the way and proved what was possible as the first three women to receive Ranger tabs—Capts. Shaye Haver and Kristen Griest, and Lt. Col. Lisa Jaster—are all graduates of the academy.

More doors opened in the coming years as women in the academy’s Class of 2016 were allowed to branch infantry and armor for the first time and enter the Army with many of those once closed career paths available to them.

Now, in 2020, as Cross sat in her house separated from the Corps of Cadets and the academy because of a pandemic, she was able to look back at her four-year journey through West Point and say, “Going through the academy I’ve always felt in a siblinghood … If you put yourself out there as just a hard-working Soldier, you are respected the same.”

Her answer spoke of the progress made at West Point as she and her classmates prepare to graduate as members of the 40th class to include women this Saturday, and her story as a whole exemplifies just how different the Army she will soon enter is from the one her predecessors served in.

Before she even arrived at West Point, Cross wanted to serve in the infantry. Her senior year of high school she did her graduation exit project on being an infantry officer, with a “definitely terrible” mock battle plan and toy soldiers.

There was only one issue. At the time, the infantry was still closed to women. As she battled her way through a tough year at Valley Forge Military Academy and College and prepared to be admitted to West Point, it was announced that women would be allowed to serve in the infantry for the first time.

Five years later, her dream is about to become a reality. At Branch Night in November Cross opened her envelope, found two crossed rifles—the insignia of the infantry—printed on the inside along with a brass pin of the insignia and threw her head back while screaming out of pure happiness.

Because of the change made during her year at prep school, she was able to pursue the route she wanted. The door had not been artificially closed to her like it had for so many other women over the years. The key with the change to open every branch to women was for the first time they have near limitless choices other women over the years. The key with the change to open every branch to women was for the first time they have near limitless choices other women over the years.

Mohamed said. “She’s thriving, and that made it seem so possible and so within reach that if she can do it, why can’t I? I feel like a lot of the times, we count ourselves out. It takes an extra push to actually see someone doing something and then knowing that you also can do it yourself.”

After the chance meeting, Mohamed began to reflect back on all the field artillery officers she had met, including a member of the branch who’d become a mentor during Cadet Field Training a couple summers earlier. She realized she’d never met a field artillery officer she didn’t like. That, along with her experience during Branch Week, solidified FA was the right branch for her.

In November, Mohamed opened her Branch Night envelope to find the crossed cannons insignia of the field artillery branch.

“I am allowed to take that challenge” This year marked the last time female cadets had the option to opt out of including infantry and armor on their branch preference lists. Starting with the Class of 2021, both male and female cadets will have to include all 17 branches in their preference list.

For Class of 2021 Cadet Elizavetta Fursova that mandate is just fine, as infantry and armor are her top two choices. Fursova was born in Texas, but her family has lived in Moscow since she was 2 years old because her parents work at the American embassy there. In high school, she’d started considering enrolling in an ROTC program for college when her guidance counselor asked if she’d thought about attending West Point.

When she arrived at the academy, Fursova said she was thinking she would eventually branch military intelligence, adjutant general or something else “completely non-combat arms.”

Class of 2022 Cadet Sam DiMaio tells a similar story. It was tennis that brought her to
West Point. As an eighth grader, she first met West Point’s women’s tennis coach Paul Peck at a national tournament. That kickstarted a multi-year recruitment, which eventually led her to enrolling at West Point and joining the team.

She admits she had little exposure to the Army before the academy and entered figuring if she went combat arms she would eventually find herself in the middle of a war zone like the ones she’d seen represented in “Saving Private Ryan.” So, her plan was to play tennis and then branch something “safe” like finance or signal. Now, two years in, every branch in DiMaio’s top five is combat arms with engineers currently number one. Her hope is to become a combat engineer, a job that was just opened to women in 2015.

For both Fursova and DiMaio, the change in mindset began their very first summer at the academy. When cadets first arrive at West Point, they go through Reception Day and then begin Cadet Basic Training, which is affectionately referred to as Beast Barracks or just Beast. The new cadets learn how to shoot and go through basic squad drills while making the transition from civilian to military cadet.

Fursova said she realized during that first summer she enjoyed being out in the field and going through field training exercises. It was also during that first summer when she realized West Point was absolutely the right place for her and the nervousness she’d felt upon arriving became a thing of the past.

Beast planted the seed of change in DiMaio’s mind and the next summer as she went through airborne school and Cadet Field Training, the 180-degree change in plans was completed.

“I realized that being an actual leader in the Army (is serving) with Soldiers who are actually doing big, physical things like jumping out of planes and clearing zones and just getting things done,” DiMaio said. “I was like, ‘That’s something I want to do.’ So, I think the experience really turned me around.”

Class of 2023 Cadet Savannah Achenbach, on the other hand, knew before she ever entered the academy that, much like Cross, she was going to try and work toward a career in the infantry. The challenge of the branch drew her toward it, as did the personal relationships that grow between Soldiers as they face adversity together.

Both of her parents are West Point graduates and Achenbach arrived at the academy last summer brimming with confidence and sure she could cut it.

Then on Reception Day, when it came time to report to the cadet in the red sash, that confidence came crashing down. The rite of passage requires new cadets to step to a line right in the face of an upper-class cadet and recite a memorized response as the cadet in the red sash yells at them. Time after time Achenbach struggled to get the lines right, until finally succeeding on her 15th try, the most of anyone in her company, she said.

The repeated failures caused her to doubt whether West Point was the place for her, especially with the requirement to memorize and recite cadet knowledge throughout that initial summer. The doubts persisted until it was time for the first physical fitness test of the summer.

Fitness was her calling card as she’d been training in CrossFit and powerlifting before arriving at the academy. Despite her diminutive frame at only 5-foot-1 and 125 pounds, she said she managed to score the highest of anyone in her company, which gave her a new boost of energy to keep working toward her goal of serving in the infantry.

That boost carried her into the school year, where she tried out for and was selected to join the Black and Gold Sandhurst team, which trains throughout the year for military skills competitions including the multi-day Sandhurst Competition annually held at the U.S. Military Academy.

She would have had a chance to compete for the first time this year, but the competition was canceled due to COVID-19.

Achenbach is still early in her cadet career, but her time at West Point has already galvanized her desire to serve in the infantry and take on the challenge of leading Soldiers into combat.

“Now that it is open to females, and I’m seeing the firsties of Class of 2020 able to graduate and pursue that career, it means everything to me, because that means I am allowed to take that challenge,” Achenbach said.

Four female cadets—out of a total 229 in the Class of 2020—were commissioned into the infantry this year. Fourteen were commissioned as armor officers, while Mohamed and 35 other women are joining the field artillery branch.

Stepping into those roles, as some of the first women to join those branches, comes with the pressure of proving they belong. Cross said she naturally has a very “hooah” personality, but even though that matches well with infantry, she doesn’t feel the pressure to act or behave a certain way just because she will be serving in that branch. The pressure she does feel comes from the need to show that she and other women serving in combat arms can meet the standards, and also leaving a good impression on the men who might be experiencing a woman in their unit for the first time.

“It’s really just a thought of don’t give them a reason not to like you and don’t give them a reason to care about what the gender of their next leader is,” Cross said. “It’s really just a thought in my mind of don’t mess this up and don’t give them a reason to have a misconception of women.”

“The Army is changing”

Because the changes are recent, both Cross and Mohamed know there is a chance they will arrive in a unit that has never had a female officer in it before. It is an experience Cross is familiar with because during her Cadet Troop Leader Training experience last summer, she was placed into an all-male infantry company with the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii.

Stepping into the company for a few weeks,
she already had the challenge of proving she belonged because she was still a cadet. Additionally, she had the added pressure of being the first woman to be a member of the company.

It took a few days to break the ice, she said, but soon she was “smoking and joking” like another member of the company during a field training exercise. Before Cross arrived, the men had a misconception of what it would be like having women in their platoons, she said, because they had no exposure to it. It wasn’t that the culture was uninviting to a woman, it was simply that the men had no frame of reference to know what to expect. Gaining that acceptance comes, she said, not from acting a certain way or changing yourself, but from instead being authentic instead of putting on a false façade because of a preconceived notion of what an infantry officer should act like.

“At the same time, she said she has worked to be true to herself. She doesn’t want to feel like she has to act a certain way to fit in or behave a certain way just because she wants to go infantry. Like Cross, she has found the most acceptance simply by being herself and being authentic instead of putting on a false façade because of a preconceived notion of what an infantry officer should act like.

“I always try to be 100% Savannah Achenbach in everything that I do,” she said.

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The balance of being true to yourself and also proving you belong is something Achenbach said she has had to find during her first year at West Point. As a member of the Black and Gold Sandhurst team, she constantly has to prove she belongs physically.

At West Point as a whole, she said she feels secure in her place, but within the team—much as it will be within the infantry—she is surrounded by people in peak physical shape who push her to be faster, stronger and more competent.

At the same time, she said she has worked to be true to herself. She doesn’t want to feel like she has to act a certain way to fit in or behave a certain way just because she wants to go infantry. Like Cross, she has found the most acceptance simply by being herself and being authentic instead of putting on a false façade because of a preconceived notion of what an infantry officer should act like.

“I always try to be 100% Savannah Achenbach in everything that I do,” she said.

That’s very important to me to be authentic. That’s how I navigate things and sometimes that’s my downfall to just being myself all the time. That’s really hard because you’re so vulnerable to everyone else and if people don’t like the way you do things, then there’s nothing really that you can change about that unless you break that.”

Along with the ability to pursue the career of their choice, the current female cadets said they have found West Point to be a much more accepting place for women than their predecessors.

DiMaio said in her first two years at the academy, she doesn’t feel she’s faced any additional challenges because she’s a woman. There is pressure to meet the physical standards, but at the same time she feels she has entered West Point, and will join the Army, at a time when everyone expects it to be integrated.

“I’ve been really fortunate to be surrounded by people who don’t view me as just a little girl trying to play Army,” DiMaio said. “They don’t think about how it’s just a man’s job when they go into it. They expect to have male and female peers, superiors and subordinates.”

Throughout her four years at the academy, Mohamed said she has felt like just a member of the team. Unlike the women in the Class of 1980, who Sue Fulton said were seen as nothing more than female cadets—and frequently referred to as worse—40 years later Mohamed said she was treated as just a cadet.

That feeling of just being a member of the team is something she said she hopes carries over to the Army, even as the branches adjust to women.

“The Army is changing. I think when the females back in 1980 were joining the Army, the Army really favored physical strength and just that aspect of it,” Mohamed said. “If you weren’t physically strong, we don’t really need you, but I think the Army shifted from that ever since. We value skills more. We value diverse teams and I think that’s why it’s been a lot easier for us relative to them to integrate into that kind of culture.”

A domino effect
When the Class of 1980 arrived at West Point, they were the only 119 women at the academy in a sea of more than 4,000 cadets. By the time they graduated, only 13% of the Corps of Cadets was female. Forty years later, there are 1,026 women across the four classes making up 23% of the Corps.

The decision to allow women to enter the academy has left an indelible mark on the U.S. Army, but the impact of them being admitted has not stopped at America’s borders. Since 2000, 17 foreign female cadets from countries such as Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Montenegro have graduated from West Point and gone home to serve in their nations’ armies.

Arefena Shala—who will be the first female cadet from Kosovo to graduate from West Point—will become the 18th foreign female graduate since 2000 when she graduates as a member of the Class of 2020 Saturday.

After graduation—and before returning home to serve in the Kosovo army—Shala will attend Stanford University as a Knight-Hennessy Scholarship recipient. There, she will

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USMA Class of 2020: With Vision We Lead (Class of 2020 member Lynne Mooradian)

Compiled by Eric S. Bartlett

Class of 2020 member Lynne Mooradian

The U.S. Military Academy Class of 2020 will graduate more than 1,100 cadets on Parade Field on June 11, 2020. Though they are spread across the nation and the world, there is no question that they have a shared memory of events that no other class previous has experienced, what is the importance in your mind of combating sexual harassment at the Academy?As an Army Officer, the ideas of service and leadership are so important: my passion, media, provided a way for them to change the world around them is one that I think can be expanded far beyond West Point.

Lynne Mooradian: "I would have to say graduating at West Point—it's struggles and opportunities—made an incredible experience. As a plebe, I really didn't understand what those goals were. I learned so much about the importance of combating sexual harassment at the Academy. As an Army Officer, the ideas of service and leadership are so important: my passion, media, provided a way for them to change the world around them is one that I think can be expanded far beyond West Point."

"My West Point Experience" in his own words…by Robert Norwood

Robert Norwood: "What is your favorite memory/top moments at West Point?"

Robert Norwood: "What did you find out about leadership through your experience as a cadet?"

Robert Norwood: "What was the biggest hurdle you faced during your time at West Point?"

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achieved half of my accomplishments without his support. He has been the best coach I’ve ever had, a friend, a shoulder to lean on and a source of motivation whenever I faltered.

“Coach Reed never stopped believing in me, which helped me believe in myself. He has taught me to be confident, be competitive and execute in everything I do in life.”

**PV:** Through this collective experience everyone has gone through, from your perspective, how has the Class of 2020 united together and motivated each other during the COVID-19 crisis?

**LM:** “From my personal experience, the Class of 2020 has done an incredible job of coming together during this crisis. By consistently reaching out to friends, company mates and classmates on all platforms—texting, calling, emailing and social media—we have made sure no one feels alone. I’ve also noticed that we have remained motivated and committed in our leadership roles, ensuring that we continue to support the underclassmen until the very end of our time at West Point.”

**PV:** What was the biggest hurdle you faced during the crisis? What did you find out about yourself and your resilience, whether it was physically or mentally, in overcoming this situation and drive toward graduation?

**LM:** “I am very lucky to have wonderful parents who support me in all my endeavors, as well as a home environment that is conducive to remote learning.

“Without Track and Field, I had far more time to dedicate to my classwork. However, while my academic requirements became more manageable, my role as Brigade Academic Officer became more invasive. I faced the challenge of finding innovative ways to support the Corps during an unprecedented crisis. I worked closely with the dean and her team to address the concerns of the Corps and improve the remote learning environment, allowing us to finish the semester strong.

“The challenges inherent to my role as Brigade Academic Officer during this crisis taught me about my commitment to helping others, my creativity and my ability to adapt. As I drive toward graduation and my career in the Army, I know that this will not be the last time I am asked to adapt and lead in unprecedented circumstances.”

**PV:** What were you looking forward to the most when you returned to West Point?

**LM:** “I looked forward to reuniting with my friends. I have had the same roommate for every semester at West Point except for one—we are an inseparable pair. I’ve missed her, my teammates and my other classmates more than I ever would have expected.

“Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, I had intended to prioritize making memories with my classmates before we go our separate ways after graduation. I lost a lot of precious time with the people close to me, so I am thankful for the chance to say goodbye as we each embark on our next adventure.”

**PV:** Historically, similar to your last two months, this will be a unique graduation that no class previously has experienced, what is your hope and anticipation for your graduation day?

**LM:** “The bottom line is that this ceremony is about celebrating our accomplishments as a class. I am honored to be a part of a group of outstanding leaders, and each one of my classmates deserves recognition on graduation day. I am simply grateful to be having a ceremony at all, given the circumstances, and I anticipate a graduation day that is as or more memorable than any before it.”

**PV:** Describe what tossing your hat in the air will mean to you, completing your journey at West Point?

**LM:** “The hat toss is an incredibly symbolic moment, one that I have looked forward to since the very beginning of my journey at West Point. I watched my brother toss his hat in the air in 2017, so being able to follow in his footsteps will be the emotional culmination of everything I’ve worked for these past four years. Tossing my hat will be an iconic end to my journey as a cadet, and the beginning of my next adventure as an Army officer.”

**PV:** As the Brigade Academic Officer, describe what that job detailed for you?

**LM:** “As the Brigade Academic Officer, I served as the liaison between the Corps of Cadets and the dean, registrar and Center for Enhanced Performance. I supported the peer tutoring program, monitored the academic standing of the Corps and worked with the cadet academic chain of command to provide resources and help to those who needed it.

“Following COVID-19, I became a more integral member of the dean’s team. I was in contact with Brig. Gen. (Cindy) Jebb and her team before the start of remote classes, organizing and analyzing the results of several cadet surveys. These surveys were aimed at determining cadet concerns and potential issues with resources and connectivity in the new learning environment.

“My work contributed to adaptations and improvements to remote learning, while retaining West Point’s high academic standards.”

**PV:** Top 10 in the class academically and number one physically, how much pride do you take in achieving both of those feats?

**LM:** “I never aimed to be top in my class in any pillar, but I am enormously proud to have achieved that standing both academically and physically. I have always thought that if something is worth doing, then it is worth doing well.

“I think these accomplishments reflect my dedication to a high standard of effort and performance. I had many opportunities to take the easy way out and let my standards slip, but my self-respect and respect for the values of West Point kept me motivated through it all. My own efforts aside, my academic and physical standing would never have been possible without my incredible support network. My parents, coaches, instructors and friends have helped me in all my endeavors. Although I feel pride in my accomplishments, I also feel very lucky.”

**PV:** Legally blind as a child and working to gain your eyesight to get to West Point, talk about that experience and overcoming what was once a physical liability?

**LM:** “My eyes have always been my greatest weakness. Spending years of my childhood performing vision therapy exercises—like counting grains of rice with tweezers—not only strengthened my eyes, but also strengthened my discipline and resilience.

“The hard work paid off, and I was thrilled to learn that I was finally qualified to attend West Point. In truth, that moment was almost more exciting than receiving my acceptance letter. The relief I felt when I learned of my medical qualification helped me realize how much I truly wanted to attend West Point.

“Struggling with my vision during CBT and having to wear an eyepatch helped me realize how much I wanted to attend West Point. I would not wish my eye problems on anyone, dealing with this physical liability has made me a stronger, more resilient person. I am grateful for that.”

**PV:** What branch did you choose and why?

**LM:** “I chose military intelligence because of the flexibility—as an MI officer, I will have the opportunity to work with many different organizations within the Army. Intelligence is also the backbone of any operation, and I am excited to be such a critical member of the Army.

“My experiences with an MI Platoon during CILT were also a driving factor for my choice of branch; I was impressed by the quality of the Soldiers that I worked with and the mission set of the unit.”

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**“My West Point Experience” In her own words ... by Lynne Mooradian**

When the Class of 2020 chose “With Vision We Lead” as our class motto during Cadet Basic Training, I felt like the target of a bad joke. We were marching back from Camp Buckner, the banner held proudly at the front of a column of exhausted new cadets as families and friends lined the route to cheer.

Somewhere in that line of new cadets was me: New Cadet Mooradian, more commonly referred to as “Patchy.” For six weeks of CBT, I struggled with crippling double vision and was forced to wear an eyepatch in order to complete my training.

The pirate jokes and isolation were unrelenting, but the irony seemed far worse: The Class of 2020, “With Vision We Lead,” seemed to be the first class with a near-blind new cadet. Our motto felt like a personal attack and a confirmation of my looming fear that I was not cut out to attend the U.S. Military Academy.

Although the eyepatch was not permanent, “Patchy” would continue to shape me. During CBT, I had felt like my vision problems made me a liability to others and unqualified to serve. I never wanted to experience that feeling again, so over the next four years I endeavored to prove that I belonged at West Point and in the Army. To me, that meant taking advantage of the countless opportunities the institution provided.

I published research, studied Russian in Armenia and the Republic of Georgia, trained at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, competed as a Division I Track and Field athlete and lead my fellow cadets as both the track and field team captain and the Brigade Academic Officer.

My intent was to make a meaningful contribution to West Point and the Corps, but along the way I found myself developing and growing in unexpected ways. The liberal arts education I received challenged my perspectives and critical thinking, while the focus on character development instilled in me a vibrant sense of duty and commitment to serving others. My 47-month experience was enriched by the people around me: those who were there for me when I wasn’t at my best and those who challenged me to be better each and every day.

I have emerged from the last four years a more confident leader, an experienced scholar and an accomplished athlete.

Looking back, I would not change a thing—every mistake taught me a new lesson, every failure strengthened my resilience and every success made me appreciate the support of my peers, instructors and coaches even more.

Now, as I look toward what lies ahead, “With Vision We Lead” seems so very fitting. Our class, graduating during the COVID-19 pandemic, has faced unprecedented times and emerged stronger than before.

No one knows what awaits us in the years to come, but I am confident that we have the foresight and character to adapt and lead, regardless of the circumstances.

The future is bright—I can see it clearly.
Class of 2020 Cadet Arelena Shala will become the first female cadet from Kosovo to graduate from West Point on Saturday. Prior to returning home to serve in the Kosovo Army she will attend Stanford University as a Knight-Hennessy Scholarship recipient. Photos courtesy of Arelena Shala

pursue a master’s in international policy with a focus on security studies and counterterrorism.

It is an experience she would never have thought possible even a few years ago. She’d been studying at the Kosovo Military Academy for two years when the opportunity to attend West Point was presented to her. At first, she was hesitant. It would mean starting her cadet education all over from the beginning in a country she had never visited. In the end, she decided it was an opportunity she couldn’t pass up. Not only was it a chance to pursue a world-class education, but it would also enable her to represent her army and country on an international stage.

She arrived in the United States a few days before Reception Day and then was immediately thrown into Cadet Basic Training. She found comfort there because she was used to a military environment, but still had to adjust, particularly to the colloquialisms in American English she was unfamiliar with.

Attending West Point has introduced Shala to a considerably more diverse environment than the one back home. The academy in Kosovo is very homogeneous, she said, while West Point has cadets from all 50 states along with foreign cadets from countries throughout Europe, Asia, South America and Africa.

Along with the education, her time at the academy also offered her opportunities to experience things that never would have been possible back home.

She was able to attend airborne school, which is not offered in the Kosovo Army. During Shala’s firstie year, she was also able to serve as a regimental command sergeant major over roughly 1,000 cadets. That was the equivalent to overseeing a quarter of her entire army back home.

“Being able to have that experience here and understanding how leadership works at the higher levels and interacting with the West Point leadership on a daily basis, I think that’s really valuable,” Shala said. “It will definitely make my experience easier once I go back.”

After attending Stanford, Shala will return to Kosovo and begin her career as an infantry officer.

In the long run, she said she hopes to have a chance to work at the Kosovo academy so she can introduce parts of what she learned at West Point into their curriculum, mainly the West Point character program.

“I would definitely not be here today if the women of 1980 wouldn’t have opened the door for all of us. You can really see the impact when you have women from armies from all over the world coming to West Point and then going back and opening doors for women in their militaries,” Shala said. “To think that I would be opening the doors for other women or cadets in general from Kosovo to come to West Point in the coming years, that is really inspiring. It’s just an impact that kind of spreads like a domino effect.”
For a one-stop shop of all updated coronavirus information, Keller Army Community Hospital notifications, how to stop the spread of COVID-19, federal/state/local guidance and the U.S. Military Academy and Army Garrison West Point webpages, visit https://kach.amedd.army.mil/West-Point-COVID-19-INFO/.

KACH Immunizations Clinic to schedule appointments

Keller Army Community Hospital will resume scheduling immunization appointments.

In an effort to accommodate our population needing vaccines while maintaining the safety of all of our beneficiaries, appointments will be scheduled for:

1. Any healthy beneficiary 11 years or older (parent must call to make appointment).
2. Any active duty servicemember who needs updated immunizations for MEDPROS.
3. Any travel related vaccines after an appointment with one of our providers has taken place.

To schedule an appointment, call the KACH Appointment Center at 845-938-7992.

KACH Pharamacry Curbside Pick-up

By Robert K. Lanier
Public Affairs Officer, Keller Army Community Hospital

Keller Army Community Hospital is taking steps to maintain social distancing while continuing to serve our beneficiaries by providing “In-car” pharmacy dispensing. This service is available during the pharmacy hours, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Beneficiaries will need to call the pharmacy to ensure we have your medications filled prior to coming to the pharmacy.

Refill prescriptions can still be called into the refill line for pick up after two business days.

When you arrive at the pharmacy, pull in to one of the numbered pharmacy parking spaces and call the pharmacy for a hospital representative to bring your medications to your car.

This service is available for all beneficiaries and is the preferred medication dispensing method.

The pharmacy inside the hospital is still open and serving patients who have been seen in the hospital that day.

Any patients who are under a restriction of movement (self-quarantine or self-isolation) should not leave their quarantine/isolation area.

In Brief:
• Prior to arriving at the pharmacy, call 845-938-2271/6199/3812 so we can start process your medication prior to your arrival at the KACH Pharmacy. We will coordinate a time for you to come pick up your medication within about two hours.
• When you arrive at the pharmacy, pull in to one of the numbered pharmacy parking spaces, and call the pharmacy again at 845-938-2271/6199/3812 to have a hospital representative bring out your medications out to you.

Additional information:
• If you have hardcopy (paper) prescriptions, let us know when you arrive and we will come collect them.
• If you are picking up controlled substances, please bring your own pen to use when signing for your medications.

We thank you and appreciate your patience as team West Point continues our COVID-19 response.
COVID-19: MWR facility and program updates

The following services remain open or just recently reopened:

- Dog Parks—Please limit groups and cleanup after yourself.
- West Point Bowling Center—Open 11 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Monday through Sunday. Food delivery and pick up only.
- Round Pond Recreation Area and Lake Frederick Recreation Area—Permitted fishing and passive recreation only, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. No camping or picnicking allowed. For West Point fishing permits, create an online account at https://westpoint.isportsman.net.
- Morgan Farm Pet Grooming—Now accepting reservations. You must call ahead for an appointment at 845-938-3926. Also, if you’re PCS’ing away from West Point this summer and will be checking out of your RV Storage site, Morgan Farm would like to hear from you. Contact Trish at Morgan Farm at 845-938-3926.
- Stony Child Development Center—The CDC is open for key and essential customers only. Eligible patrons have received direct notification via their Chain of Command.
- CYS Parent Central Services—The CYS Parent Central Services is open by appointment only. To schedule an appointment, call 845-938-4458/6939/3969 between the hours of 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
- (NEW) Automotive Center—It is open for “Self-Help” patrons and “Fleet Services” only. For complete details, visit https://westpoint.armymwr.com/programs/automotive-center.

The following services are closed or canceled (until further notice):

- MWR Administrative Offices.
- Army Community Service—Recommend using MilitaryOneSource.mil.
- Arts & Crafts—Classes are canceled. Virtual classes are available via the Arts & Crafts Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/westpointartsandcrafts.
- BOSS.
- (UPDATED) CYS (All programs closed except for Stony CDC and Parent Central Services, see above)—All Youth Sports and Instructional programs for the Spring season are canceled. CYS staff is currently refunding/giving household credits in accordance with ICOM guidance. SAC Summer Camp canceled through July 3. Re-assessment decision will be July 6 for remainder of summer.
- MWR Fitness Center.
- Intramural Sports.
- Leisure Travel.
- Outdoor Recreation—All camping/lodging reservations canceled until further notice. The Bull Pond lottery reservation is postponed until further notice.
- Recreational Swimming
  - Season opening postponed until further notice. This includes Long Pond Swim Area, Round Pond Swim Area, Lake Frederick Swim Area, and Crandall Pool inside Arvin Cadet Physical Development Center.
- Special Events:
  - West Point 5K/10K, Army Birthday Run, (June 13) canceled.
  - Check out our #MWRAtHomeHome events/competitions on our Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/westpointfmwr.
- Tronsrue Marksmanship Center—Closed, all classes are canceled.
- West Point Club:
  - Dinner-To-Go is closed.
  - All events and personal reservations are canceled currently.
- West Point Golf Course.
- Leave a voicemail with your name, phone number and brief message describing your situation. You may also email marilyn.shenton@westpoint.edu for assistance. Messages are reviewed every two hours during normal business hours.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

LRC CIF appointments for retiring, ETSing military personnel
Due to COVID-19, all military personnel who will be retiring or ETSing and require clearing through the Logistics Readiness Center West Point Central Issue Facility (CIF) will be required to make an appointment by phone.
To make an appointment, call 845-938-4562 or 845-938-1835.

Logistics Readiness Center message
We regret to inform the community that the SMURF buses are indefinitely suspended due to lack of drivers.
The Transportation and Maintenance Division will continue to provide a bus for handicapped patrons from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. To call for that service, call 938-4468 or 938-2018.
The taxi service was suspended at the beginning of the current COVID-19 crisis in an effort to mitigate the spread of the virus. We regret any inconvenience this may cause.

Legal Assistance Office information
Have a legal question? For example, are you wondering how you can legally terminate or extend a lease?
- Contact the West Point Legal Assistance Office. The Legal Assistance Office’s physical location is closed in response to COVID-19.
- Limited services are available by calling 845-938-4541.
- Leave a voicemail with your name, phone number and brief message describing your situation. You may also email marilyn.shenton@westpoint.edu for assistance. Messages are reviewed every two hours during normal business hours.

West Point Commissary hours change for Saturday and July 4
The West Point Commissary is open Saturday on Graduation Day, however, the hours have been changed to 3-7 p.m. only. The commissary will also be open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. July 4. As a reminder, customers will not be allowed in the commissary without a face mask.

West Point Tax Center closed and IRS extension
The West Point Tax Center is officially closed. However, the IRS has extended the federal income tax filing and payment deadlines. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the IRS is automatically extending the federal income tax filing and payment deadlines until July 15.
This extension applies to all taxpayers, including individuals, trusts and estates, corporations and other non-corporate tax filers as well as those who pay self-employment tax.
Taxpayers do not need to file any additional forms or call the IRS to qualify for this automatic federal tax filing and payment relief.
Please note, the extension does not apply to state income tax filings or payments. Check with your state of residence for state income tax filing and payment deadlines.

COMMUNITY FEATURED ITEM

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THANK YOU, FIRSTIES

By Paul Peck
Army West Point Women’s Tennis Head Coach

Dear Danna Funaro and Gloria Son,

Congratulations on graduating from West Point and commissioning as 2nd lieutenants! I am so proud of the both of you for all you have accomplished these past four years. It has been quite a journey!

I know that you are both prepared and ready for the challenges ahead in your military career. You have been trained at the best leadership institution in the world and your leadership skills will help you succeed in any unit you are assigned. I am looking forward to seeing all your accomplishments in your military careers, in your communities and in the private sector in the future.

I also want to thank you for all you have done for Army women’s tennis. Because of you two, our team is the most cohesive I have ever seen it in my 26 years at West Point. You both have led by example in terms of your work ethic, competitiveness and just being great teammates. One of your best strengths as teammates is your sense of humor and constant teasing of each other. It allowed the team to laugh and relax during a tough dean’s week or in stressful competitions.

We have had many adventures on and off the courts over the years but one of my favorite memories during your time with the team is the 2018 Patriot League Championship. You both won critical matches to help us bring the championship trophy back to West Point after five years of frustration. Danna’s dramatic win over Boston University in the semifinals earned us the right to play Navy in the finals. And Gloria’s win in singles during the finals switched the momentum in our favor to beat Navy 4-2.

What was even more amazing is we had lost to Navy 7-0 in the regular season and we lost the doubles point against them in the finals but because of your tenacity we were able pull off the upset!

Again, I just want to say how proud I am of both of you and how grateful I am to have been given the honor to be your coach.

By Matt Sherman
Army West Point Men’s Rugby Head Coach

To the Army men’s rugby Class of 2020,

Congratulations on the successful completion of your 47-month journey at West Point culminating with Saturday’s unique graduation. I don’t think you would say the journey has been easy, but I hope you’ve enjoyed it. I believe strongly it will be one that you found to be challenging, rewarding, fulfilling and formative as you forge down your life’s path.

I know how hard you’ve all worked to get here, and I am overwhelmed by how happy for you all. I am also deeply saddened to see you depart, and I, your teammates, and the team, will miss you immensely. Nonetheless, while not here in being, your legacy will be with us in spirit as we continue to strive to now stand on your shoulders and leave the jersey in a better place.

I am very grateful for our time and experiences together, as well as your considerable efforts and contributions to the team these last 47 months. I am grateful for our relationship and the personal impact you have had on my life, helping me to improve and grow as a better person, leader and coach. I’m grateful for the positive impact you have had on our team and brotherhood.

I feel absolute in saying you left the jersey in a better place and have carried our legacy forward. I also know that you have forward and upward. I wish you and the entire Class of 2020 the best as you now forge ahead into your professional careers as officers in the United States Army.

In a complex, dynamic and troubled world, strong young leaders of character will be critical, and I know you will rise to meet, solve and defeat the challenges that lie ahead.

My family and I take great faith in the future of our country knowing you will be carrying the torch forward.

Please stay in touch and as always, keep climbing in everything you do. With the most admiration, respect and appreciation I can offer,

Love,
Coach Peck
P.S. Beat Navy!!!!

Photo by Army Athletic Communications

See next week’s Pointer View for the 13th annual Black Knight Awards that celebrates Army West Point Athletics, its teams and cadet-athlete accomplishments.
By Samantha Stewart
Army West Point Women’s Lacrosse

If I was able to go back in time to the day I committed to Army women’s lacrosse, I would have never expected to be where I am now. Growing up in a military family, I always knew I wanted to attend West Point. I think the scariest part was not knowing what to expect.

Of course, there are stories from your parents, a family friend and even a current cadet, but nothing compares to your own experience.

While deciding to come to West Point seemed like an easy decision at first, it has been anything but easy. At the R-Day barbecue, I remember coming together with the rest of the class of 2020, bright eyed and excited for the journey we were about to embark on. However, the next day I found myself standing in my sweaty white over gray uniform in the rain holding back tears as I desperately held on to my parent’s gaze from the bleachers.

We have all had those moments, those days and that thought of whether West Point would be right for us or not. However, I always had one thing that helped me stay on track. My teammates.

From the very beginning, our team has served as one of the most important support systems throughout my West Point experience. It’s interesting to take a moment and look back at those memories as a senior. Filled with fear of the unknown then, I finally know what the next few years will have in store for me. Those moments don’t seem as scary and all I can think now is how blessed I am to be apart of something like West Point.

To my teammates—we have achieved so much this year. The milestones we reached as a fifth-year program demonstrate our hard work and dedication to this team.

Although our season was cut short due to unforeseen circumstances, the goals we reached and the memories we created will remain in our hearts forever.

To the freshmen, four seasons go by incredibly fast, make sure you take advantage of every moment. Sophomores, in the next few months you’re going to make a huge decision to continue on this path. It’s an exciting one so get ready! To the juniors, I am so excited to come back and see the ways you will carry this program as a senior class and what your military careers will soon become.

Although our team is young and breaking records every day, there is always room for improvement. I have no doubt in my mind that next year’s team will be even stronger. With strength on the field comes bonds made off the field. I think this year we did a great job of establishing new traditions and following old ones.

My hope for the future is strengthening our alumni program and ensuring we stay connected. I wish I could stay with you all and play lacrosse forever, however, I am extremely excited to start my career in the Army. The best part about our program is that our team bond will never leave us.

So, as we reflect on our time cut short with one another, it is important to acknowledge that we will eventually be working alongside one another on an even bigger team.

It’s crazy to think how much a sport can change your life. I almost didn’t play lacrosse. It took some tough love from my parents to “inspire me” (they signed me up without telling me). If I hadn’t played lacrosse, my life would be completely different. To the daily laughs, the late-night study halls and countless American Burrito dinners, there was never a dull moment.

If I had not played lacrosse, I would not have reached my potential in so many ways. Thank you for coaching such a great group of girls.

To my coaches—thank you for guiding me throughout this experience. Seeing the goals, you’ve made for this program over the years unfold has been such an exciting journey. Not only have our seasons gotten stronger, but the gear has gotten even better. All jokes aside, I will miss you three so much.

Coach Waagbo, thank you for believing in me. I am so blessed to say I was a part of the Army women’s lacrosse team. It is crazy to see how far we have come in four years and I’m sure you’ll have many more seasons of greatness getting to coach such a great group of girls.

Coach Shan, you have been here since the very beginning and to think at one point you were helping me take a draw. Thank you for all the midfield knowledge and support you’ve given me throughout my career. If I ever get the chance to play again, I will always take a hard shot.

Love,
Sami Stewart
#10

Photo by Army Athletic Communications