



West Point cadets raise the mast on the boat that will be burned as the centerpiece of the final on-campus activity in the run-up to the annual Army-Navy football game last December.

The bonfire blaze spreads as a member of the Army football team walks past. As the fire still crackled, the team boarded buses that would take them to Philadelphia for the contest.

Cheerleader-in-chief COL Mark McKearn (far right), brigade tactical officer at the U.S. Military Academy, whips up the crowd before the bonfire was lit. A former Army player, he wears his old number.



Army-Navy Game:

Spirit of the Long Gray Line

Text and Photographs
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Two days before the annual Army-Navy football game, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point's Corps of Cadets, alumni, faculty and well-wishers gathered on an athletic field wedged between the Hudson River and West Point's revered parade ground called The Plain, the perimeter of which is guarded by statues of historic Army leaders and upon which no humans





Above, Army football team members gather for their send-off.

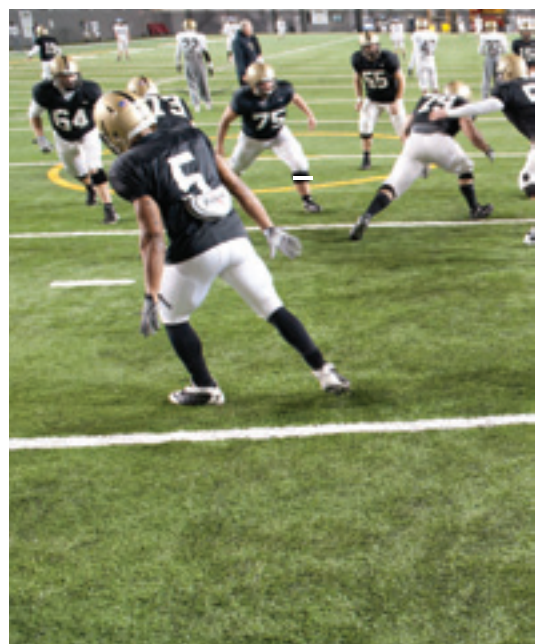


Right, Cadet Tiffany Mincey, a West Point cheerleader, performs with her squad during the traditional Spirit Dinner that precedes the bonfire.



dare tread except on the proper occasion. Birds and squirrels even seem to give it wide berth. Yet at dawn that morning a diminutive sailboat had appeared at the center of The Plain. Painted on its side were “Go Navy” and proclamations asserting that Army should not prevail in the game. It disappeared soon enough, but it was clear that saboteurs had been at work under the stern gaze of bronzes depicting GEN George S. Patton Jr., General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower and other great generals—though GEN George Washington was spared the indignity of viewing the insult as his statue faces the cadet dining hall, from which thousands of cadets streamed after the traditional Spirit Dinner toward the small athletic field and another boat.

That boat was bigger than the pranksters’ craft, though not by much, and it was about as seaworthy: not at all. Boldly painted on its side was “Go Army”



During a final practice at West Point’s indoor training facility, Army offensive coordinator and quarterback coach Ian Shields watches players walk through plays for the game.

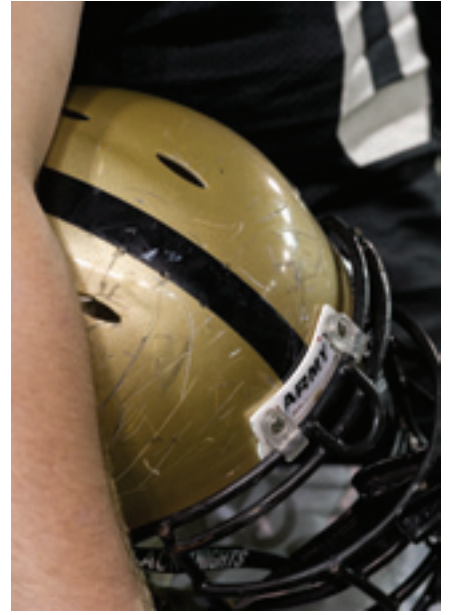
Cadets watch the blaze.



West Point cheerleaders add to the fanfare at the bonfire site.



Left, Cadet Katherine Deaton hoses down one of West Point's iconic mule mascots in preparation for a final bleaching of the "A" before the mascots were transported to the game. Right, Cadet Victoria Walling masks off the letter. Both cadets are members of the academy's "Mule Riders" section, a highly selective squad that shares responsibility for tending the mules with soldiers assigned to West Point's veterinary detachment.



A scarred helmet attests to Army's hard-fought season.

Army football head coach Rich Ellerson focuses on a play during practice.



Left, the “Beat Navy Tunnel” is a year-round reminder on the West Point campus. Below, supporters of the “Goats” (bottom half of the academic class) female football team cheer in the stands at the Goats versus “Engineers” (upper half) game, among traditional events leading up to the Army-Navy game.

with “Beat Navy” smeared on its makeshift sail, and it was to be burned on a pyre of pallets.

The traditional boat-burning was the final event in pregame activities conducted at West Point and the send-off for the team, which boarded buses as the fire died down and onlookers cheered.

As it turned out, Navy won the 2010 game 31 to 17 and chalked up its ninth consecutive victory over Army, but let’s not dwell on that—or mention it again. It must be noted, however, that Army went on to claim victory in the



Cadet Kenneth Robertson, drum major of the Pipes and Drums of the Corps of Cadets, holds the leader’s mace as the pipers and drummers form a cordon.



Above, players vie for a pass during Goats versus Engineers play. Right, a Goat takes a hit from an Engineer after a good gain. The women’s teams play a contact form of flag football; the men’s teams play full contact in pads and helmets.





Cadet Katie Merrick of West Point's Spirit Band plays during the Spirit Luncheon staged for faculty and guests, an on-campus event leading to the Army-Navy game.

U.S. Military Academy Superintendent LTG David H. Huntoon Jr., wearing his Army athletic letter, speaks during the Spirit Luncheon.



The U.S. Military Academy Corps of Cadets stand in formation on the field as part of the traditional Army-Navy game march-on, which precedes the game.



Right, a member of the U.S. Army's Golden Knights parachute team prepares to land on the playing field during Army-Navy pregame festivities at Philadelphia's Lincoln Financial Field. Below, West Point players hold their helmets high in salute during the opening kickoff.



Ssg Salvatore A. Giunta, recent Medal of Honor recipient, salutes during the Army-Navy game pregame activities.



U.S. Army Chief of Staff GEN George W. Casey Jr. joins Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen on the field to honor both teams.

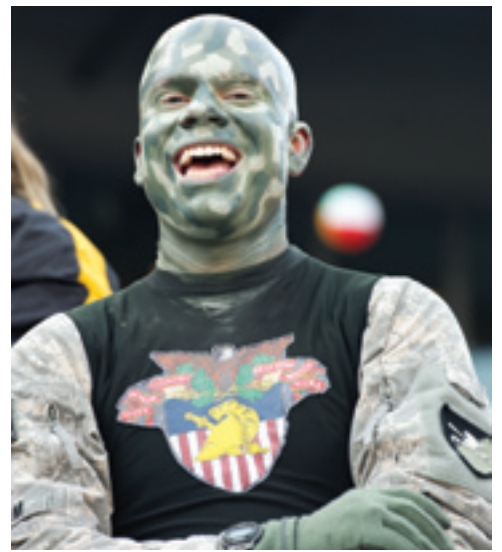


Before the game, Army football players touch a plaque bearing GEN George C. Marshall's words.



Armed Forces Bowl in the post season, beating Southern Methodist University 16-14.

The actual score shrinks in importance relative to its positive outcome for Army because we have it on unassailable authority from across the West Point campus by various observers and experts (all donned in Army gold and black, though that should not make their views less authoritative) that West Point *always* prevails in the degree of spirit, the variety and worthiness of the game's run-up activities, the Corps of Cadets' military precision during the game's "march on," the quality of mascots and uniforms (both athletic and military), enthusiasm in the stands, and, it's whispered, also in congeniality, class, cleanliness and the ability to attract mates—all areas of merit not related to the unfortunate circumstances of



Above, cadets cheer in the stands. Above right, Cadet Grant Durham dons the guise of "A-Man," one of West Point's spirit mascots.

unrequited scoring aspirations in a particular contest (lest it be to Army's advantage, which should then be trumpeted—repeatedly and bombastically). That is to say, Army supporters see things in proper perspective (so they assert—repeatedly and bombastically).

Evidence that can be weighed and measured is presented here in photographs taken during pregame activities at the U.S. Military Academy and at the 2010 Army-Navy game, the 111th football contest between the Black Knights and Midshipmen.



During play: Left, an Army runner struggles for yardage. Below, in the pivotal play of the game, Navy defensive back Wyatt Middleton snatches the football from Army quarterback Trent Steelman and runs 98 yards for a Navy score.



The Black Knights' spirit arsenal includes a firing section.





West Point's Black Knight.

West Point cheerleaders perform a balancing act for the Army-Navy game crowd.



The Corps of Cadets cheerleaders' megaphones sport the motto "All for the Corps."



Cadets look on as time runs out on the Black Knights during the 2010 Army-Navy game.