

Lt. Colonel Robert Curtis Plaine



Robert Curtis Plaine was born in Norristown, Pa. on June 6, 1912 to John R. Plaine (b. 1882) and Sadie Valentine (b. 1885) and lived there until he joined the Army at the age of 18. He lost his mother as a teenager and was left to live with his father with whom he became very close. He remained very close to his father until he died. He was very much like his dad and his dad was very proud of him.

Not much is known about Robert Plaine until he entered the army during the depression as there were no jobs. He went to army prep school to get in to West Point. The army sent him to Hawaii but unfortunately when he got

there they determined he was too old for West Point. He was later assigned to Ft. George T. Meade.

It was Christmas and Sgt. Robert C Plaine was going home to Norristown Pa. from his duty station at Ft. George T. Meade in Maryland. A young soldier named Jim Hardebaugh asked him if he would give him a ride part of the way to his home in Rouserville, Pa. Plaine offered the young man a ride part of the way home. As they rode along Plaine changed his mind and took the young man all the way home. Nobody knows why Plaine changed his mind that day but it set off a series of events that would affect Plaine's life until the day he died December 28, 1998.

Plaine arrived at the young man's home and went inside to introduce himself. There he met Adeline Hardebaugh, his future wife. He was four years older than her. She was 18 (born May 1918). She says they fell in love right away having their first date on the eve of Easter. They were also married on the eve of Easter four years later. The date was April 12 1941

When Pearl Harbor happened Addie didn't want to marry if Plaine stayed in service. Plaine tried to get out of the service on an early out

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- which you could apply for back then. He was denied. He got commission because of Pearl Harbor and staying in the service. He went to Ft. Benning Ga and went to many schools while there.

He went to many schools as enlisted man and got educated as he would have at Officer Candidate School (OCS). He received his commission at Ft. Benning. When he got tot Ft. Benning there was no place for an enlisted man to stay. All the hotels and motels were full as were the people who rented out rooms in their private homes. He then, out of frustration stopped at a local business and asked for help. Did anyone know of a room for rent? A man told him of a possible room but when he got there it was rented.

The family called a friend of theirs and told them the Plaine's needed help. Now you have to know that America felt much differently about service men than they do today. The new family agreed to help them even to the point of removing their son from his bedroom!

He went then to Macon Ga. He wanted Addie to stay when behind when he went to California. H went across the bay from San Francisco and ran into the same situation on housing! Their housing market was overtaken by the workers in the factories making the implements of war. The military was much unprepared for a war and had to play catch up on all things military. They trained with wooden guns because there were no guns.

Mrs. Plaine stayed in a hotel only seeing Col. Plaine on Sunday for church and dinner. She eventually told Plaine that she has to leave if she didn't find something to do. After all she was alone in a hotel with no friends or family around her. She saw in a newspaper advertisement that a family needed someone to care for a child during the day while the mother went to work in one of the war factories. The father of the young boy was the editor of the local newspaper. They worked varied hours and needed help with childcare. She went to love with them in Pittsburgh California.

She agreed she would take all her meals outside the home as well as do laundry at the laundry mat. She had a room with no kitchen privileges. The lady of the house later relented because she liked Mrs. Plaine so much and cleared a portion of the refrigerator for her. The woman would eat and then when she went to work she would let Addie have the kitchen. She later let her use laundry telling Adie that it was too far and inconvenient for her to go all the way to the laundryman. Addie would clean the lady's house for her everyday so she would

have less to worry about each day when she came home. Addie wasn't required to do this but did it just to help the lady out. Her son was named Bobby and one day he tore a flower off of his mother's favorite plant and gave it to Addie. At 92 she still remembers that today.

Eventually a man in Plaine's outfit told Plaine that his wife was coming home and he was giving up his place to live also in Pittsburgh. The Plaines then moved.

Southern California (Mrs. Plaine doesn't remember where) the next place for them to go while Plaine waited his assignment overseas. Mrs. Plaine decided to go home while Plaine went overseas. She and a high school friend Ilene Ireland a schoolteacher in a one room school wanted to drive home to Rouserville Pa. Plaine was opposed to this because gas was rationed and there wasn't much of it and he was afraid they would be stuck somewhere with no gas. He wanted them to take the train. Addie persisted that they would be all right and they drove home with Plaine's blessing.

Plaine went to Alaska when he came back from overseas Plaine was in Baltimore and then Philadelphia at the Philadelphia Depot where he stayed for 2-3 years before moving to the Columbus Depot in Ohio for four years, the longest of his military career. Plaine was assigned to Alaska next on a three year assignment that didn't last the entire time.

Again he found that there were not enough quarters for him and Addie. He said it would be a year till he got his beloved Addie there and he wanted her there sooner. So he bought a little house and fixed it up.

When Plaine moved in he had no water. They spent a fortune in drilling wells that came up dry. For many months he hauled water for them to bathe and perform normal tasks. He built utility room and redid the bathroom and got all the painting done when the army said to move again. They rented the house to someone as a summer cabin only so they could keep the house as an investment. Only to have the house destroyed by the people he rented it to. Mrs. Plaine remembers that they had put down new limeoleum and they had destroyed it.

Plaine was assigned to the army air force while in Alaska. Then the air force was part of the army and not a separate unit. The army told Plaine he was in a mission critical position and did he want to transfer

to the new air force that was being formed. He declined the transfer. In those days army officers were bonded for their duties.

He then went to Ft. Lee Virginia just outside of Hopewell-Petersburg from Alaska. When he got there this time he had no housing issues but he did have training issues. (In recent years Ft. Lee has been a commissary for the army). When he got there they found he already had the training that he was sent there for. Remember, Plaine took every educational opportunity the army offered.

He bought house in Ft. Lee and moved his mother-in-law and Addie's 12 year younger sister in with them. When Plaine's duty station changed again his mother-in-law said she couldn't take the nomadic

lifestyle and she and her daughters went back home to Pennsylvania. The Plaine's were away from each other again.

He was then transferred to Korea during the war and ETS (Ended Tour Of Service) from there. He was devastated that at the end of the conflict the army medically discharged him from the service due to back problems. Plaine went to live in Pa. with Addie and her folks.

While he was staying with her folks he was accepted to an electrical school of engineering out in a western state. Addie asked him to please reconsider. He had been away from his dear father all these years. She also wanted them to get a home and settle down. Addie loved army life but now it was time to settle down. He waited a few months and decided to go to school at York College to become a CPA.

He bought a home overlooking a schoolyard and a big back yard. The Plaine's were finally settled. Or Not. The president of a large business hired him to be his accountant.

One day while at home Addie opened the retired officers magazine that regularly came in the mail. Now she didn't even bother to look at them when they came in but this one day she did. To this day she doesn't know why she picked up the magazine, or more importantly, why she turned to the classifieds in the back. But she did and she noticed an advertisement for a military academy in Waynesboro Va. for a good military man. She thought since they came from the Waynesboro Pa. area it was an omen to go to Waynesboro Va.

When Plaine came home she asked him to look at the advertisement and give her his thoughts on it. He told her the magazine had

probably been out for months and the job had long been filled. She told him it would be perfect for him and asked him to apply. She remembers getting a call from the school right away. They packed up the car and drove to Waynesboro Va. to Fishburne Military Academy to see the president of the school. He was so impressed with Plaine that he told him as far as he was concerned the job was his. He told him, "You are the man for the job". Plaine and Addie were preparing to move to Virginia.

But it was not to be. But it was to our advantage even though it was disturbing at the time. One day call came while he was at work from the president of the military academy. He said that he didn't know how to tell him that he did not get the job. A former cadet lobbied for the job and over the objection of the president he was given the job. The president told Plaine if it was up to him, he would have the job. He was very sorry. Plaine resigned himself to the job in New York.

Plaine Comes To Frederick

One day Mr. Blanchard called Plaine from Frederick Military College in Portsmouth Virginia. Blanchard has been spiking with the president of Fishburne Military Academy about his need for a military instructor for a new school he is starting. He is looking for a good military man for the school. The president of Fishburne immediately recommends Plaine. He left for the interview right away. He met with Willard J. Blanchard, the first president of Frederick College. Addie and Col. Plaine didn't think anything of campus. It was in really bad shape. They use to let other organizations use barracks in summer. To hear Mrs. Plaine tell it, "we weren't a bit impressed by the school".

Blanchard really got along with Col. Plaine and they talked and talked. Blanchard told them that Fred Beazley had already purchased Nansmond Depot on the water in Nansemond County (now Suffolk) from the government and was going to move the school there.

Beazley, who was never in the military, was fascinated by West Point and dreamed of building a smaller version of the military academy. Nansmond Depot was on the water like West Point. Beazley's dream was about to be realized. Blanchard talk the Plaine's into staying by telling him it won't always be like this.

Beazley decided Tidewater needed a community college and gave the land away to the State of Virginia. The college would move there for

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severs years but the newly formed high school would remain at 1801 Portsmouth Boulevard.

Plaine went back to York, packed his house, and left his job on short notice. His employer was quite angry at the notice but Plaine had to go now.

He joined FMA in the military department and became Commandant in 1969 following Col. Floyd H. West. The first FMA Commandant was Henry H. Church who had an assistant, William H. Angel for one year.

Col. Plaine did not leave FMA again until he was 68.

Plaine came home one night in 19XXXXXX and told Addie, "Guess what I did tonight Addie? I called my officers together tonight and resigned. I'm burned out."

But the Plaine era was not over just yet. He remained on campus for a short while sort of in an advisory capacity but then they hired a TAC officer and the Plaine's had to move out of their quarters. He got a mobile home and he asked the Board if he could live on campus behind the bleachers over at the "country club" (for you later cadets, we used to call the area by the new gym the "country club" when it had four dormitories there.)

Board acted and said he could stay. But Justice Ianson was away when they took this action. When Ianson came back he said no. The board felt he was owed that much. The Plaine's were leaving FMA.

He was deviated over leaving FMA. I don't know if it was the way it was handled or the fact he was leaving his extended family after all these years or both. Plaine refused to talk about it even to Addie. Addie remembers being in her quarters the day they gave Plaine his last Pass in Review and crying, wondering what it nuts have felt like for Plaine. He felt like we were his kids and he only wanted the best for us, being disappointed in us when we failed and happy when we did well.

Plaine got into his Uhaul with his wife and his sister and brothers in law and left that day.

EPILOGUE

Most people thought he had cancer because he had lost so much weight. He didn't have cancer but diabetes had done quite a number on his body. He had a hard time getting up to open door when someone came over. He was put in hospital for diabetes during this time.

He was a newspaper reader and would read three history books at a time. He loved civil war books especially becoming something of an expert which explains his association with Maj. George Gelbach, a teacher who also loved the civil war and was a Lutheran minister.

Plaine was an avid woodworker building many things for his home here and in Pennsylvania. When they first moved to York he built her a stepladder, hutches tables, stools, mirror shelves. He loved to create and build but not repair. He made 30 stools for teachers at FMA. Addie remembers that he would see a stool in a magazine and go to his workshop and make it.

One day after Col. Plaine died Mrs. Plaine came across a little box that was really heavy and had a huge lock on it. She remembers thinking it was nothing special because he had locks on everything. She put it away and forgot about it until one day when her sister came over with her husband. He had a number of these little metal containers with big locks on them hidden throughout the house.

She brought it out and they took it home and opened it. They were surprised to find that it held three 10 dollar gold pieces and 11 one ounce bars! He had purchased them during the Falkland war with Great Britain.

Col. Plaine used his own pistols for competition in the pistol club at FMA. He had to buy his own pistols and his favorite pistol had a white handle. He used it extensively. Frederick did not purchase any of the pistols for the boys. They did purchase the Cooley rifles we used on the range but did not buy the pistols.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Plaine was robbed a couple of years ago while she was in a nursing rehab center. Many things were stolen by home health aides and others. Plaine's army ring was stolen. It was promised to Cadet Bill Wideman but he never got it. The white handled pistol was stolen as were new bed linens any money. Mrs. Plaine was very upset that people she trusted had done this to her. She is a very devout woman and believes that all people are good. Cpl. Plaine left her financially secure.

Frederick invited the Plaines review the troops after they left. However they were never invited by the president or the commandant to stay with them on campus. This slight was not unnoticed by the Plaines. They ended up staying with Bob and Jeanette Doerr in their quarters.

Mrs. Plaines nephew Billy Berlin went to Frederick in 1961 and was part of a group caught drinking beer, although he said he only took a swig. He was busted with all the other cadets. This was somewhat close to graduation and Plaine gave them their rank back at the graduation ceremony.

Similarly in the Class of 1972 we went out at midnight a couple of nights before graduation and stole everybody's hats who were not seniors. We had one person per hall that took all the non-seniors hats and put them in a trash bag and placed them on the steps of the chow hall so seniors were the only people with headgear in the morning. Col. Plaine busted all of us and suspended us from school (albeit an in school suspension). He also banned us from the graduation ceremony and from graduating. We were scared to death. By the way, to this day there was one cadet who was a muckhatter who never got caught. His name was...oh come on you know I'm not going to tell. On the Friday before graduation Col. Plaine let us all off the hook.

The academy closed 3 years after he left. He was heartbroken, the academy was Plaines life. He still kept up with what was going on because cadets would write him letters.

Col. Plaine had Parkinson's disease and began losing weight rapidly and he became very tired. Mrs. Plaine stayed 8 to 8 when Plaine went to nursing home. The insurance company made him leave and the nurses cried when he left. He told Addie the next day, "I've never had a night like this." Plaine loved his sister-in-law Lucille but couldn't talk to her when she called.

On Plaines last visit to the hospital they wanted to keep so he could be comfortable until he died. The doctor insisted he stay. Addie insisted that Col. Plaine die at home and she had hospice come in. Col. Plaine died December 28, 1998 in Waynesboro Pa. The hospice nurse and Lutheran services still come to visit Addie on a regular basis.

Col. Plaine was in a wheelchair until he died and couldn't swallow or talk and Addie had to put food in blender.

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The old green and brown car that we in the late sixties and seventies were familiar with was wrecked one summer in Pa. He would go up to Ft. Ritchie to get medical care and would drive to be picked up by a military vehicle and be taken to treatment. One day he came home and told Addie, "I wrecked the car today on way to Gettysburg." This was after they left Ft. Ritchie he gave some guys a ride and wrecked the car. He came home with an unknown gentleman who drove him home and told her it was totaled.

Col. Plaine spent all his summers at his home in Waynesboro and was a camp counselor at Camp Comet. He continued at Camp Comet even after he retired from Frederick. It was a camp for Jewish boys and he loved being there. They must have loved too as they named a trail after him on the property. The camp has been sold but the trail is still there. When we went to the camp (which is about a mile and a half from his house) they still knew who he was.

I visit Addie every couple of months and although she is mostly blind and hard of hearing she still gets around pretty good. We take her to get a plant for Col. Plaines grave and take her out to the cemetery. We don't suspect she gets there much. She becomes very emotional when visiting and tells him she wants to be with him. We always take her to lunch at her favorite restaurant and she tells us every time she is not hungry, then she proceeds to order soup, three salads - chicken, ham, and tuna, and vegetables and desert.

We usually get there about 11:30 and leave about seven and she is very distressed when we leave. We sit for hours on her log cabin's porch and just talk about the old days.

Addie is very lonely and Bill Wideman and I keep in touch with her, but she would love to hear from other cadets. You can call her after 6:00 pm in the winter and 8:30 pm in the summer. She sits on the porch every day until it becomes dark and she goes in for the night where she can hear the phone.

You CANNOT write to her as she just puts the mail into a bag until we come to read it to her.

Addie Plaines Phone Number 717-762-8304 please call her even if you only talk for a minute.

From the Book

"Frederick Military Academy: Knowledge – Truth- Valor"

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