

TROUBLE AT WEST POINT – 45 YEARS AGO AND IN 2020
AND THE COAST GUARD ACADEMY

NEW BOOK PULLS BACK CURTAIN ON THE 1976 WEST POINT CHEATING SCANDAL
WITH OTHER INFORMATION ON CHEATING AT THE OTHER SERVICE ACADEMIES

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Cadets form up on the campus at West Point. A new book is shedding light on a cheating scandal at the institution 45 years ago. (Army)



JUL 13, 2021

The release of a new book, one coming on the heels of the 2020 cheating scandal that shook the United States Military Academy at West Point, is offering new perspectives on another cheating controversy that ensnared cadets at the institution 45 years ago.

“Choosing the Harder Right” tells the story of Cadet Timothy Ringgold, who stood up to senior leadership at his beloved school and aided fellow cadets during the infamous 1976 West Point cheating scandal.

Ringgold was a year away from graduating in 1976, when he and other cadets were selected at random to meet with then-Under Secretary of the Army Norman R. Augustine. Each was questioned about a scandal involving 153 upperclassmen who resigned or were expelled for cheating on an electrical engineering exam. The secretary of the Army went as far as appointing a select commission headed by former astronaut Frank Borman to review the case. By the end of the ordeal, more than 90 of those caught cheating were reinstated and allowed to graduate.

While Ringgold was not directly involved in any violation, he believed the institution’s honor system was “not fairly administered.”

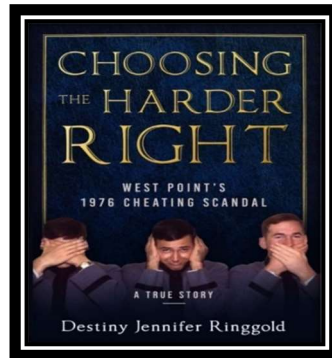
“I thought it was a bunch of nonsense,” Ringgold told Military Times, explaining what he told Augustine during the 1976 meeting. “In my opinion the cadets who were involved did no more or less than we all have done. Cadets are only human, cadets make mistakes. This just did not seem to me to be an incident worth making a crisis out of.”

As news spread of the 1976 incident, which was considered the largest cheating scandal in service academy history, Ringgold called for outside assistance, going as far as asking Arizona Republican Senator Barry Goldwater for an impartial investigation.

In doing so, Ringgold became the de facto spokesperson for the accused cadets.

"West Point clearly lost its way in the 1970s," he said. "I think the changes that have occurred since have made West Point the very strong institution that it is."

Ringgold faced expulsion for his stance, but would go on to graduate in 1977 after West Point dropped all charges following the discovery *of "new evidence" that implied cheating was far more widespread than West Point leadership suggested.*



Choosing the Harder Right was released on July 12, 2021. Above, the cover of the book.

Today, Ringgold, who would go on to enjoy a distinguished career at the Pentagon, Capitol Hill and the White House, said he hopes the information in this book will be a reminder of what it takes to keep an institution in check.

"Every revered institution like the military academy can have flaws and lose its way," he said. "If there's not a constant vigilance to make sure you're on the right path ... then history will repeat itself and we will have the chaos and confusion and disappointment we had so many years ago."



Cadet Ringgold was one year away from graduating when the West Point cheating scandal rocked the institution

DISCOVERING THE UNTOLD STORY

Author Destiny Jennifer Ringgold, the subject's daughter, was unaware of her father's story or role in the scandal until discovering following a recent online search of his name.

"I was in the process of doing a sequel to my first book and I knew [my father] had a complex relationship with West Point," she told Military Times. "It really took my breath away because I didn't understand the history behind the story until I sat down with my dad and asked him."

Despite his daughter's newfound curiosity, Ringgold initially ignored her queries, telling Military Times that the story is one he would have never written himself.

"I'm very much at peace with what my role was," he said. "I have no regrets about the stand I took, but that doesn't mean I want to relive it."

Eventually, however, Ringgold acquiesced to his daughter's inquiries.

"I think this is an important part of West Point history," Destiny Ringgold said. "This was a dark period but I knew there was a lot of good that came out of it."

The book's title, meanwhile, comes from an excerpt from the *Cadet Prayer*. (See below)

"Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half-truth when the whole can be won."

THE ENTIRE CADET PRAYER



O God, our Father, Thou Searcher of Human hearts, help us to draw near to Thee in sincerity and truth. May our religion be filled with gladness and may our worship of Thee be natural.

Strengthen and increase our admiration for honest dealing and clean thinking and suffer not our hatred of hypocrisy and pretense ever to diminish. Encourage us in our endeavor to live above the common level of life. Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half-truth when the whole can be won.

Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy.

Guard us against flippancy and irreverence in the sacred things of life. Grant us new ties of friendship and new opportunities of service. Kindle our hearts in fellowship with those of a cheerful countenance and soften our hearts with sympathy for those who sorrow and suffer.

Help us to maintain the honor of the Corps untarnished and unsullied and to show forth in our lives the ideals of West Point in doing our duty to Thee and to our Country.

All of which we ask in the name of the Great Friend and Master of all. AMEN

The sentiment also explains why Ringgold stood up to West Point leadership.

"We were all fighting for the same thing," he said. "We all believed in the honor code and we wanted standards; it was just a difference of how we got there."

Even though "Choosing the Harder Right" is based on his own story, Ringgold, whose father and older brothers also served, wants readers to know that the story remains bigger than him.

"The real story here is how a lot of people came together and were willing to sacrifice their career to put values [first]," said Ringgold, *acknowledging the West Point-graduate attorneys, the chaplain and officers who fought alongside him.*

“They all sacrificed their careers in order to force West Point to correct the ills of the time, so that it [could] become the world class institution that it remains today.”

PART B

MORE THAN 70 WEST POINT CADETS ACCUSED OF CHEATING ON EXAM



*In this **June 13, 2020**, photo, President Donald Trump, left, and the United States Military Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. Darryl A. Williams, right, salute graduating cadets as the national anthem is played during commencement ceremonies in West Point, N.Y.*

AP Associated Press

DEC 21, 2020

WEST POINT, N.Y. — More than 70 cadets training at the U.S. Military Academy to be Army officers have been accused of cheating on a math exam taken online when they were studying remotely because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Lt. Col. Christopher Ophardt, spokesman for the academy at West Point, said Monday that 73 cadets were accused of cheating on the calculus exam in May after instructors noticed irregularities in answers. ***All but one were freshmen, or plebes, in a class of 1,200. The other was a sophomore.***

“West Point honor code and character development program remains strong despite remote learning and the challenges brought by the pandemic,” Ophardt said. “Cadets are being held accountable for breaking the code.”

After an investigation by an honors committee made up of trained cadets, two cases were dropped for lack of evidence and four were dropped because the cadets resigned, Ophardt said. Of the remaining 67 cases, 55 cadets have admitted cheating and have been enrolled in a six-month rehabilitation program focused on ethics. ***They will be on probation for the rest of their time at the academy. Three more cadets admitted cheating but weren’t eligible for the rehabilitation program.***

The remaining cadets accused of cheating face administrative hearings to determine if they’ve violated the honor code and recommend penalties, which could include expulsion.

The cheating scandal is the biggest at West Point since 1976, when 153 cadets resigned or were expelled for cheating on an electrical engineering exam. ***The 1976 case is considered more serious, Ophardt said,***

because it was upperclassmen who planned, collaborated and executed the cheating. "The whole system broke down," Ophardt said. In the 1976 cheating scandal, the secretary of the Army appointed a select commission headed by former astronaut Frank Borman to review the case and more than 90 of those caught cheating were reinstated and allowed to graduate, Ophardt said.

PART C

31 PEOPLE CHARGED IN ALLEGED COAST GUARD TEST SCORE FIXING SCHEME

MORE THAN 30 PEOPLE ARE ACCUSED OF PARTICIPATING IN A TEST SCORE-FIXING SCHEME AT A UNITED STATES COAST GUARD EXAM CENTER IN LOUISIANA



[11/24/20](#)

The U.S. Attorney's Office announced that 31 individuals were indicted for their involvement in the plot, in the middle of which, according to prosecutors, was Dorothy Smith, a former credentialing specialist at an exam center in Mandeville.

Smith's position authorized her to enter scores for examinations that merchant mariners are legally required to pass to obtain licenses to serve in various positions on ships, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana said in a statement released on Monday.

The U.S. Attorney's Office alleges Smith used "a network of intermediaries to connect her to maritime workers who were willing to pay for false exam scores." The intermediaries would then funnel the bribe money and the mariners' requests to her and she would falsely report in a Coast Guard computer system that the mariners had passed the exams, according to the statement.

"This resulted in the applicants illegally obtaining a range of licenses for officer-level positions, including the most important positions on vessels, such as master, chief mate, and chief engineer," the release says.

Two former Coast Guard employees and four maritime industry workers are accused of acting as intermediaries for Smith, with the industry workers also having their own scores fixed by Smith. She and the six accused intermediaries were charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States.

In addition, 24 current and former merchant mariners were charged with unlawfully receiving officer-level licenses.



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