

Two Graduates Killed in the Gulf War

The Institute lost two of its graduates, Major Thomas C.M. Zeugner '76, USA, and First Lieutenant Terry L. Plunk '88, USA, in the Gulf War. A service in their memory was held at VMI on Palm Sunday, March 24, 1991. The American flags which were flown on Post at half staff following word of their deaths were presented at the Memorial Service to Major Zeugner's brother, John Zeugner, and to Lieutenant Plunk's mother, Doris Plunk.

Major Thomas C.M. Zeugner '76, USA

Thomas Carlyle Morris Zeugner '76, a major in the U.S. Army, was killed in action in February 1991 while serving with an explosives unit in the XVIII Airborne Corps during Operation Desert Storm. He was 36 years old and was the commander of the 543rd Explosive Ordnance Disposal Control Center, which consisted of ten ordnance disposal units. He had been in Saudi Arabia since early December.

Prior to going to Saudi Arabia, he was based at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he oversaw bomb disposal units in eight states. He was often chosen to accompany U.S. officials to check for bombs on their overseas trips, and in the late 1970s he traveled to Israel with President Carter.

He had served in Korea and Turkey. While stationed in California, he taught military science at San Bernardino College.

Major Zeugner matriculated at VMI from Petersburg, Virginia, after graduating from Fork Union Military Academy in 1972. He held a bachelor of arts degree in English from VMI. He was a member of the varsity swimming team for four years, and served as the team's co-captain with Langhorne H. Meem II '76 during his first class year. He won All-Southern Conference honors in the breaststroke events and held a varsity record in the 200 meter breaststroke which stood for ten years. He was a four-year member of the Monogram Club.

His swimming coach, Dr. Arnold W. Joyce, recalled that as co-captain of the swimming team, Major Zeugner "worked hard and

made everyone toe the mark. He had a way of talking to people that motivated them."

A popular cadet, he was known for his sense of humor and free spirit. Colonel Michael S. Harris, head of the modern languages department who also announces home swim meets, said of him, "Like all breaststroke swimmers, he had an off-beat sense of humor. He was full of life and a practi-



Zeugner '76

cal joker of sorts. He will be missed."

His Brother Rat, Howard A. Curle, Jr., said, "...he was a character. He wore gold tennis shoes to class for almost a year before they caught him being out of uniform. Everyone assumed something was wrong with his feet and he had permission from the infirmary. He let them assume it."

In addition to his degree from VMI, Major Zeugner held a master of science degree from Troy State University. He held the Meritorious Service Medal and two awards of the Army Commendation Medal.

He is survived by his mother, Elizabeth Zeugner of Petersburg; and two brothers, John Zeugner and Robert Zeugner. His father was the late Robert Zeugner, a retired Marine Corps colonel.

A memorial service was held in Petersburg on March 4, 1991.

At the memorial service held at VMI on March 24, Major Zeugner's Brother Rat and former roommate, Kent R. Carrington, said, in part, "Many of you do not know Tom Zeugner. He kept his head down and did what VMI asked of him.

"Tom knew what he had to do and he just did it." Mr. Carrington said that his good friend's life was marked by "integrity, reliability, the absence of self-promotion, affection, respect and love of God."

He continued, "The special thing about Tom's life was it was not filled with a collection of 'could haves,' 'would haves,' or 'should haves.' He made a point of being with his family when he could. He relied on his friends."

First Lieutenant Terry L. Plunk '88, USA

Terry Lawrence Plunk '88, a first lieutenant in the 27th Engineer Battalion, 20th Engineer Brigade, XVIII Airborne Corps, was killed in action on February 26, 1991 during the allied ground offensive while his unit was clearing land mines near an airport on the outskirts of Kuwait City. He had celebrated his 25th birthday on February 23rd. Prior to going to the Gulf in August, he had served in Korea.

A civil engineering major at VMI, he wore academic stars during his entire cadetship. He rose to the rank of cadet captain and Regimental S-2 (academic officer) and was a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Engineering Society. During his first class year he was named the Marshall Award winner as the top-ranked Army ROTC cadet at VMI. He was commissioned in the U.S. Army at the time of his graduation from VMI by Major General J.H. Binford Peay III '62, USA, whose leadership as the commander of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) played such a pivotal role in the success of the Allied forces in the Gulf War.

At the time of Lieutenant Plunk's death, Colonel Donald K. Jamison '57, head of the civil engineering department, said, "He epitomized what VMI calls the citizen-soldier—there was no question about that...His academic record was exemplary."

In a March 6, 1991 editorial in the *Roanoke Times & World News*, Bob McLelland, who had known Terry Plunk in Vinton through their involvement in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, said, "I remember when Terry Plunk told me he was going to Virginia Military Institute. I thought to myself, 'what a great marriage.' If ever there was a man who was destined to become a Keydet, it was Terry Plunk."

When he graduated from VMI in 1988, Lieutenant Plunk

received the Society of the Cincinnati Medal, which is awarded by the faculty to the member of the graduating class who has most distinguished himself by efficiency of service and excellence of character throughout his cadetship. He also received the Society of American Military Engineers Award as the outstanding engineering major in the Army ROTC program; the Major General John A.B. Dillard '42 award as the outstanding graduate commissioned in the Army Corps of Engineers; the Civil Engineering Award, which recognizes top stand in the civil engineering curriculum over a four-year cadetship; the Colonel Earl L. Brown Award, which recognizes the Marshall ROTC Award recipient; and the Richard J. Marshall '15 and Sumter L. Lowry, Jr. '14 awards, both cash prizes given to the winner of the Cincinnati Medal. He was also named a member of Kappa Alpha.

Lieutenant Plunk, a native of Vinton, Virginia, was valedictorian of his class at William Byrd High School, where he graduated with a 4.0 average. He was vice president of his senior class, prom king and a member of the football, wrestling and soccer teams. He won the B'nai B'rith Award for outstanding accomplishments in academics, athletics and citizenship. His high school principal, Bob Patterson, said of him, "In 26 years here as principal at William Byrd, I've never had a better student. He was the tops."

Lieutenant Plunk was a member of Vinton Baptist Church, where he sang tenor in the choir and participated in church outreach activities.

He is survived by his mother, Doris Plunk of Vinton; and two sisters, Julie Plunk and Teresa Plunk Rogers. His father, Joe C. Plunk, an Appalachian Power Company executive, died in 1985.

Lieutenant Plunk's funeral was held on March 11, 1991 at Vinton Baptist Church. Interment was at Mountain View Cemetery in Vinton, with full military honors by an honor guard from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division.

On April 28th a dogwood tree was planted in his memory in

front of the Vinton War Memorial. Major General John W. Knapp '54, VMI's superintendent, escorted Mrs. Plunk to and from the ceremony, which was attended by W. Nathaniel Howell, the former U.S. Ambassador to Kuwait; Shaikh Saud Nasir Al-Sabah, the Kuwait Ambassador to the United States; and U.S. Senator John W. Warner. Ambassador Sabah told the spectators

that "Your loss is our loss." He called Terry Plunk "one of the greatest and most beloved sons of this city."

Following his remarks, Ambassador Sabah announced that his nation will give a financial gift to VMI in honor of Lieutenant Plunk and the over 400 other VMI alumni who were deployed to the Persian Gulf.

Gregory C. Gooch, the '88 class agent, spoke about Lieutenant Plunk at VMI's memorial service on March 24th. He said, "Terry was more than a soldier, scholar...and good Christian—he was a Brother Rat.

"Terry died doing what we always knew he would be doing—serving his country. As long as there is a remaining member of the class of 1988, he will always live in our hearts and minds."



Plunk '88