



Frederick Henry Detjen Co H-2

Former Classmate

Born – 4 May 1938, Springfield, IL.

To USMA – Came from Illinois. Appointed by Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen or Illinois 20th.

Died – 4 Oct 1963 (age 25) at San Gil, Columbia, South America. Buried at Springfield, IL.

Military Awards - Unknown

Schooling – Bachelor’s Degree in Engineering, Southern Illinois University.

Family – Unknown.

Contact – Janet Detjen Janssen (sister), Springfield, IL.

Fred joined the class of '61 and Company H-2 in Reorganization Week 1957 as a recognized Plebe from the class of 1960. He earned our respect by being 100% supportive of his new classmates while, at the same time, never saying anything or doing anything to undermine the authority of upperclassmen. Fred was always fun to be with and he had a marvelous sense of humor and an infectious love of life. Sadly, academics again caught up with him at the end of Second Class year and he left the Academy.

After graduation from Southern Illinois University, Fred joined the newly formed Peace Corps. After training, his group was assigned to Colombia, South America. During training, Fred’s leadership ability showed and he was designated as the group leader to oversee the work of volunteers throughout the state of Santandar del Sur. A fellow Peace Corps volunteer described Fred as a “natural leader” who was “filled with self-confidence – someone you looked up to.” When this volunteer learned that Fred had spent more than three years at West Point, he stated that Fred never once mentioned that he had been a West Pointer. Now the volunteer knows where Fred developed his leadership skills. He further described Fred as “friendly, supportive, and non-judgmental”. All of the volunteers looked forward to his visits and counsel. When he died, “there was a tremendous vacuum to be filled.”

On October 3, 1963, Fred spent the day meeting new volunteers, transporting them to their villages, and orienting them. At the end of the day, Fred was returning to Bacaramanga in a jeep driven by an associate. On a curve on a steep mountain road, Fred was thrown from the jeep. He was knocked out and never regained consciousness. Efforts to save his life were unsuccessful and he died the next morning. Fred’s volunteer replacement relates that wherever he traveled, the local people conveyed their warm feelings and love for Fred. The village of Santa Barbara built a school and mounted a plaque that reads - “This school was constructed in memory of Fred Detjen, Peace Corps Volunteer, who died 4 Oct 1963”. Fred’s trademark black boots were placed in the foundation of the school.