

Dan Abramowicz: Charles, it's great to see you again. Let me briefly introduce myself, I'm Dan Abramowicz from the Graduate School Class of 1984. That would be *84 in the Princeton vernacular. I've been very involved over the years with the APGA, probably for over 20 years, and I was the President of that organization for a while. And now I'm serving on the Princetoniana Committee and delighted to be working on this project on the History of the Marshals. I really appreciate your willingness to help me. And before we get started, would you please briefly introduce yourself for the audience?

Charles Plohn: Certainly. My name is Charles J. Plohn, Jr., Member of the Princeton Class of 1966 and an Honorary Member of the Great Princeton Class of 2016, which is the class of our grandchild.

Dan Abramowicz: That's very exciting. Congratulations for your grandchildren. How wonderful for you. So, to begin, could you please remind me of the years when were you a Grand Marshal in the P-rade?

Charles Plohn: Yes. I was the Grand Marshal for the P-rades of 2008 through 2012. I was initially appointed for a three-year term and then reappointed for an additional couple of years, an additional two years.

Dan Abramowicz: And I believe that became the norm for a while, a Grand Marshal term of about five years. But they have settled into a three-year term now, right?

Charles Plohn: Yes. Charlie Rose before me served a five-year term. And it was different lengths further back in time. I think the record is 17 years for a P-rade Grand Marshal, Frank Gorman, Jr. '41. Frank was the Grand Marshal for the 17 years before his passing in 1979 and for whom the mace carried by the Grand Marshals is named. But I think now they've settled it. And I think possibly as a result of my five-year term, they decided they weren't ever doing that again!

Dan Abramowicz: I'm sure that's not true! You earned a reputation as a very thorough and effective Grand Marshal! But that begs a question ... was there a particular reason they asked you to extend your term for two additional years? Was there a hole they were trying to fill? I'm just curious.

Charles Plohn: I'd like to think is that they liked what I did in the first three years. But, no, I'm not aware of any particular reason. By the way, I had been a Marshal for 18 years prior to becoming the Grand Marshal, going back from 1990, up through 2007. And during those 18 years I served in a variety of roles. As a rookie Marshal, obviously at the outset, or as Charlie Rose would like to say, "a lackey" when you first start. Then I was stationed with various Marshal groups along the route. I was a Division Marshal for a couple of years. I think today it is called an Area Captain. And then I served five years as a Flanking Marshal and one year as the first Point Marshal, which was another improvement Charlie Rose had made. And over that time, I was stationed at various locations along the route, sometimes near or alongside my Class of 1966. For example, I was

stationed on Front Campus, Cannon Green, the '79 Arch on Washington Road along Elm Drive and at the final position down on Poe Field in front of the Reviewing Stand or in the Dispersing Area. I had the privilege, if you will, of interacting with classes ranging from the Old Guard, through to the graduating seniors. And in terms of the enthusiasm of the crowd, I think those are the two groups that are the real tearjerkers. Then, after my term as Grand Marshal, and not having formally marched with my class for many years, I decided that it was time to get back and march with my class, which I've proudly done every year since. At at least every year when there's actually been a P-rade. And then in the last couple of years, when they went for the one-and-only, and hopefully never again, virtual P-rade, I played some minor cameo roles in the videos, introducing the P-rade.

Dan Abramowicz: Wow, that's an amazing Marshal resume. You point out a sacrifice that Marshals make that I hadn't appreciated. Charlie, you, and others who have done decades of service in this way, you don't get a chance to march with your class. That's an interesting point and a real sacrifice. And, as you described, you, like Charlie Rose, have been in almost every role possible as a Marshal, from Marshal to Line Marshal to Area Captain, as well as Grand Marshal. And I've seen pictures of you marching as a Flanking Marshal several times. And when I interviewed Charlie Rose, he mentioned the need for the Point Marshal and how he appointed you as the very first Point Marshal. It's fantastic how, over the years, you have done such great service for the university, but in particular, for the Marshals, in every possible capacity. I wanted to thank you for such remarkable service to the university.

Charles Plohn: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Dan Abramowicz: It's my pleasure. Now let's talk a little bit about the role of the Marshals. What do you see as their key function from your perspective?

Charles Plohn: I think in terms of looking at the role of the Marshals and their key function, it's important to look at the big picture, if you will. So the role of the Marshal Corps, in general, is more than the time during the approximately three and a half hour or so event during the P-rade. It's also important to look at the bigger picture. So Marshal service is basically part of a university wide planning and implementation process that starts immediately after the previous year's P-rade. And that event is to welcome back to campus 25,000 or more Princetonians and their families and friends for their reunion. So you have to look at the whole context of reunions, and within that the role the Marshals play. And it's important to recognize that, when considering those ~25,000 returning reunioners, the only event over the four-day period where virtually all of the returnees participate, is the P-rade.

It's also important to look up, and I apologize for my long winded answers to questions, but in the preparation, the lion's share, or, as I like to say in our case, the "tiger's share" of that planning and implementation, is done by Mibs Sutherland, Kim Collins, Dottie Werner, Cathy Phillips, and their colleagues in

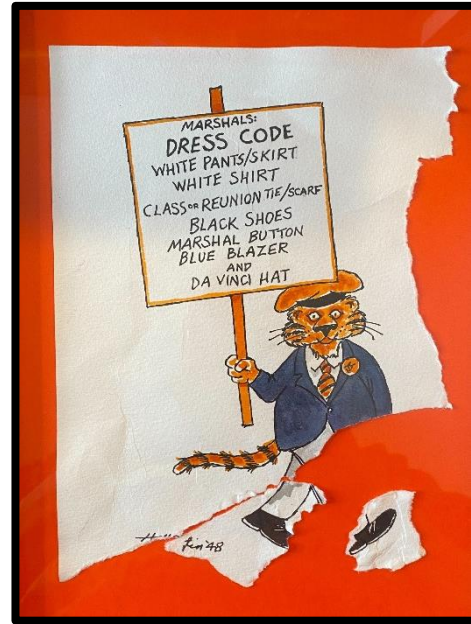
the Class Affairs and Reunions Group within alumni communications. During my tenure they were located in Maclean House. Now they're located in Maclean House and on Route One. Also actively involved in this planning, and once again this is from the big picture point of view, is what was called the P-rade Task Force, which was actually set up in 2008 or 2009. So the Task Force was created in either my first year or the start of my second year as Grand Marshal. In addition to Class Affairs, this Task Force includes the Grand Marshal and other on-campus departments, such as Grounds and Buildings Maintenance, Public Safety, Transportation and Parking Services and the Office of Communications. And in this year of planning, the primary purpose of the Task Force is to review the goals, results, and issues from the previous P-rade, and to consider the critical route, staging, control, and safety issues for the upcoming one. And as I mentioned, this process starts right after the end of the previous year's P-rade. Class Affairs reaches out to everybody, and the Grand Marshal reaches out to the Marshals to get their input ... what went right, what hit the fan, what do we need to change? So, while it's fresh in everybody's mind to get that input, it's important to realize that the most visible people in the P-rade are the other Marshals in their DaVinci hats scattered throughout the route. While the numbers have probably increased in recent years, during my tenure there were approximately 75 to 80 alumni Marshals in the P-rade, and on average that number included 15 – 17 rookies. So the team is large, with the Marshals (including first termers), about 40 to 45 Princeton University staff members from various departments, about a hundred other university staff members, plus over 300 undergraduates who play a role in various capacities. The undergraduates get involved in many different activities, whether it is decorating and driving of the golf carts, distributing and carrying banners and signs, greetings and assisting the Old Guard, working concession stands and events, and assisting in the critical dispersing area down at Poe Field, in providing public safety and cleanup. Obviously this effort ... and I've got to assume as the P-rade has gotten larger and larger, all of those numbers have increased.

And still approaching, but not having reached an answer to your question, I think it's important to understand that while each Grand Marshal that you interview has had his or her own style and approach, and possibly a different answer to this, my view on the duties of the Marshals goes along with the spirit captured in a wonderful old booklet that I probably have on my shelves right over there, called *Going Back: The Uniqueness of Reunions and P-rades at Princeton University*, written by William Sheldon of the Great Class of 1934 and illustrated by the wonderful Henry Martin of the Great Class of 1948. Bill has written a number of Princetoniana related books. Henry sadly passed away in mid-2020 and I believe that over the years every *New Yorker* cartoon that makes a reference to Princeton was done by Henry Martin.

Dan Abramowicz:

I appreciate your comments about how many other people are involved. You've given a great perspective on the level of effort. All of the staff and students that you've mentioned. So many people are needed to make it all happen.

Charles Plohn: Yes, it's a very big effort. Once again, the DaVinci hat makes the Marshal Corps the most visible part of the team, but it's part of an incredible university-wide effort. And I asked Henry Martin to do an illustration of the dress code for the Marshals, which he did. Here is the first copy he did. (image at right).



Dan Abramowicz: Oh, yes, that's a classic image. I remember seeing that image. Absolutely. Yes.

Charles Plohn: And the story behind this image that he was kind enough to do ... he sent it to me and truly my dog ate it. So this is his original drawing, dog eaten.

Dan Abramowicz: And retaped back together. I see you have salvaged the original as best as possible.

Charles Plohn: By the way, Henry was amused by the story and very graciously created a second very similar illustration and contributed it to the Marshals.

Getting back to the booklet, *Going Back*, there are a number of wonderful descriptive quotes in it. One is that "P-rades are unforgettable events: animated, boisterous, congenial, friendly, joyous, noisy, and spirited". And one alum who was quoted described Reunions and P-rades as "bedlam and brotherhood". And another one said, "Some things in life justify themselves emotionally without necessity for analytic reasoning". Now, in my view, once again, getting back to how each Grand Marshal has some input in it, that's the historical spirit that I think we should try to maintain.

But we just want that wonderful enthusiasm by individuals and classes waiting to enter the P-rade to be displayed alongside the route, not *on* the route itself, as other classes are trying to march through. During the P-rade, the role for the Marshals is to, quoting a traditional Princeton saying, "Clear the tracks", for the marchers, baby strollers, bands, golf carts, and floats, and to close any gaps between the marchers. This reminds me of a wonderful piece originally penned by Bob Rogers of the wonderful Class of '56, who was also a major contributor to the Princetoniana group, including assembling the various reunion jackets of all of the classes. In his P-rade Marshals' Marching Orders, Bob said, "the primary objective of the Marshals is to provide structure within the greater mission of joy and celebration for P-raders and spectators". So I view, and I think every other Grand Marshal has probably viewed that statement as the overriding goal. It's a balance, as you don't want to dampen the enthusiasm of

the participants. You want to channel it, if you will. And so, as I started to say, during the P-rade, the role of the Marshals is to clear the tracks for the marchers, the baby strollers, the bands, the golf carts, and the floats, and to close any gaps, among the classes as they march. But we also want people to enjoy themselves. Therefore, any approach or any interaction by the Marshals, where you want one of the spectators or the marchers to do, the approach should be cheerful, requesting and explanatory as to the safety, order, pace and deployment of the P-rade. However, of course, when you must, when it's necessary, there are times you do need to be firm and direct. The marching orders themselves, both the original and then the follow up piece, does go into the specific duties that the Marshals have both before, during, and after the P-rade.

Dan Abramowicz: That's great. And I love the sentiment that Bob Rogers described, the objective to create structure, while maintaining the objective of joy and celebration. So how do we help that boisterous crowd, as it was described, to have fun, but not to be in any danger or cause any other potential complications or issues? That's a great way to think about it. And sometimes that does require being firm and direct, as you so aptly described it.

Charles Plohn: And that's in the heat of battle. And often things learned in the heat of this three and a half hour or so battle, then get channeled into the conversation of what do we do next year type thing. And that, I think, leads up to the question, did the P-rade itself change during this time period?

Dan Abramowicz: Yes. But before you go into that, I just want to briefly build on what you've said. It is that spirit of continuous improvement ... that we're going to see what worked, we're going to see what didn't work, and we're going to try something different. Because we have to keep searching for ways to make it as effective as possible, particularly with the growing logistic challenges. And I know that you were involved in making some significant changes and improvements. I'd be fascinated to hear you talk about that.

Charles Plohn: OK, thank you. And to begin, please recognize in advance that there will always be difficult logistics coordinating some 25,000 plus people marching in the P-rade, and the increasingly large turn-out of all the younger classes and the 25th class, especially when we get back to in-person P-rades. During my tenure there were 1,500 attendees or more from the 25th class, including spouses, children and family members, and that number has ballooned up since then. And you're always going to have the challenges in a P-rade with what the Marshals call the "stroller brigades", or basically the classes of the 5th through the 15th, where there are many young kids, some in strollers and some marching. And in your history, you may want to look back at the time when only the classmates were allowed to march. And that was at a period when the classmates were all male, so men were the only ones who were marching in the P-rade. And then over the years they expanded who could march in the P-rade. And I can't imagine how that trend could ever be reversed. I mean, it would be a storming of the

capital... here it'd be the "storming of Old Nassau", if they tried to limit participation.

Dan Abramowicz: And the contrast is so striking to the past. Grand Marshal Hugh Fairman talked to me about how in the late '40s and the early '50s, the reunions were, as you said, just the classmates. And they were literally marching four abreast, almost like a military unit down the route. We are certainly far from that level of structure.

Charles Plohn: Yes. And that genie has marched down the road or flown down the road, or however genies transport themselves. So every year, analyzing a whole bunch of things, the two primary goals the committee comes up with is that you want a great event that is continuously enjoyable and entertaining for the marchers, the classes staged along the route, the spectators and the dignitaries in the reviewing stand. And every year a goal was set as to what a hopeful time period was to complete the P-rade. In my time, it was approximately 3 ½ hours. And to be honest, I'm not sure what that is today, but those are the two goals ... how do we maintain the enjoyment and control the timing.

And in terms of everyone's thinking on it, it's important to understand a couple of things. First is that there's a huge difference between an almost 3 ½ hour event filled with classes marching crisply, with continuous entertainment ... and the one example I will always go back to in terms of entertainment was the fantastic 65th reunion of the Great Class of 1944 with its WWII theme in 2009 ... there's a huge difference between that and a period of the same 3 ½ hour duration with large gaps among the marchers, and simply a sense of people just out on a leisurely Saturday afternoon stroll. That's in the same length of time, but two different reactions for everyone involved. And especially as a leisurely stroll tends to elongate the P-rade. And every year there have been changes, some strategic, and very more often what I would call fine tuning changes, either to the route, where the classes are staged, where the floats and carts are staged, as well as changes to the deployment and assignment of Marshals and other security personnel. And often these changes, especially changes to the route, are often directed by what construction is occurring on campus. I guess we'll have to see what happens with the on-going Art Museum construction and how that's going to impact the route itself and/or where classes get staged along the route.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes, and you've been involved in such changes. And changes to the staging of the classes is an interesting topic, particularly staging the 25th reunion class, which is typically the largest class.

Charles Plohn: By far.

Dan Abramowicz: By far. This class has been staged in several different places and during your tenure you were involved in some important changes to that location. Would you elaborate a little on that for me?

Charles Plohn:

In the 125+ years since 2,800 undergraduates and alumni took part in a mile long procession through campus and town in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the newly renamed Princeton University (1896) and all returning classes formally joined a decade-old tradition to march in order to the Princeton-Yale baseball game at Princeton on the Saturday before Commencement (1987)...and FitzRandolph Gate was installed (1905)...the event has transformed into the one-and-only Princeton University P-rade that it is today. Along the way, the P-rade route and the staging of the classes (especially the 25th) along the route have changed various times.

For many years, including in the 1990s, the 25th Class was staged sort of mid-campus, and, well before the formal start of the P-rade with the ringing of the bells on Nassau Hall at 2:00 p.m., the class would be funneled off campus near the U- Store onto University Place. And they'd march from University Place, then along Nassau Street, leading up to the class coming on to through Fitzrandolph Gate. That has of course changed over the years, as obviously it was becoming a challenge to get the larger 25th Class through the gate to have a 2 o'clock kickoff of the P-rade. You need a little head start to do that and so over the years the path was shortened.

And at one point, a couple of years before I became Grand Marshal, the 25th Class was staged on campus next to the First Presbyterian Church which fronts onto Nassau Street. So that route at that time was that the entire 25th class all marched out onto Nassau Street, to FitzRandolph Gate, and then through. But that funneling process would always create gaps. Therefore, one of the biggest strategic changes during my period was in response to all these previous efforts in terms of the increasingly large 25th Class and the longer P-rade times. And then in 2008, which was my first as Grand Marshal, there was a 15-minute delay to the start of the P-rade. This was due to weather concerns, as the Old Guard buses were late leaving the luncheon at Forbes College to get over to campus because there were concerns about the weather. The buses were further delayed as they got caught in traffic. Essentially the Princeton Police wouldn't let the buses go onto Nassau Street, to make a long story somewhat shorter. The late arrival of the Old Guard caused about a 15-minute delay in the start, as we made it clear to everybody that the P-rade could not start without the Old Guard in place. That's simply not going to happen. Also that year, the Princeton University Band, in part because they were trying to implement some changes, rather than playing their traditional routine down the route, the band decided they were going to incorporate different music as they went down the route tailored to the audience. So as they marched through the classes of the older classes, they played older songs. And as they went through the classes in the '90s, they tried to come up with some '90s music, and the music got younger and younger as they marched. And for some inexplicable reason, this elongated their walk down the route. So you had that years' 25th Reunion Class, and I will not mention the class numerals, but if you look at Nassau Hall, the top guy there is a member of that class and an honorary member of '66! When these delays resulted in the class taking almost 45 minutes from when they entered the P-rade to walk the route and to go past the reviewers.

In fairness to them, the Old Guard buses and the band all contributed to the problems. So our reaction in 2009, really our primary focus, was on speeding the path of the 25th Reunion Class. Therefore, the decision was then made to stage them on Front Campus for the first time. As a result, only the class banner and some of the class leadership would march through Fitzrandolph Gate along with the Vanguard Marshals, comprised of the Grand Marshal, the Flanking Marshals, the Point Marshal, and the Princeton University Band. So, in 2009 only a handful of individuals staged next to the First Presbyterian Church for the short walk to come in through FitzRandolph Gate. The result of this staging decision, which obviously I would put in terms of one of the critical changes, if you will, was to reduce the marching time of the 25th Class along the route from 45 minutes to 20 minutes. So that change was important for a couple of reasons, not just simply to reduce their time marching, but also in terms of the P-rade, as the 25th Class sets the pace for the whole P-rade. You were talking about your conversation about what happened in the '40s, when it was only classmates four abreast marching and such changes spill over into others. That's the good news among strategic changes.

Another strategic change during my tenure was actually triggered during that same 2009 P-rade, when all of us there were cheering the 25th Class, crisply marching. We were high fiving each other at a great celebration, we did it, we aced that... then all hell broke loose at the other end of the route. The chaos came from the staging era, from the 10th Reunion Class down through the seniors on Elm drive. As I like to say, the record turnouts and unbounded enthusiasm really spilled out onto the P-rade route itself and the coming onto the P-rade route. This enthusiasm resulted, at times, in a passage area only 1 abreast entering Bloomberg Arch. This resulted in delays that backed up classes marching as far away as Dillon Gym. And this especially became a problem later in the afternoon as both the confluence of enthusiasm, possibly beer, and an already long P-rade, started to take effect on the seniors. So then in response to this, the following year of 2010, all of our focus went onto this problem. And as a result, for the first time in the history of the P-rade, some physical barriers were introduced. I'd like to specifically point out that they were waist high, plastic, lightweight sawhorse style barricades. We did not have electrical fences. We did not have permanent barriers. And they were placed along that route on Elm Drive, from the south side of Patton, down to the Bloomberg Arch. We also included specific gaps in the barriers to allow people to cross the route and to facilitate the entries of classes into the P-rade at the appropriate time, because there were 11 classes that needed to enter along that stretch (10 reunion classes and the graduating seniors). And in addition, for the first time in the history of the P-rade, several public safety personnel were assigned to those staging areas from the start of the event. In previous years, we used to send some public safety people down there late as the senior class was about to enter. Instead, some security people were put there at the outset of the P-rade, to provide greater control. And by all accounts this change was a success.

Of course, there were also several examples of some fine-tuning decisions that were made in response to events in the last P-rade or in some cases for specific

upcoming accommodations. One example was the widening of the route on Front Campus and some places down route. And initially this was accomplished working with Herb Hobler in connection with the 65th Reunion of the Great Class of 1944 in order to accommodate their military marching band which marched seven men abreast. Herb was a longtime Marshal and, by the way, the first Marshal who was also simultaneously a member of the Old Guard. We also started deploying undergraduate workers on a rotating basis, along the route. Another change was moving the staging position of the Old Guard from the east (New York) side to the west (Philadelphia) side on Front Campus. This change was made as the 25th Reunion Class was staged for the first time on Front Campus. And then one year after putting the Old Guard on the west side of Front Campus, we had to change slightly the layout of the staging area and put a little bit more space between the golf carts, which permitted the Old Guard to better get into the Old Guard location and their golf carts. Sorry I keep running on, but I obviously have a lot of thoughts about P-rades!

Dan Abramowicz: Not at all! I mean, you're a wealth of information and I appreciate your helping us to capture it! And in this spirit of continuous improvement ... you've mentioned some very big changes like where the 25th Class enters Nassau Street or not even entering Nassau Street any longer, just because of the need to try to make it a little more organized. And the use of the barriers which have worked extremely well over the years. It really shows that small changes happen every year, because we are always thinking about a way to make it better. That's great.

Charles Plohn: Until the university manages to do the perfect P-rade, which will require no minor changes. I sort of hope we'd never get there.

Dan Abramowicz: I don't think that's a fear I have. Well, thank you again for all that great information. Let's talk a little bit about whether you have any stories about how the Marshals played a particularly important role in a P-rade or stories that stick out in your mind where the Marshals were perhaps critical to the success of the P-rade.

Charles Plohn: Actually, there are two examples that come immediately to mind for me. First, in the 2010 P-rade, Heather Butts, from the Great Class of '94 and the current Grand Marshal of the P-rade, was stationed with the classes of the 1990s on Elm Drive between Clio Hall and Dillon Gym. Well one of the golf carts in the P-rade broke down right in front of her. And what she did then was to help push that golf cart from somewhere north of Dillon Gym, along the length of the remaining route, and past the reviewing stand. That's one vivid memory.

Dan Abramowicz: That's remarkable.

Charles Plohn: The second memory and unbelievably so, is in the P-rade of 2011... it happened again! And so right in front of Heather, who was again stationed with the classes of the '90s on Elm Drive, a golf cart broke down. And once again, she put her shoulder to the wheel, if you will, and helped push that golf cart down the

remainder (fortunately downhill route) from there onto Poe Field and past the reviewing stand. And in recognition of the combination of saving the day and clearing the tracks, not once, but twice, at our Marshals dinner in both 2011 and 2012, we presented her with a special trophy! I don't understand why we could not find a miniature golf cart to present her with, one would think that would not be difficult, but we couldn't. So each year she was presented with a miniature tow truck. So those are 2 vivid memories. And please understand during a P-rade many Marshals are doing things like this, but her actions were so visible. And the fact that she went on to become a Grand Marshal makes an even better story.

Dan Abramowicz: That's a great story and so well captured and memorialized at your Marshal's dinner.

Charles Plohn: Right. And I'd like to think it is now memorialized on her desk, in her office, with two tow trucks.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes, I'm sure. Were there any examples where maybe it didn't turn out quite so well or where problems were encountered? You mentioned some of the challenges you had during your term or while you were a Marshal. Does anything come to mind?

Charles Plohn: Well, we really touched upon them already. The first one was in my first year as Grand Marshal with the combination of a 15-minute delay because the Old Guard buses hadn't arrived, which was immediately changed the following year. Second, and also in that same P-rade, the pace and gaps of the then 25th Reunion Class. And then the third one is also mentioned, it was the near chaos, the following year, in the staging area for the 10th Reunion Class down through the seniors.

Dan Abramowicz: Yes. And you've captured too how the challenge you encountered were met with improvements later. So that's fantastic.

Charles Plohn: That didn't help us out in either of those moments.

Dan Abramowicz: No, but we live and learn. Let's switch gears now and just talk about some of your fondest memories of the P-rade or your time in one of your many roles as Marshal in the P-rade. Are there any examples that you'd like to discuss?

Charles Plohn: I guess I would say there were three...first when I was in my rookie year as a Marshal and then the following year; second when I was a Flanking Marshal; and third when I was Grand Marshal.

The 1st memory is from my rookie year as a Marshal in 1990, when I was lucky enough to be stationed at the Class of 1879 Arch on Washington Road, overlooking Prospect Street. And for those who remember that time, the P-rade would come along, and then it would go through the Arch and down Prospect

Street and out onto the baseball fields where, until the tradition was discontinued, Princeton played Yale in a baseball game.

Dan Abramowicz: Right. Yes.

Charles Plohn: So that was my rookie year. The following year in 1991 was the 25th Reunion of my class... the Great Class of '66. And as a result of a strategic change in the P-rade route, we became the first 25th Reunion Class, as well as every other class, not to march down Prospect Street towards the baseball fields. And while, especially in hindsight, I do understand the reasons for keeping the P-rade on the main campus, to this day, that remains one of my most vivid memories of the P-rade (and admittedly not a fond one), because marching down Prospect Street with a lot of spectators was great. There would be a lot of people from the town who would attend the P-rade and they would gather along Prospect and I think that the participation of local attendees, if you will, is probably lessened as everyone is more crowded on to the main campus.

The 2nd memory, in 2005, before my first year as Grand Marshal when I was serving as a Flanking Marshal. That year, after marching the route and like many other Marshals, I had double duty. And the Flanking Marshals after marching the route would either go back to stand in front of the reviewing stand to help move people along on Poe Field, or I volunteered a few times to go stand in front of the younger classes, which is just a wonderful experience. Now what happened is that during this P-rade the heavens sort of opened up, as it were. Then, just before the Senior Class came through Bloomberg Arch onto Poe Field, there was a downpour accompanied by thunder and lightning. Those members of the Old Guard who were still in their tent were immediately evacuated and driven off in their golf carts. The remaining spectators who were in the aluminum stands that were set up on Poe Field, a good number of whom were probably parents of and relatives of the senior class, they all scattered. I'm assuming that along the P-rade route... since we can only see Bloomberg Arch from the reviewing stand, we can't see what's happening up the route ... I'm assuming everyone there scattered. It was for safety reasons. And so after a big gap in time, with no one appearing and no one presenting themselves to those dignitaries who remained or returned to the reviewing stand. There were a few Marshals stationed on Poe Field and we just waited there. Suddenly, we look up at Bloomberg Arch, and there's the Princeton University Marching Band that was doing either its third or fourth go-through in the P-rade. They would start, go through with the 25th Class, then they would catch up and they come back to lead the seniors. I think their record may be four trips in a P-rade, but it's usually three and sometimes four. And once again, it's raining, there's lightning and thunder, not necessarily overhead, but in the near distance. And there is ankle deep mud on Poe Field and the band starts marching in.

The seniors once again, having gone through a long P-rade, after sitting there for three plus hours, to then march the final 200 feet or 300 feet, probably had some libations during this pause to ease the pain. Well, the seniors just came rushing onto Poe Field. They ran way past the reviewing stand and some were

sliding into the mud. People were doing belly flops into the mud. And many of them, after immersing themselves in mud, ran up to the reviewing stand, they were high fiving everyone on the reviewing stand. President Shirley Tilghman was there. People were hugging her, sharing their mud, if you will. And it was just exhilarating! And then after a while they were officially welcomed. There's this brief ceremony where they are officially welcomed into the alumni ranks of the university, even though they don't graduate until the following Tuesday. But they officially become members of the Alumni Association at that time. And then for all of us standing there, I'll always remember a car with a driver, I assume a university car driver, came back and President Tilghman got in and it drove off. And the rest of us all had to trudge our way back up campus.

Dan Abramowicz: A remarkable scene you presented very vividly. I feel like I was there.

Charles Plohn: It was wonderful. And then **the 3rd memory** was also one of the scariest of perhaps any P-rade. I've already mentioned the 65th Reunion of the Great Class of 1944 in 2009. The event was led by Class President and Reunion Chair, Herb Hobler '44. The class theme focused, as they had for many years prior, the class honored its 22 classmates who died in WWII. Herb spent a couple of years researching and reaching out to the families of his classmates and a 65th reunion record 340 attendees came to the reunion, including 53 classmates or their widows and other family members. They had posters with the 22 classmates who were killed in the war and with its WWII theme, they were accompanied in the P-rade by the US Army Ceremonial Band known as Pershing's Own, and also by a group of WWII reenactors, members of the New Jersey Army National Guard, the current Princeton ROTC students, as well as several military vehicles, mostly Jeeps. Some of the vehicles had guns, hopefully unloaded guns, mounted on them.

Dan Abramowicz: And Herb had organized all these other participants, I assume, such as the WWII reenactors.

Charles Plohn: Oh, yes, Herb had done all of this. Herb was phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. And he had organized all of this. He also, as an aside, was the individual primarily responsible for restarting the long-time tradition of classes installing class ivy stones and planting ivy on the walls of Nassau Hall. That tradition was discontinued during WWII. It was restarted by the Great Class of 1944, again led by Herb, at their 25th Reunion in 1969. So Herb played many, many roles in many capacities at the university. The scariest moment, however, was right before the start of the P-rade on the very crowded Front Campus. As you know, the 25th Reunion Class, the Old Guard and about 10 other older classes are stationed there now, and it's, you've been there, it's just jampacked.

Dan Abramowicz: It's chaos.

Charles Plohn: Right, you can barely move. And then suddenly from the east side of Front Campus, rushing west, came the WWII reenactors from Trenton. They were delayed in getting there by their buses being caught in traffic on Nassau Street

and throughout the town. And I'm going to embellish on this a while and I'll attribute it to my age, but they're rushing across this campus with bayonets extended to get where the 65th Class was stationed, right next to the Old Guard. But just picture the crowd, picture everyone there, people running with guns with bayonets (extended or not, they're still out)! It's miraculous that nobody on campus was impaled as they rushed by! I'm happy to say, and I think I always attributed it to a combination of, one, clearly divine intervention, and two, certainly I want to give credit to the instinctive responses of the Marshals stationed at that site.

Dan Abramowicz: Well, Charles, you have created two more dramatic memories that I will now never be able to forget about the P-rade. First, those seniors in whatever year it was diving in the mud, belly flopping and hugging president Tillman covered in mud.

Charles Plohn: And hugging others. Probably also the head of the Board of Trustees.

Dan Abramowicz: And others. And also this image of WWII reenactors running with bayonets through the crowd. Yes, those are remarkably vivid images now forever in my mind. I thank you for that. I thank you for all of this. You've provided so much detail and so much information. You made it clear how many people are involved in making the success of the P-rade, that spirit of continuous improvement that I've referred to, and how you, either through small changes or sometimes very large changes, found ways to improve the P-rade. Your enthusiasm for this is palpable and has made this interview so enjoyable. And I really do want to thank you again for all of the valuable information you provided, but also for the time and effort that you've spent helping to give me this information. I really appreciate it.

Charles Plohn: Thank you. I want to thank you for including me in this history and for giving me a reason to recall my 23 years [1990-2012] serving as a P-rade Marshal in various capacities. I've enjoyed doing this interview.

Dan Abramowicz: It was a great pleasure and honor ... and you provided a wealth of valuable information. Thank you again.