

Chuck Vincent – An Apple Pi for All Seasons!

By John “Rusty” Heckler (1984)

Charles “Chuck” Vincent graduated from Drexel in the Class of 1957. He was an Apple Pi as an Undergrad from 1949 through 1957. Say what? Was he on the 8 Year Co-Op Program? He has been very active as an Alumnus since 1957; more so in the past ten years. You know him, right?

What was that? You do not know Chuck? Is he the guy at the Alumni and Undergrad Formal Functions dressed in United States Army Dress Blues with Medals and Ribbons all over his broad chest? Is he the “older” guy at the Alumni – Undergrad sporting events that continually “sticks it” to the Undergrads whether pitching in Softball or drawing on his other formidable athletic skills, even in his early 80s? Is he the guy at all the Drexel Lacrosse games, Wrestling matches, and other sporting events?

Chuck is all of these and more! Chuck is an Apple Pi for All Seasons. Not only is Apple Pi honored to have Chuck as an Alumnus, the same is being said by Drexel University, the United States Army, the United States Marines, and each and every organization that has been lucky to have itself associated with Charles Vincent over the past eight decades.

It was recently announced to all Apple Pi’s by Alumni President Ed Schickling that Chuck will be inducted into the initial class of the Alpha Pi Lambda Crimson and Grey Society on Saturday, March 5, 2011 during the 76th Anniversary Ball celebrations. I have known Charles Vincent personally over the years but it wasn’t until I spent a few hours with him in December 2010 at the Undergrad’s Christmas Formal at the House that I got to know “Chuck”.

Chuck was born and raised in Ocean City, New Jersey during the 1930s and 1940s. For those of you who know and love Ocean City, New Jersey, Chuck hails from 3rd / 4th Streets and Atlantic Avenue. Chuck graduated from Ocean City High School in the spring of 1948 and came to Philadelphia and Drexel Institute of Technology (“DIT” and / or “Drexel”) in the fall of 1948.

During his freshman year Chuck immersed himself into every facet of life at DIT. He joined the Choir. He also joined the Drexel Wrestling Team and was taught how to wrestle by “some guy” named Al Link. You KNOW Al Link; Class of 1953. Apple Pi KEY Alumnus and huge supporter of the fraternity. Drexel Golden Dragon and initial member of the Drexel 100. Yeah; that AL LINK. Chuck told me that Al was an awesome wrestler. He also noted that every wrestling maneuver he learned from Al resulted with Chuck on his back while in the process of getting pinned. Al and Chuck wrestled in the 121 lb. weight class.

In addition to his Chemical Engineering classes, singing and wrestling, Chuck found time for one “other thing” in his freshman year during 1948 / 1949 – Apple Pi! Chuck’s

Pledge Class started in February 1949 and he became an Undergrad Brother in April 1949 along with that Al Link guy. There must have been something in the “water” at Apple Pi in 1949. How is one fraternity blessed with not one but two outstanding individuals such as Al and Chuck? Don’t ask them because they won’t know what you are asking. They will tell you that they were two simple young guys who were lucky to follow in the footsteps of a guy named John Linehan and a few of his buddies who formed Apple Pi in their spare time in March 1935!

Chuck’s sophomore year during 1949 / 1950 found him involved in all of the same activities as well as others. According to Chuck, the “activities” got the best of him and like many other Drexel Engineers throughout the ages; it was time for a “break”. Little did Chuck know at the time but his “break” from Drexel would last from the end of the spring in 1950 until January 1954.

In the summer of 1950 Chuck went to work at a cement plant in West Conshocken, Pennsylvania. Around the same time his Ocean City, New Jersey Armed Forces Recruiting Office became interested in Chuck as he was no longer a fulltime enrolled student at Drexel. In early December 1950 Chuck enlisted in the United States Marines and soon found himself on the way to Basic Training (aka “Boot Camp”) at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, South Carolina.

In case you were wondering, Chuck found time to enjoy various “activities” while in the Marines. After Boot Camp the Marines sent Chuck to the Naval Air Station Memphis, located in Memphis, Tennessee, to receive training in the operation of radar equipment. While learning his new craft, Chuck found time to march with the Marine Drill Team, play football, and participate in a few wrestling matches. In 1951 Chuck captured 1st Place in the Navy’s Memphis District Championship in the 137 lb. weight class. It sounds like Chuck learned a few things from his buddy Al Link while on his back at the Drexel Wrestling center!

1952 found Chuck literally all over the place. He shipped out to Korea in February 1952. He was assigned to a Marine Fighter Squadron as a Radar Specialist. September 1952 found Chuck in the backseat of an AD Skyraider attack aircraft participating in Electronic Countermeasure Missions. Chuck participated in 67 total missions while in Korea. In December 1952 Chuck returned back to the States and was assigned to the Marine Corp Air Station Cherry Point, located in Havelock, North Carolina.

In the spring of 1953 the Marines assigned Chuck to an air squadron stationed on board the attack aircraft carrier USS Bennington. Chuck and the USS Bennington spent April, May, and June of 1953 patrolling the waters of the Caribbean. Chuck ended his tour with the Marines in December of 1953 and headed back to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and his home at Apple Pi.

Chuck returned to Drexel in January 1954. He changed his major to Electrical Engineering. Chuck had planned to resume his Drexel Wrestling career but an injury incurred before the start of practice prevented that. After the Winter and Spring terms in

1954 Chuck headed to Baltimore, Maryland for his first Co-Operative Education (“Co-Op”) experience. He worked in the Aviation Electronics division of Westinghouse. While on Co-Op Chuck traveled back and forth from Baltimore and Philadelphia to stay at the Pi on the weekends and participate in IFA Athletics for the Pi.

In January 1955 Chuck returned to Philadelphia to resume classes. In February 1955 he decided that he would like to try his hand at the sport of Lacrosse. He joined the Freshman / Junior Varsity squad and was teammates with two guys (non Apple Pi’s) who would go on to much personal success as well as becoming major benefactors to the Drexel Lacrosse Program. The first individual was William Thayer (1959). Bill would go on to be a Lacrosse Honorable Mention All-American and in October 2004 he wrote and published “Drexel Lacrosse – A History From The Heart”. The book is the definitive history of the Drexel Lacrosse Program. It includes hundreds of pictures, records, stories, etc. You can see many Apple Pi’s in there and read of their accomplishments. Please see the article “Apple Pi and Drexel Lacrosse – Great Teammates!” in this Newsletter for further information regarding this excellent book. The second individual was Vincent Vidas. Vince was an All-American football player while at Drexel who picked up Lacrosse in his “spare time”. Vince is another Charter Member of the Drexel 100. The home to Drexel’s Varsity Outdoor Athletics is named The Vidas Athletic Complex in honor of Vince’s numerous contributions to Drexel.

During his initial season with the Drexel Lacrosse Program Chuck played as a Midfielder. Famous Drexel Lacrosse Coach Herman “Eppy” Epstein thought he had a real “find” in Chuck and was looking forward to having Chuck in the Drexel Lacrosse program for another three seasons after the 1955 campaign. Eppy was not yet aware that Chuck was not a freshman! It was at this same time that Chuck decided that he wanted to make a commitment to his Country and have a career in the Military. Before heading to his Co-Op assignment at Westinghouse, Chuck participated in “Advanced ROTC”.

Chuck headed back to Baltimore, Maryland and Westinghouse for his next Co-Op period in June 1955. Once again Chuck would spend the weekends from June through December 1955 commuting back and forth from Baltimore, Maryland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to visit the Pi and represent it on the playing fields of the IFA sporting events.

In January 1956 Chuck returned to school after completing his 2nd Co-Op assignment. Upon his return to school and the Lacrosse team, Chuck met with Coach Eppy after sizing up his prospects for the 1956 season. Chuck mentioned to me that he thought that his best opportunity to see playing time on the Varsity team was to transform himself into a Goalie. Chuck discussed this with Coach Eppy and the Coach agreed. Coach Eppy, a former college Goalie himself, spent the remainder of the winter personally teaching Chuck the art of goaltending.

It was 5 minutes before the season opener against Swarthmore when Coach Eppy notified Chuck that he had earned the right to be the starting Goalie for the Varsity Lacrosse team. Chuck went on to post a record of 7 wins and 2 losses in his very first season as a

Lacrosse Goalie. Joining him on Drexel's Lacrosse Team in 1956 were fellow Apple Pi's Milt Lang, a Defenseman, and Frank Arnold, an Attackman. In December 1956 Coach Eppy took Chuck and Frank to Palm Beach, Florida to play in the "Coconut Bowl" representing the South squad. Both Chuck and Frank were named starters for their squad.

1957 was another busy year for Chuck. He completed another Co-Op assignment with Westinghouse, commuted back and forth again from Baltimore to Philadelphia to visit the Pi and play for it's teams, and he played his final year of lacrosse again. He once again teamed with fellow Apple Pi's Milt Lang and Frank Arnold on Drexel's Lacrosse Team. His last season (1957) in the nets was a success again, this time resulting in 6 wins and only 3 losses.

Chuck graduated from Drexel from Drexel in June 1957 with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He immediately began his 2nd career with the United States Military; this time with the United States Army. He spent June, July, and August of 1957 at Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Virginia. It was here that Chuck received his Basic Training for ROTC enlistees. In August 1957 Chuck became formally enlisted with the United States Army, commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. He then spent August 1957 through November 1957 working again at the Aviation Electronics division of Westinghouse. In November 1957 he was called to Active Duty by the United States Army again at Fort Belvoir (Home of the Army's Engineer Corps) and received training in the Engineer's Officer Course. He also received training as a "Special Weapon's Officer" and in March 1958 he was sent to Fort Benning, located in Georgia, for Parachute training.

In April 1958 Chuck was then assigned to an Engineering Battalion located in Mainz, Germany. During May 1958, while on a ship crossing the Atlantic on its way to Germany, Chuck met Judith Deojay (from Brunswick, Maine) who would become Mrs. Charles Vincent. Judith was traveling with her Mother to Germany to join her Father who was a Staff Sergeant stationed in Munich, Germany. Chuck and Judith became engaged in December 1958. In January 1959 Chuck drove Judith (along with Judith's Mother) to Zurich, Switzerland and they were married on January 30, 1959 in the town of Kusnak which was 10 miles south of Zurich.

On January 22, 1960 Chuck and Judith welcomed the arrival of their fist child, a son named John Thomas Vincent. Sadly, John passed away in April 1960. Shortly thereafter Chuck and Judith returned to the States and Chuck was assigned to Fort George G. Meade, located in Odenton, Maryland. Chuck was assigned to work with representatives of the National Security Agency (the "NSA"), the preeminent "spook agency" at the time. Chuck would spend over 2 ½ years in this assignment. During 1960 Chuck spent over a month in the Country of Turkey "on assignment".

In January 1961 Chuck and his wife welcomed the arrival of their daughter Anne Vincent. In early 1962 Chuck was working as an Engineer in Facilities Management. Eventually his Superiors learned of Chuck's prior experiences as a Marine Electronics Specialist and then they transferred him to Electronic Intel within the United States

Army. Later in 1962 saw Chuck working at the Berlin Wall conducting Intel activities as well as working in activities related to the Cuban Missile Crises in October 1962.

In October 1962 Chuck and his wife welcomed the arrival of Robert Michael Vincent. After the Cuban Missile Crisis had passed, Chuck was sent to Turkey again where he was stationed at an Intel base along the Black Sea. 1963 and 1964 saw Chuck assigned back to Fort Belvoir in Virginia where he received additional training in the Engineer Career Officer Corps. In July 1964 Chuck and Judith welcomed the arrival of Sondra Jean Vincent.

In 1964 and 1965 the United States Army sent Chuck to the University of Missouri – Rolla, located in Rolla, Missouri. Chuck spent his time at Rolla immersed in Civil Engineering classes. In September 1965 Chuck was on the move again with the Army. The 1st week of September 1965 was spent in Okinawa, Japan and then in the 2nd week Chuck was off to Vietnam. He was assigned as an Advisor to “US Aid”, a Government Agency that provides assistance to foreign governments. Chuck spent the next 3 months in the Mekong Delta. Part of his duties included investigating sites for potential suitability as locations for Water Purification Units. During this time period Chuck’s wife and children remained in Maryland. They joined Chuck in Okinawa immediately prior to Christmas 1965.

On January 1, 1966 Chuck was informed that he was being assigned to serve with the United States Army’s Special Forces unit back in Vietnam. He would be working as a Special Forces Combat Engineer. In February 1966 Chuck found himself back in the Mekong Delta carving out Special Forces’ “A-Camps and Firebases” out of the jungle deep in enemy territory. The Camps were required to be “Livable and Defendable”. These camps could only be supplied by air; were vital to the conduct of counter-insurgency, psychological operations, and other special highly effective missions against the enemy performed by the Special Forces; and were always under heavy enemy attack.

In October 1966 Chuck and his family found a brief period of excitement. Chuck was promoted to the rank of Major. Then he, his wife, their two daughters, and their son welcomed Jacqueline Danielle to the Vincent Family.

1967, 1968, and 1969 found Chuck and his family constantly on the move. There were assignments in Okinawa, Japan, Fort Belvoir in Virginia, and in Vietnam. Chuck was spending most of his time in the development of various types of equipment to be utilized by United States Armed Forces.

In 1970 Chuck was named to the position of District Senior Advisor under the auspice of the State Department. After training he was charged with working with the Vietnamese on the transfer of “items and duties” back to the Vietnamese. In May 1971 he was sent to Vietnam for his 5th Tour of Duty. He spent the following 10 months back in the Mekong Delta.

In April 1972 Chuck and his family returned to the States for good. Chuck was assigned to Fort Belvoir in Virginia again and he worked as the head of a special Teaching Department in the Engineering School. He also began taking additional graduate college classes himself at nearby George Washington University. His focus was on Public Works engineering.

In August 1972 Chuck was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Chuck then retired from the United States Army after numerous years of Distinguished Service to his country in December 1974. As mentioned earlier, Chuck can be seen at Apple Pi Formals in his United States Army Dress Blues with Medals and Ribbons all over his broad chest. Some of those Medals and Ribbons include:

- Bronze Star Medal – (3)
- Air Medal – (3)
- Meritorious Service Medal – (3)
- Army Commendation Medal – (2)
- Meritorious Unit Citation – (2)
- National Service Medal
- Combat Infantryman's Badge
- Senior Parachutist Wings
- Korean Presidential Unit Citation
- Korean Service Medal with 3 Campaign Stars
- Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry – (2)
- Vietnamese Unit Citation
- Vietnamese Service Medal with 10 Campaign Stars
- Vietnamese Parachutist Wings

During the time period from 1958 through his retirement in December 1974 Chuck had limited contact with his beloved Apple Pi due to his worldwide travels in the service of his country. However his love of Apple Pi never diminished.

In November 1974 Chuck accepted a position as the Deputy Director of Public Works for Prince William County, Virginia. In that position he managed the County's "non-school" construction including projects such as a new courthouse and jail.

After 9 years in public service, Chuck left for the private sector. He continued to oversee numerous construction projects. With one firm he built numerous hotels and motels around the country. In another position he worked on the plans for the development of the National Aerospace Annex at Dulles National Airport in Washington, D.C. This addition, eventually completed in 2004, houses many significant pieces of the aviation history of the United States, including the Enola Gay which dropped the 1st atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II. Another engagement found Chuck working with a Structural Engineering firm from Providence, Rhode Island that was owned by fellow Apple Pi Alumnus Frank Zamecnik (1950).

Additional “new beginnings” for Chuck upon his retirement from the United States Army was his love affair with all things Drexel, including Apple Pi and Drexel Lacrosse.

It took Chuck a little while to get back to his current active roles in the affairs of all things Drexel. Unfortunately for Chuck and many individuals who defended their Country during the Vietnam War era, many Americans treated Serviceman unjustly in Public. Chuck and his family experienced this across the United States, including in Philadelphia and on Drexel’s Campus. It took awhile for Chuck to get over this but he was able to remember how important Drexel and all of its activities were to him and his development and he wanted to give back to his Alma Mater.

Chuck immediately began to participate in numerous activities. He played on the Alumni Lacrosse squad which played the Undergrads each year. Chuck’s final Alumni – Undergrad game occurred in 2007! He only missed two years after his retirement from the military. The 1st time was in 2001 after he had a stroke and the 2nd time was in 2004 after he had heart surgery. Chuck went on to play a very active role in the Alumni support of Drexel’s Lacrosse Program. In addition to working with the athletes and the coaching staff, Chuck contributed to William Thayer’s book on the history of Drexel’s Lacrosse Program as well as fundraising and other Alumni activities geared towards supporting the Program.

Chuck has also lent his support to numerous Drexel activities, athletic and academic. Chuck often drives to Philadelphia from his home in Buford, Georgia to support and cheer on the Drexel Wrestling Team and other Varsity sports. Chuck has been honored for his efforts on behalf of Drexel by both the School and the Lacrosse Program. In 2007 Chuck became a Golden Dragon upon his 50th Anniversary of graduating from Drexel. He also received a special award from the Golden Dragon Society for his efforts in supporting Academics and Athletics at Drexel. Chuck was also presented with a Ceremonial Lacrosse Stick from current Drexel Lacrosse Coach Chris Bates for his contributions to the Program.

Chuck has also made himself quite a presence at Apple Pi over the years. He is usually in attendance at almost all Alumni / Undergrad Events; social and athletic. He still takes the pitching mound annually in the Softball Game. He also provides counsel to both the Alumni Officers (yours included) as well as the Undergrads. He has never hesitated to draw on his lifetime of experiences to share ideas on leadership, courage, and responsibility. His choice as a member of the Charter Class of Inductees into the fraternity’s Crimson and Grey Society was a no brainer!

In addition to his contributions to his Country and his Alma Mater, Chuck has been a wonderful family man for over 50 years. Chuck and Judith were married for over 40 years before Judith passed in 2004. She is interred in Arlington National Cemetery. Chuck’s 4 children have all experienced success due to the wonderful parenting of Judith and Chuck. Two of the children, Robert, a former Submariner in the United States Navy, and Sondra, a former Air Force Captain, followed their Father into Service on behalf of

their Country. Chuck currently has 14 Grandchildren and 16 Great-Grandchildren (with an additional one on the way).

One last interesting fact I learned about Chuck is that he has been a licensed pilot since 1978. However he has been “grounded” by the FAA due to health concerns. Interestingly it seems like the FAA is the only organization, government or other, that has been able to tell Chuck what he can and can’t do! Other than the FAA, Chuck has spent 80 years doing everything he wanted to and all of us are the beneficiaries!

I hope that you found Chuck’s story as “interesting” as I did. I had always admired him for just “being there” to help out at the Pi. Little did I know until this past December that Chuck has been “there” taking care of untold numbers of Apple Pi’s and their families since the 1950s. Hopefully you will be able to come to the Pi on Saturday, March 5, 2011 to honor Chuck on his induction into the Crimson and Grey Society! If you do not “know” him, he’ll be the guy in the United States Army Dress Blues making everyone else feel good!