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Date: 2-24-88
Edition: MIAMI HERALD
Title: "RETIREE CHASES GHOST"
Character:
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Classification: 45A-1773
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BUSINESS/5B
DEATHS/3B

Local

Wednesday, February 24, 1988

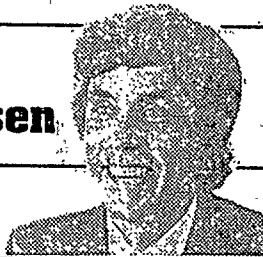
Retiree chases ghost

On Jan. 14, 1950, at exactly 6:20 p.m., a U.S. Army cadet named Richard C. Cox left his West Point dormitory to meet a friend named "George" for dinner. He never came back.

Soldiers combed the campus on foot; searched the woods, drained the ponds, scouted the banks of the Hudson by air. Investigators traced nearly every "George" whom Cox had ever known, yet never located the man who visited him that night.

Richard Cox was 21 years old. He stood a wiry 5-foot-8. He had a diagonal scar above the right elbow, and small ears that stuck out markedly. At the time of his disappearance, he was engaged to marry a young woman named Betty in his hometown of Mansfield, Ohio.

Carl
Hiaasen



In the dorm, Army investigators found \$87 in cash, two unmailed letters and Cox's wristwatch. He disappeared wearing his dress grays, in full overcoat.

Soon the FBI joined the search, and Dick Cox became, for a time, famous. Life magazine and Coronet wrote about the mystery. His case was compared to that of Judge Crater.

No one heard from Dick Cox

again — not his fiancée, his mother, his brother or sisters, his best friends, no one. To this day, he is the only cadet ever to have vanished from West Point without a trace.

On that Saturday night in 1950, Marshall Jacobs was a student at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. As a child he had lived in New York near the West Point campus and loved its atmosphere and historic lore. Jacobs read about Dick Cox in The New York Times, and followed the story for years, until the press forgot about it.

Later Jacobs moved to Dade County, where he taught history at Norland and North Miami Beach Senior High until his retirement in 1986. Then he finally had time to chase the ghost of Dick Cox.

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FBI — SAN FRANCISCO	

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State News

The Miami Herald

Section B

of West Point past



Cox



Jacobs

"Cadets," Jacobs would say to his wife Lois, "just don't disappear from West Point."

He traveled widely, interviewing Cox's friends, family and classmates, and amassing four drawers of documents. Using the

Freedom of Information Act, Jacobs got more than 1,500 pages of FBI files, and more from the Army C.I.D.

He was impressed by what he saw. "They really tried to find this kid," Jacobs says. He wasn't sure he could do any better; his wife encouraged him to press on. For a retiree it was an unusually consuming hobby, but this was an unusual case.

Among the provocative theories Jacobs encountered: Dick Cox had secretly joined the CIA. Another: Cox had been involved in the death of a pregnant woman while he had been stationed in West Germany.

Still another: Cox had been a key witness in a court-martial case, and fled the Army because he feared for his life. One theory

even linked Cox to the cheating scandal that rocked West Point a year after he disappeared.

Perhaps the wildest story of all had Cox kidnapped, put aboard a Polish freighter, and eventually transported to a Siberian prison as punishment for espionage against the Soviets during his German tour.

Methodically Jacobs checked this lead, as he did the rest. In fact, during the 1950s there was a young American named Cox in Russia's Vorkuta prison — only it was not Richard.

Government files, as well as Jacobs' own interviews, suggest that Dick Cox might have staged his own disappearance. There is testimony, Jacobs says, of homo

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1950 missing-cadet case 1980s obsession for Dade

HIAASEN /from IB

sexual relationships with other cadets — a secret that would have jeopardized Cox's Army career.

Apparently, he had also become disenchanted with West Point. One of the letters found in his room was written to his fiancée. In it, Cox wrote bitterly of the academy, and even drew a picture of a soldier spitting on the letterhead.

"The thought keeps entering my mind," he wrote, "and I've yet to discover exactly what I'll have lost by leaving the dear old corps."

Following this avenue, Marshall Jacobs got a break. In 1986 a San Francisco detective investigating a high-seas murder received an old newspaper clipping in the mail. The anonymous sender hinted that the detective's murder suspect had also been involved in the case of the missing cadet.

The detective had never heard of Dick Cox, but he gave the tip to the C.I.D. When Jacobs heard about it, he flew west.

The murder suspect's name was Robert W. Frisbee, a male secretary who during a Canadian cruise had allegedly murdered the wealthy widow for whom he worked.

Checking back, Jacobs learned that Frisbee, then known as Robert Dion, had once been stationed at Fort Knox, Ky., with Dick Cox. The two men knew each other and, Jacobs says, might have had a relationship.

More significantly, a Canadian prosecutor told Jacobs that Dion/Frisbee had once been in-

volved in a phony ID racket in the New York area. In appearance, Dion matched the "George" who visited Dick Cox at West Point a week before he vanished, and was to meet him again for dinner that night of Jan. 14.

Of all the possibilities, Marshall Jacobs believes this is the most likely: That Cadet Cox — under pressure to marry from his fiancée, ambivalent about his sexuality, disillusioned with the academy — obtained a bogus identity from Dion and simply became someone else.

Jacobs thinks there's a good chance that Cox is alive today, using another name. That over

these 38 years he never once contacted his family — even as his mother lay dying two years ago — is hard to believe. But it is possible. "Very few people, even his own family, knew the real Dick Cox," says Jacobs.

The full story might never be known. Robert Dion Frisbee, now appealing a life sentence, has not replied to Jacobs' request for an interview. Maybe someday, his lawyer says, but not now.

Meanwhile, West Point has asked Marshall Jacobs to donate his voluminous research about Richard Cox to its library. "That's quite an honor," the retired schoolteacher says.

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becomes retiree

A few months ago he was back at West Point, meeting with C.I.D. agents about the case. Walking the campus, Jacobs met a fourth-year cadet who asked him if the legend was true — was there really a Dick Cox? Did he really vanish in his dress grays?

"Take it from me," Marshall Jacobs told the young man, "it's true."

Jacobs plans to write a book about the lost cadet. "Oblivion," he would call it.

In the annual Registry of Cadets, these words are still written next to the name of Richard Colvin Cox: "Mysteriously disappeared, 14 Jan 50, Cadet A-21."