

MR. T. ALLAN MCARTOR | CLASS OF 1964



Don't talk about T. Allan McArtor's career in the past tense.

He's certainly accomplished much since graduating from the United States Air Force Academy in 1964, but he's still very much engaged and involved in the aviation industry today.

As chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Airbus Americas, Inc. for the past 17 years, McArtor has significant influence on the company's current operational direction and future innovations.

"I feel good about my contributions," he says. "I've had a good run ... but I don't think it's over yet. I can see myself staying fully engaged for some period of time."

Even with prospects of a bright future ahead, McArtor is being honored as one of three USAFA Distinguished Graduate honorees for 2018.

"I was very honored," he says of his reaction to his selection. "I'm privileged to be part of a class [1964] that not only has five other DGs, but several more who could easily be distinguished graduates. To be recognized with them and the other distinguished graduates — most all of whom I know personally — is really quite an honor. I'm very humbled by that."

Chapter One

McArtor grew up in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis that was the perfect proving ground for a future Academy cadet.

McArtor's father was a high school coach and teacher, and his mother was a physical education teacher.

"Education was a big deal in our home," he says. "I had two brothers and a sister, and we all worked pretty hard on the education side and our



parents made sure we paid attention to it.”

As he began investigating possible colleges and universities to attend, McArtor zeroed in on Princeton University for his future studies.

A high-profile Princeton graduate — James Smith “Mac” McDonnell, founder of McDonnell Aircraft Corporation — took it upon himself to recruit the talented football player.

McDonnell set up a weekend tour of the McDonnell Aircraft facility for McArtor, hoping to wow the recruit with the company’s impressive engineering center.

Unfortunately for Princeton, the tour included a stop at the plant’s assembly line. There, on the line, was a newly assembled McDonnell F-101 Voodoo aircraft.

“I was awestruck,” McArtor says. His tour guide offered to have McArtor sit in the cockpit. At that point, attending Princeton was off the table.

“I was hooked,” McArtor smiles. “I went to the Air Force Academy.”

On the Terrazzo

“To show you how naïve I was, I thought I would get out there early so I can look around and see what the place (the Academy) was like,” McArtor laughs. “I was one of the first buses to unload at the base of the ramp. I had no idea what I was getting into. Look around? Are you kidding me — if you had your eyeballs moving at all, you had more push-ups. I saw a lot of concrete that day.”

Another major adjustment was answering to the name “Trusten A. McArtor.”

“I’d never gone by Trusten before,” he says. “Several hundred push-ups later, I finally got used to saying that.”

Despite the rocky start, McArtor would go on to enjoy and appreciate his time as a cadet.

Even though he wasn’t a recruited athlete, McArtor would play both football and baseball for the Falcons.

“I truly enjoyed playing football and baseball and the great friends that I made on those teams,” the former quarterback and catcher says. “And there are many great stories to tell.”

McArtor admits to having a lot of fun with his roommates through his four Academy years — including classmate and fellow distinguished graduate Max James — but he isn’t likely to share some of those stories anytime soon.

In his first-class year, McArtor would serve as First Group commander for the fall semester. As he prepared for the spring baseball season, McArtor met with USAFA Commandant of Cadets Maj. Gen. Robert Strong, Jr., who suggested the cadet become Cadet Wing commander during his final semester.

“I told him I was very honored by that, but I’m playing baseball and that would keep me tied up a little bit,” McArtor laughs about his response. “And I’ve already had a command position.”



PREVIOUS PAGE

T. Allan McArtor is pictured at Airbus Americas offices near Washington, D.C. (Photo by Ryan Hall)

ABOVE LEFT

As a young pilot, Allan McArtor was ready to slip the surly bonds of earth.

ABOVE RIGHT

Not a recruited athlete, Allan McArtor would play for the Falcons as a walk-on and as a quarterback. He’d also become part of the baseball squad.

The general was not amused.

“He scowls at me and says, ‘This is not a question. You are going to be the Wing commander,’” McArtor recalls.

With the help of a “great deputy,” Thomas Till ’64, McArtor was able to excel in his leadership role and play baseball at the same time.

Life Lessons

As he prepared to enter the Air Force, McArtor says he recognized the foundation of leadership skills and character instilled in him during his time at the Academy. ►

AT RIGHT

(Left) Allan McArtor rocks his signature mustache during his early Air Force days. (Right) Allan McArtor marries his wife, Grace, in the Cadet Chapel soon after graduating from the Air Force Academy.

OPPOSITE PAGE

President Ronald Reagan (left) congratulates Allan McArtor upon becoming the administrator for the Federal Aviation Administration.



"The Academy's rigor and discipline — and the Academy's balanced values among academics, athletics, military — was exactly what prepared me, quite frankly, for duty in the Air Force," he says.

The cadet honor code, McArtor suggests, was the most important lesson from that period of his life.

"The honor code was one of the pillars of the Air Force Academy that really resonated with me," he explains.

Other life lessons included self-reliance, self-confidence and courage. In addition, his time as a collegiate athlete taught him the importance of teamwork and one's reliance on others.

"I often tell people that collegiate sports prepared me for combat, and combat prepared me for corporate life," he laughs. "But it's true. The lessons learned at the Air Force Academy were spot on."

Air Force Moments

After marrying his Academy sweetheart, Grace, McArtor would head to Vance Air Force Base for pilot training.

"I didn't know how I was going to do in pilot training," McArtor notes. "We didn't have a soaring program at the Air Force Academy at that time. But it turned out I was a pretty good pilot. It was like a duck taking to water — I absolutely loved it."

As the top student at pilot training, McArtor had his pick of assignments. He

signed up for the F-104 Starfighter. McArtor's first assignment sent him to Homestead Air Force Base in Florida.

"I can't think of a better assignment for a young fighter pilot than to fly the F-104," he says. "It was exhilarating."

At the time, it appeared the Vietnam War was winding down and McArtor was anxious to get involved. He volunteered for a tour in Southeast Asia from 1968-69.

"Quite frankly, I enjoyed every minute of it," he recalls. "Nobody likes warfare, but I loved combat. I loved flying combat missions."

When he returned to the States, McArtor toyed with the idea of becoming a test pilot so that he could pursue his dream of becoming an astronaut.

The commandant of Aerospace Research Pilot School at the time — Col. Chuck Yeager — talked the young fighter pilot out of it.

"You're a pretty aggressive guy," Yeager told McArtor. "I think you'd be bored."

McArtor admits Yeager was right.

"Another Academy graduate was in the same class that I would have been in at Test Pilot School," McArtor notes. "It took him 14 years to get a Space Shuttle ride. That would have driven me nuts."

Instead, McArtor pursued his master's degree at Arizona State University, which helped him land a job as associate professor of engineering at USAFA.

His stint at the Academy didn't last long, as his itch to return to flying resulted in an invitation to join the Thunderbirds Aerial Demonstration Team in 1972.

Family First

McArtor's family was enjoying the Air Force experience when life took an unexpected turn. McArtor's third child was diagnosed with a rare form of brain cancer that required specialized treatment the Air Force couldn't provide.

McArtor decided to leave the Air Force and focus on his daughter's health. The couple relocated to Memphis, Tennessee, so their daughter could receive treatment at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

"We made the right decision," McArtor says. "She got great treatment there." (She would live until she was 8 years old.)

The sudden end to his Air Force career turned out to be a challenge for McArtor.

"I was struggling to try and figure out what to do," he says. "When you look at the help wanted ads under fighter pilots, there weren't many opportunities. I had to create some opportunities for myself."

After pursuing several options, McArtor would meet Fred Smith, founder of Federal Express, an emerging air express company at the time.

"He and I hit it off just great," McArtor says. "He was the Marine, and I was the Air Force guy."

When Smith suggested that his new friend join Federal Express, McArtor assumed the job opportunity would be as a FedEx pilot.

But Smith clarified that he wanted McArtor to become vice president of System Operations.

McArtor would later become the senior vice president of telecommunications for FedEx. At the time, McArtor knew little about telecommunications, but what Smith really needed leadership, as he already had an expert telecom team.

Interestingly, when McArtor started with FedEx, the company had 32 aircraft in its fleet. By the time he finished his time with the company, the fleet had grown to 500 airplanes.

White House Calling

In the mid-1980s, McArtor was chairman of the Commercial Space Transportation Advisory Committee in Washington, D.C. The group was tasked with setting up policies for eventual commercial space flight operations (which is just now being realized with SpaceX, Virgin Galactic and others).

During his volunteer role, McArtor served as an advisor to Department of Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole. One day, unexpectedly, Dole asked McArtor if he'd be interested in becoming the administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration.

McArtor initially balked at the idea. He was happy at FedEx and expected to remain with the company for some time.

A discussion with his boss, Fred Smith, helped change his mind.

"You've been in the aviation band all your life," Smith told McArtor. "And now they're handing you the baton, where you can actually orchestrate meaningful things as the FAA administrator."

Instead of worrying about having to reject Dole's offer, McArtor now had to worry about telling his wife they were moving to Washington, D.C. Moments after that difficult conversation, McArtor received a call.

"Mr. McArtor, would you stand by for a call from the White House?" the operator

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asked. On the line was President Ronald Reagan, asking McArtor to join his team as the head of the FAA.

"Yes sir," McArtor laughs. "I've got the telephone in one hand, a salute in the other."

During the final two years of the Reagan administration (1987-89), McArtor would help guide the nation's aviation industry.

"It was a very frustrating but very rewarding assignment for me," McArtor reports. "I'm quite proud of the things we accomplished. All the aging aircraft regulations came under me, and we worked hard on security and air traffic control modernization."

He admired his FAA team, but his frustration came from the pace of progress within the bureaucracy, McArtor says.

"I used to tell people that my job was like being a pilot in command of a glacier," he suggests. "It had tremendous momentum, but most of that had to do with mass and not velocity."

Back in Business

After his FAA assignment, McArtor returned to FedEx as senior vice president of Air Operations to manage the company's merger with Flying Tigers Airlines.

"Then I got the itch to do something entrepreneurial," McArtor recalls. ►

He would launch Legend Airlines out of Dallas, in an attempt to provide affordable, first-class flights to major U.S. destinations. But legal challenges from competitors and state officials made it impossible for the airline to survive. McArtor shuttered Legend in 2001 due to a lack of financing.

In short order, Airbus contacted McArtor to offer him a job. The aircraft manufacturer was looking for someone to run its North American operations. He jumped at the chance.

In his role as chairman, McArtor oversees manufacturing operations, helicopters, defense and space, the Silicon Valley Innovation Center, a drone company in Atlanta and the Airbus engineering centers. He also is responsible for maintaining Airbus relationships with universities, as well as handling government affairs (i.e. dealing with the White House and Congress).

"We've had some really good experiences at Airbus ... some absolutely euphoric experiences at Airbus," McArtor reports. "And we've had some near-death experiences as well, but that's what makes it exciting."

Even with so many successes, McArtor says he's equally excited about what's to come. He hopes to remain in the aviation industry long enough to see some of the expected innovations come on line.

"There's lots of exciting things," he says. "We have this group called the Aging Aviators — these are seven classmates who get together every year. I tell them I can't do anything about getting old, but I refuse to grow old. I figure, if you stay engaged with young people and young ideas, you'll stay young for a long time."

Giving Back

McArtor has a long list of charitable organizations he's involved with. Ever since his daughter's cancer treatment, McArtor has been closely aligned with St. Jude's.

"I've been on their professional advisory board and worked hard to try to get corporate sponsorships and individual sponsorships," he says. "We've seen remarkable progress on the campus of St. Jude."



Allan McArtor and Grace McArtor enjoy a horseback ride.

Because another passion of his is aviation history, McArtor serves on the board for the National Air & Space Museum. He's also served on the boards of various aviation-related nonprofits and start-up ventures.

In addition, McArtor was intimately involved in the planning for and installation of the United States Air Force Memorial at Arlington Cemetery.

But perhaps McArtor's most passionate support is reserved for USAFA. Through the years, he's been a member of the Association of Graduates, an annual Sabre Society donor, a 30-year trustee of the Falcon Foundation, and board member of the Air Force Academy Research and Development Institute.

He's also a founding board member of the Air Force Academy Athletic Corporation, and is presently involved in projects to renovate Falcon Stadium and the Falcon's Nest at Clune Arena.

"And I've done a little guest lecturing at the Academy on management and leadership," he says. "I always enjoy talking

to cadets. And I'm always amazed at how much smarter they are than I was."

A Great Ride

"I've had the good fortune of being around aviation for my entire career," McArtor concludes. "I've seen the military side, I've seen the civil side, I've seen air freight and I've seen passenger. I've seen the regulatory side, with the FAA, and now I see the manufacturing side with Airbus."

"I've had a rather kaleidoscopic view of aerospace and it's been a great ride. I consider myself to be very fortunate ... and I wouldn't trade any of it."

McArtor shares his personal motto: "Never come out of afterburner." He says that theme can be traced throughout every stage of his life.

"I figure you should go as fast as you can, as hard as you can, for as long as you can," he smiles. "A lot of people say I'm an overachiever, and that's probably true. But I love a challenge." 