



GEN. (RET.) NORTON "NORTY" SCHWARTZ

1973

When Gen. (Ret.) Norton "Norty" Schwartz arrived at the United States Air Force Academy in 1969, he found the home and family he had always longed for.

Hailing from a small town in south New Jersey, Schwartz was born into a decidedly dysfunctional family.

"My mom was ill from the very early days, so it was basically the three of us — my dad, my older brother and me," he says. "I sort of came from a goofy home."

His father, a typewriter salesman, failed to provide much of the emotional nurturing important to young boys, and Schwartz admits it had an impact on his development.

When he received an appointment to USAFA, Schwartz says his cadet experience helped fill in many blanks in his life.

"It was home, it was a family," he says. "It was all those things that you would want to have as a young person. It was a mission and it was something with which I was compatible."

As a cadet, his goal was to fly for the Air Force. And over a nearly 40-year military career, Schwartz would not only fly but achieve ever-increasing leadership roles that would eventually lead to an appointment as the 19th chief of staff of the Air Force.

"What's the chances of a kid from South Jersey, whose dad sold typewriters for a living, to be a service chief?" Schwartz laughs. "It wouldn't happen in the United Kingdom. It wouldn't happen in France and it wouldn't happen in the Asian militaries, but it happens here."

Schwartz says it was a privilege to lead the Air Force for a time, and he gave it his all.

"We didn't leave anything in the gas tank on the last day," he admits.

Early Life

Schwartz says he was fortunate to grow up in the Toms River community.

"All in all, it was a great, solid place to be from," he suggests. "There were good values in that town and in that environment."

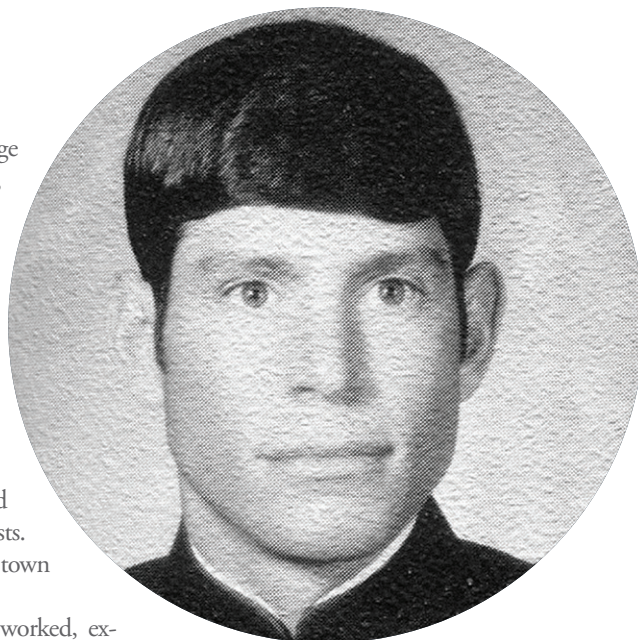
As a young man, Schwartz worked, excelled at school and played both football and baseball. He was highly competitive and strove to do his best.

"I'm a closer, I guess you could say," he relates. "If you give me a task, I'm kind of driven to make it happen. That's been true from the earliest days."

Schwartz developed a love of aviation early on, frequently riding his bicycle to the nearby Ocean County Airport to check out the airplanes.

A school counselor, who shared a love of aviation, suggested Schwartz apply to the Naval Academy as his high school career came to a close.

"He knew the circumstances we had," he says. "My dad sold typewriters for a living, so wasn't able quite to have both my older brother and me in school at the same time. Either I got a scholarship someplace, or I waited for two years ... which was the plan."



At the last moment, Schwartz also applied to USAFA. He ended up with no appointment to Navy but was named his congressman's first alternate for the Academy.

"The kid who was the primary choice ... couldn't pass the entrance physical," Schwartz says. "I got in because of his misfortune. That was the first time that fortune sort of shined on me as time went on."

Doolie Days

Schwartz had no clue what awaited him at Basic Cadet Training.

"I remember my dad in the old green Dodge took me to the Philadelphia Airport," he recalls. "It was the first time I'd ever left this sort of envelope of New York, Philadelphia and D.C. Once I got there for Doolie summer, I was task saturated."

“Someone once told me a long time ago that reputations are hard to earn and easy to lose. People can forgive a lot of things, but few people will forgive lack of integrity.”

Fortunately, Schwartz’s initial roommates were very helpful in his transition from civilian life.

His roomie during Basic, Ron Taylor ’73, had gone to Prep School and was familiar with the Doolie drill. His next roommate, Bob Munson ’73, was an Army brat — his father having served as a brigadier general.

“The bottom line is there were many people who helped me cope, and that was instrumental in the outcome,” he admits.

A defining moment for Schwartz came during Hell Week. He was sent to his room for a “uniform change,” requiring him to quickly return to formation within minutes.

As he changed clothes, Schwartz glanced out the window at the Quad and had an epiphany. When some may have questioned continuing, the young basic cadet felt a wave of resolve sweep over him.

“I guess I really do want to do this,” he recalls thinking. “And I never wavered. I didn’t think my career would last more than 20 years, but it lasted almost twice that.”

Academy Life

Schwartz began his academic endeavors as an aero major, but soon discovered engineering wasn’t for him. He shifted his focus to political science and international affairs instead.

By the time he was a second-class cadet, Schwartz was enjoying leadership roles within the Cadet Wing. He served as a sergeant during his junior year, then as a squadron commander as a firstie.

“Maybe one of the most unusual things for me was I actually turned out to be a halfway decent boxer,” Schwartz chuckles. “I had a good jab but didn’t have much of a right hand.”

He competed in the Wing Open and coached his squadron team for several years.

Most importantly, Schwartz says his years as a cadet taught him important lessons that have carried him throughout his life. Integrity, trustworthiness and excellence were traits that were instilled at USAFA.

“Someone once told me a long time ago that reputations are hard to earn and easy to lose,” he says. “People can forgive a lot of things, but few people will forgive lack of integrity.”

Set to Fly

Inspired by his USAFA commandant, Brig. Gen. Robin Olds, Schwartz secured an F-4 pilot slot at graduation.

“But I knew in my heart of hearts that I probably would not have made the best fighter pilot,” he admits.

He instead went to pilot training at Laughlin Air Force Base in Texas, before assignments in the C-130 Hercules at Clark Air Base in the Philippines and Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas.

“I was destined to be a crew airplane person,” he says. “That was the right fit for me. It turned out fine.”

Schwartz arrived on active duty at the tail end of the Vietnam War, and was a co-pilot during the 1975 airlift evacuation of Saigon.

“It was a good experience for a youngster to watch a well-seasoned pilot run the crew,” he smiles.

After an internship with the Air Staff Training Program, Schwartz switched over to Special Operations and became a flight examiner in the MC-130E.

“I understood that this was pretty demanding flying, but it was also a mission



ABOVE: Suzie and Norton "Norty" Schwartz '73 on their wedding day.

RIGHT: Gen. Norton "Norty" Schwartz offers a salute during the 2012 USAFA graduation ceremony, as President Barack Obama looks on.

BOTTOM: Gen. Norton "Norty" Schwartz offers a flag and comforting words to a Gold Star family.

with which I connected,” he explained.

After completing Armed Forces Staff College, Schwartz went on to assignments in D.C., Germany, Florida, Hawaii and Alaska.

He returned to combat during Desert Storm, assigned to Special Operations Command Europe.

“One of my assignments during that period was to go open up an installation in the eastern part of Turkey,” he recalls. “We operated there with our helicopters. We were responsible for the northern half of Iraq, both for personnel recovery reasons and also for insertion of American shooters.”

By the close of his flying career, Schwartz had amassed over 4,400 flying hours in a variety of aircraft.

He continued serving in leadership roles, including director for operations for the



Joint Staff and commander of U.S. Transportation Command at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

Schwartz was set to retire when a final Air Force opportunity arose.

Chief of Staff

Schwartz and his fellow Air Force generals were attending a CORONA meeting at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio in the spring of 2008 when controversy over the handling of U.S. nuclear weapons swept top leaders out the door.

"All of a sudden, all the blackberries started buzzing and people see that both the secretary and chief have been relieved," he remembers. "Everyone around the table knew instantaneously that someone there was going to be the next chief."

Schwartz was convinced that someone else — perhaps Gen. Kevin Chilton '76 — would be appointed to fill the role.

A few days later, Schwartz received a phone call at home. It turned out to be a brief interview for the position of chief of staff.

President George W. Bush eventually chose to nominate Schwartz, and a few months later he was confirmed. It was never an option for Schwartz to decline the offer.

"Given the circumstances, there was a need for someone to step into the breach," he says. "The civilian leadership decided it was

me and Suzie, and there was no way to say no. We decided that we would give it our all.

"There's a mythology that says the chiefs' jobs are marathons. That's nonsense; they're sprints. It turns out to be a four-year sprint."

Accomplishments during his tenure included supporting the fights in Iraq and Afghanistan; maintaining focus on the Air Force nuclear mission; initiating the B-21 Raider bomber program; improving support for airmen, their families and wounded warriors; and expanding the Air Force remotely piloted aircraft capability.

"It was clear that this was a technology that we could benefit from and could use to good effect," he says of drones. "We did what we had to do to provide the capability that the commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan needed. We played a small part in getting the Air Force to be a leader in that respect."

Another key milestone during his tenure came in May 2011, when his Air Force played a role in the takedown of Osama bin Laden.

"It was a wonderful thing that Sunday night ... watching the president come to the podium and say that justice was done," he recalls. "It was this overwhelming feeling of redemption."

A Second Act

Upon retirement, Schwartz accepted the position of chief executive officer for the organization Business Executives for National Security. He served in that capacity for six years.

"I would characterize it as a second career of public service," he says. "It's a great mission. This is a group of about 500 or so business executives around the country who believe that there's a connection between security and prosperity, and they want to give back."

Those involved in the organization provide guidance and mentorship for leaders in government.

In January, Schwartz began a new challenge — president of the Institute for Defense Analysis, a federally funded research and development center. He helps lead an organization of about 1,000 employees.

"Their mission is to provide scientific and technical analysis to government decision-makers to enable good choices that are not tainted by corporate self-interest," he says.

"It's an important mission. Hopefully I can add some value there."

DG Honor

Schwartz's selection as a 2019 Distinguished Graduate Award recipient has given him a chance to reflect on his life and career.

"I recognize that I have done some things that might draw attention," he says. "But being the chief is not a ticket to be a DG, and it shouldn't be. So, other things were obviously considered as well. Given the other selectees, it's an honor to be among them."

The lifetime achievement award, however, does not mean he's done contributing. He continues to support his alma mater. He, along with the Class of 1973, continues to support the National Character and Leadership Symposium both financially and by attracting high-impact speakers to the gathering.

"It's a labor of love for our class, and I'm glad I can just be a little part of that," he says, "making sure that the cadets at the Academy



have exposure to great Americans ... role models of character."

Schwartz is quick to give credit to his wife, Suzie, for much of his past and present success.

"Bottom line, Suzie was the singular occurrence of fortune in my life to be sure, and I'm doing my best to be a worthy partner," he says. "My girl has the same public service ethic that I have. She works her tail off on behalf of others." 