

A portrait of an elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a striped tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a wooden bookshelf filled with books. A blue flag with a white star is visible on the right side of the bookshelf.

LT. GEN. (RET.) JAY KELLEY

CLASS OF 1964

Prior to being named a Distinguished Graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, perhaps Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Jay Kelley's proudest previous moment was being named to the "Frankfort Hot Dog Hall of Fame."

Kelley '64 graduated from Frankfort (Indiana) High School and at the time had designs on following in his father's footsteps and becoming a police officer.

But it was his unexpected career detour into the Air Force that sealed

Kelley's eventual accolades from his hometown.

"It doesn't get any better than that," he says of his hall of fame honor. "We all went to a small, rural school, and our mascot was a wiener dog."

If not for a series of fortunate events, and sheer stubbornness on his part, Kelley may have never experienced a long and storied military career. Today, he remains grateful for the opportunities that the Air Force offered him.

EARLY INSPIRATION

It was fortunate timing when Naval Air Station Bunker Hill in Indiana transitioned to an Air Force base (the base later becoming Grissom Air Force Base).

In the mid-1950s, Kelley recalls his father taking him out of school one day to watch the impressive planes first arriving at the base.

“We parked off the end of the runway and watched what seemed like a hundred F-86s land,” he remembers.

A short time later, Kelley learned all about the relatively new service academy in Colorado Springs. The young man also met several of the Air Force pilots stationed at the base, and he quickly was hooked on the idea of an Air Force career. Unfortunately, Kelley applied to the Academy but failed to secure an appointment.

Poised to attend Purdue University instead, Kelley received a telegram in early summer from the USAFA basketball coach outlining a possible backup plan. Kelley was a stand-out basketball player in Indiana, and the coach was interested in him playing for the Falcons.

Based on the coach's advice, Kelley enlisted in the Air Force Reserve and attended basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

Once there, Kelley learned that a number of basic trainees were also athletes who USAFA officials were trying to get into school.

“It was one of the early attempts on the part of the Academy to send people to a prep school deliberately to get into the Academy,” Kelley reports. The athletes ultimately ended up at the Naval Academy Prep School.

After finishing the academic year, Kelley and some of his classmates headed to USAFA for a four-year education. He brought with him the work ethic and values he learned from his parents.

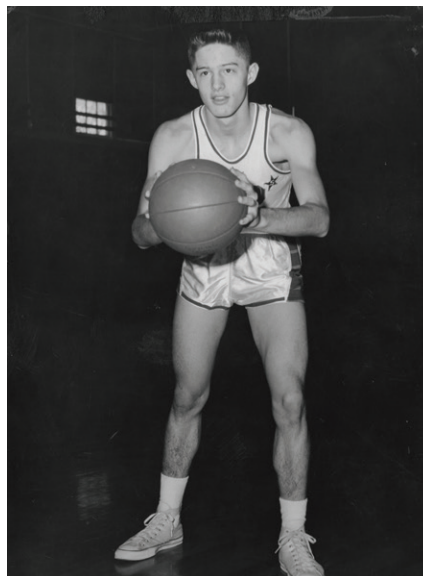
“When you’ve got a chore, do it right, do it better than anybody else and don’t screw it up,” he recites.

CADET CHALLENGES

When he arrived at the Academy, Kelley was focused on just one goal.

“I was going to be the world’s best fighter pilot,” he recalls.

His opportunity to achieve that goal was brief, however. While standing at attention for rifle inspection during Basic



TOP: A young Eagle Scout Kelley is flanked by his parents in this submitted photo.

MIDDLE: A stand-out basketball player in Indiana, Jay Kelley was fortunate to be chosen for a backup plan to get to USAFA.

BOTTOM: C4C Jay Kelley. (Note the M-1 rifles in the rack.)



Cadet Training, Kelley passed out from the heat and fell to the ground.

"There wasn't anybody in front of me and I fell forward and landed on my chin," he says. "It just destroyed my jaw. I had busted it in 16 places and lost a total of 11 teeth."

While in the hospital, Kelley did all he could to stay on track as a basic cadet. He memorized required fourth-class knowledge and stayed in shape by running in the stairwells, plus doing pushups and sit-ups.

When his Air Officer Commanding tried to convince the injured cadet to leave the Academy, Kelley refused. He promised to complete all requirements of his Doolie year, including survival detail.

With his jaw still wired shut, Kelley was allowed to carry 32 cans of baby food into the backcountry and complete the required mission.

"I lost some more weight, so I was a pretty skinny rat by the end of it," he laughs. "But I made it through just like everybody else did. I was determined that they were not going to throw me out."

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

Kelley never actually competed in basketball due to an injured knee and poor grades. He found himself on academic probation most semesters.

One positive highlight of his cadet years was Kelley's involvement in the accidental establishment of the jump program.

A Class of 1964 classmate, Joel Aronoff, approached Kelley and several other rising first-class cadets asking if they were interested in skydiving. The small group jumped for the first time in Boulder, Colorado.

In short order, the quartet of fearless cadets entered parachute meets around the nation — registering as the Air Force Academy Parachute Team, even though leaders knew nothing of their group. Their first event was in Enid, Oklahoma.

"I ended up hung up on a barbed wire fence, and a couple other guys ended up on a roof," Kelley remembers. "Needless to say, we were still learning."

As their jump abilities improved, Aronoff decided to register the team — which now included five members — for the National Collegiate Parachute Championships in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Kelley and Pete Johnson, Class of 1966, made up the accuracy duo and they blew away the competition that day.

"I'VE BEEN BLESSED. I'M HONORED TO HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE MY COUNTRY THROUGH SOME VERY CRITICAL ISSUES AND IN SOME CRITICAL TIMES ... AND ON MANY OCCASIONS TO BE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME." —LT. GEN. (RET.) JAY KELLEY '64

"Pete and I damn near nailed it," Kelley recalls. "It was amazing."

The cadets returned to USAFA with two first-place trophies, proudly displaying them in their rooms. The commandant caught wind of the secret victory and had the trophies confiscated.

"We went through about a week full of just being scared to death, quite honestly," he says. "We didn't know what would happen."

Everything turned out fine, of course, as the commandant decided to present the trophies to the team on the staff tower during the noon meal. The commandant shortly thereafter brought in jump experts from West Point to help USAFA establish an official parachute club.

MISSILE MAN

By the time he was ready to graduate Kelley received some disappointing news. Since he passed out during Basic Cadet Training, and because there was no official medical assessment of the incident in his records, he was disqualified from pilot training.

"About a month before graduation, they asked what else do you want to do?" he remembers.

He asked what other operational opportunities the Air Force offered and someone suggested missiles. He chose a Titan II missile assignment with the 390th Missile Wing at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona.

"I knew almost nothing about the Titan," he admits. "But that's where I went, and that's what I did. It was a great, fortuitous decision, being on a Titan II crew."

He would remain in the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) field for several decades to come.

"I loved every minute, and I'd do it all again ... except I might need a new body," he laughs.

MOVING ON

After four years on alert, Kelley became the payload project officer for Minuteman III.

"The Minuteman III was really different from the Titan," he explains. "It afforded extraordinary targeting options and, needless to say, complexity. Explaining that to the flying Air Force became my job, and it was a tremendous experience for a young captain."

Later, as a major, he served on the Joint Strategic Target Planning staff and the Joint Chiefs of Staff team.

"I was one of those responsible for writing what's called the President's Decision Handbook," Kelley recalls. "Explaining that to the president is something interesting ... trying to describe what the nation can do with its nuclear weapons. It's one job you didn't want to screw up."

Next, Kelley became the first active-duty Air Force officer to study in London at the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS).

Upon return to the States, he attended National War College and then went to Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, returning to the ICBM world. A year later he became the Combat Support Group commander, where he quickly learned about the support world — everything from sewer systems and dining halls to officers clubs, enlisted clubs and more.

From there, Kelley went to McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, to command a Titan II wing, and also as the host wing commander supporting a KC-135 wing stationed there.

A short stint followed at Strategic Air Command Headquarters as the assistant chief of staff, and then he headed to the State Department as the senior military adviser to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

"Not a job I ever thought about, but the Air Force just kept telling me what they needed me to do," he says.

In 1988, Kelley became the director of operations for Air Force Space Command. His marching orders were to help operationalize the space domain, including the use of the global positioning system in warfare.

"It's a process that is still underway," he says. "But thanks to guys like Gen. Jay Raymond, who was my escort officer at Vanden-



CLOCKWISE: Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Jay Kelley, at right, with five former defense secretaries. (Note the uniform with rank on the sleeves.) Once a missileer, always a missileer. Sook and Jay Kelley at a Falcon Foundation Banquet.



berg Air Force Base as a captain, it's happening," Kelley eventually departed Air Force Space Command as its vice commander.

He was then assigned to a completely different role — director of public affairs under Secretary of the Air Force Don Rice and Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen. Tony McPeak.

For his next assignment, Kelley was promoted to lieutenant general and assigned as the commander of Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, for four years. During his tenure, he helped align Air University with Air Training Command, and his team helped launch Air Education and Training Command. His team also moved Air Force Officer Training School from Lackland to Maxwell Air Force Base and moved Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), the Community College of the Air Force and Civil Air Patrol into Air University.

Following Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Kelley helped start a Joint Forces Air Component Commander course for all services.

FUTURE SHOCK

Toward the end of his Air Force career, Kelley chaired two major studies of great importance to the Air Force — SpaceCast 2020 and AF 2025. The two projects helped the military envision what future conflicts might look like.

To encourage outside-the-box thinking, Kelley recruited science fiction writers and Hollywood types to suggest "alternate futures" for the Air Force to consider. One key figure in the discussion was Alvin Toffler, world-renowned futurist and author of "Future Shock."

"He saw things no one else could see," Kelley reports. "It proved of immense value, and I think we came up with a bunch of home runs. It changed some very important things in our Air Force."

TRANSITION TIME

Kelley's relationship with Toffler turned into his first civilian job. Fresh from Air Force retirement, Kelley and several other former Air Force officers teamed with Toffler to start a consulting company.

"We had a great operation going, but I just tired of being gone because I traveled a lot," he says.

Kelley would then become the chief operating officer of a minority-owned small business, later a vice president for Lockheed Martin and later still president of Global Services for ManTech. In all, he worked in industry about 12 years.

By then, Kelley had become invested in giving back to his alma mater. He joined the Falcon Foundation as a trustee and was a member of the executive committee when

previous President Randy Cubero '61 was set to leave his position.

Kelley was eventually elected president of the nonprofit and served in that capacity for 10 years (2010 to 2020). During his tenure, more than 750 Falcon Scholars were sent to prep schools and eventually landed a spot at USAFA.

"It was very quickly evident that this was what I was born to do," Kelley says of the role. "I loved every single minute of it — helping these young people achieve their life's dream of entering the Air Force Academy."

He credits the Falcon Foundation trustees, his support staff (Donna Porter, Sherry Cooper and Pearl Swofford) and the USAFA Admissions staff for their efforts over the past decade.

"Nobody does anything alone, and I had a dream team of people to work with," he admits.

GIVING BACK

Through the years, Kelley also has been involved with various organizations in the communities he's lived. In Colorado Springs, he has been active with the local United Way and helped bring the Colorado Springs Symphony/Philharmonic back from the brink of bankruptcy. He also is a Sunday school teacher at his church.

Because of his dedication and commitment to the Academy core values, Kelley was tasked by the superintendent to co-chair the Academy's most recent Honor review. Kelley continues to serve as a volunteer squadron professional ethic adviser (SPEA) for Cadet Squadron 33.

In addition, he is the president of the Class of 1964.

LIFE LESSONS

When alerted that he'd been selected as a Distinguished Graduate of USAFA, Kelley admits he couldn't believe it.

"It's a humbling honor," he says. "There are so many great graduates out there, and so many who have done so much."

He thanks his wife, Sook, and his family for the support they've offered through the years. And he thanks God for guiding him through a career that he wouldn't have thought possible as a Hoosier.

"I've been blessed," he says. "I'm honored to have had the opportunity to serve my country through some very critical issues and in some critical times ... and on many occasions to be in the right place at the right time." 