

CLASS OF
1966

BRIG. GEN. (RET.)

HANS MUEH



Decked out in his Air Force uniform, which he normally keeps stored away, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Hans Mueh '66 stands at attention and raises his right hand to once again recite the oath of office.

This time, however, he's swearing in his grandson, Max, during a May 13 Air Force commissioning ceremony at the University of Colorado Boulder.

"He's going to become an intel officer, just like his grandpa," Gen. Mueh states with pride. "That's just amazing to me."

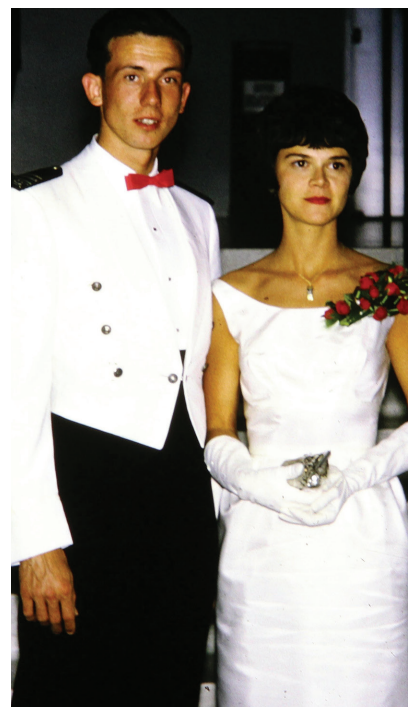
The full-circle moment is not lost on the 38-year Air Force veteran who as a youngster, born in Germany in the final months of World War II, never could have imagined the life and career ahead of him. That unexpected journey included his acceptance into the United States Air Force Academy and has now culminated with his receiving the United States Air Force Academy Distinguished Graduate Award.

"I owe everything in my life to the Academy," he reflects. "I'm still surprised that I got into the Air Force Academy, but I'm so grateful for that opportunity. For a little immigrant kid from Germany to be able to do that in the United States of America ... it's living the dream. This truly is the land of opportunity."

A CHILD OF WAR

Gen. Mueh was born in Celle, Germany, in 1944. His father was conscripted into the Wehrmacht in 1932 and fought for more than a decade.

Captured by British troops in 1945, the elder Mueh — a munitions expert — worked for two years with the Allies to identify and disarm unexploded ordnance



throughout Europe.

"I didn't meet my father until 1947," Gen. Mueh recalls.

Looking for a fresh start, Mueh's father brought the family to North America in 1951.

"We had one suitcase for the three of us coming out of Naples, Italy," Gen. Mueh says.

Fortunately, Mueh's grandfather had emigrated to Canada and later the United States during the Great Depression. He fared well working in California's vineyards and eventually purchased a hotel in Fessenden, North Dakota — population 1,000.

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Gen. Mueh says his grandfather was somehow involved in Dwight D. Eisenhower's successful presidential campaign, which likely helped his family leave Germany.

"I think that had something to do with it. My parents and I were authorized a visa to come to the United States," he says.

The immigrant family lived at the hotel while searching for work. Eventually they moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Mueh's father put his artistic talents to work in the lithography industry.

"I never saw my parents give up on anything," he says. "They accepted all the challenges that were in front of them. Their courage was phenomenal."

BECOMING AMERICAN

Even though his parents continued to speak German at home, Gen. Mueh says it didn't take him long to learn English and assimilate into American culture.

He quickly made friends, often playing sports and spending significant time outdoors. He also excelled at academics.

"My parents had a lot to do with that, because they never stopped learning," he says. "I think that wore off on me."

He also credits his first teacher in Germany, Herr Wenig, who required near-perfection from his students.

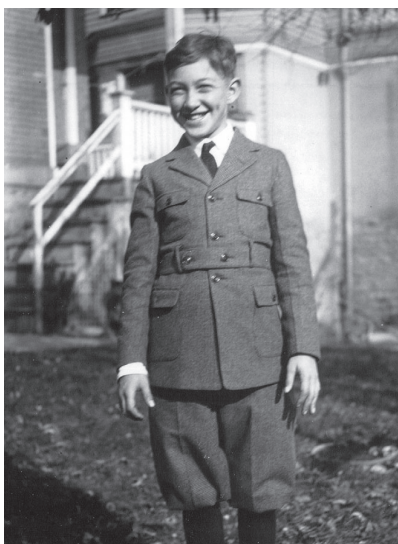
"Nothing was ever quite good enough," he recalls. "So, we just got better and better, because that's what he expected."

As he developed academically and athletically in the United States, Gen. Mueh caught the attention of the high school staff.

His track coach, a liaison officer for the then-upstart USAFA, mentioned "a new school out west" that he felt might be a good fit for the young man.

"He gave me a brochure, and I took it home and talked to my parents," he says. Gen. Mueh was eventually selected for US-AFA appointment from among 10 finalists in his congressional district.

"That same day, there was an article in the Milwaukee Journal that said ... Congressman Henry Reuss picks immigrant for Air Force Academy," he remembers. "I think he used that as a little bit of political fodder. But I didn't care; I got in."



ACROSS: Hans and Sally Mueh on their wedding day.

TOP: Ilse and Alfred Mueh, Gen. Mueh's parents, are surrounded by family and friends on their wedding day in 1942.

MIDDLE: A young Hans Mueh came to the United States with his family at age 7 and assimilated quickly into the new culture.

BOTTOM: Then-Col. Hans Mueh is named permanent professor at his alma mater.



LIVING THE DREAM

By the time Gen. Mueh arrived at the Academy in 1962, he had developed quite a patriotic streak.

"I loved this country," he admits. "There was no doubt in my mind that I was going to serve for however long they wanted me to serve."

But he had no clue what awaited him as Basic Cadet Training (BCT) kicked into high gear.

"You just didn't know what hit you. It was unbelievable," he recalls. "The yelling didn't stop for six weeks ... seven weeks, actually, because we had survival at the end of BCT."

Those challenging first weeks, however, demonstrated the need for teamwork, which has stuck with him ever since.

"There isn't a single cadet who could have done it on their own," he explains. "But because we were all in it together, you develop these bonds of support and trust with your classmates. It's hard to describe if you haven't been through it."

While a cadet, Gen. Mueh played goalie for the Falcon soccer team, where he learned even more lessons about teamwork, integrity and honor.

"The Honor Code overlaid the whole experience," he says. "Every one of the instructors and senior leaders that I had great respect for were the ones that had deep integrity. You could trust them at their word."

CAREER PATH

Early on, then-Cadet Mueh wasn't necessarily fixated on becoming a pilot. That came later in his four years at the institution.

"One of the devastating things that happened in my life was when I lost my pilot training slot," he says. "I had an eye injury when I was very young, and it never bothered me. But it eliminated me from pilot training. To this day I still think I would have been a good fighter pilot."

When he heard the disappointing news, Gen. Mueh changed his mind about a long military career, pledging then to put in his minimum five years.

His negative attitude changed, however, once he entered the Air Force as an intelligence officer.

"I went to intel school with a chip on my shoulder," he remembers. But an instructor eventually set him straight, encouraging him to get his act together and make the best of the situation.

Fresh from technical school, Gen. Mueh and spouse, Sally, were off to Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, assigned to the Indications and Warning Center for Tactical Air Command (TAC). The important intel mission proved challenging and eye-opening.

"I'm a second lieutenant, and I got to brief the four-star and his vice," he says. "I started to fall in love with the Air Force ... and found out that there were other jobs that were supportive of the pointy end of the spear. I loved intel."

The analytical skills he'd developed as a chemistry major at the Academy served him well in the intelligence field.

"I could sort the junk from the good stuff in a hurry and put together a briefing package for the generals that I was confident was the right one," he says.

MOVING ON

After three years at TAC, the Air Force sent Gen. Mueh to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to get a master's degree in chemistry. Remembering his less-than-stellar USAFA grade-point average, he laughed at the suggestion.

He completed his coursework in 13 months and returned to his alma mater to teach.

After two years at the Zoo, he volunteered for an intel assignment in Vietnam.

"All of my classmates were in Vietnam and the war was winding down," he reports. "I felt like I needed to go."

Academy leaders agreed, but only on the condition that when Gen. Mueh returned stateside he would pursue a Ph.D. and come back to teach future cadets.

"I went over there and worked for Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in Saigon," he says. "It was pretty high-level stuff, and my area of responsibility was Cambodia, Laos and the Delta region — the southern part of Vietnam."

After the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, he helped establish the new Support Activities Group in Thailand, developing intelligence assessments for the con-

tinuing air war in Cambodia and Laos.

When Gen. Mueh returned home from his yearlong deployment, his perspective on life had shifted.

"Ever since that tour, little things stopped bothering me," he explains. "Because when you see the big picture — you see people dying, and you see people trying to survive — it changes you. You figure out what's important and what's not."

THE THRILL OF TEACHING

Returning stateside, Mueh completed his Ph.D. and resumed teaching chemistry. Because of his grasp of his native German language, he also taught third-class-level courses for the Foreign Language Department.

"Teaching students, instead of being on the receiving side, was a thrill to me," he says. "And I think I was a pretty good instructor. I worked very hard at my craft."

Gen. Mueh decided early on that he would never let any student fail his classes. He would spend whatever extra time cadets needed to get them up to speed so they could pass.

"The fortunate thing about the Academy is, when you have a class of 20, that's doable," he explains. "The vast majority of them don't need the help, so I could focus on those people who did."

Even today, Gen. Mueh is frequently stopped in his tracks by someone recognizing him. The message is usually the same: "Thanks for helping me get through the Academy."

"I think it's human nature to want to make a difference in the world," he says. "And if I have done any of that for a handful of cadets, that's a success."

STAFF TOUR

To remain in uniform, Gen. Mueh accepted an assignment to the Pentagon serving as special assistant for technical matters at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), working to exploit technology to enhance intelligence collection and analysis. He also helped develop a partnership between DIA and the USAFA faculty.

"Life is so full of those kinds of targets of opportunity," he says. "If you're ready for them, then good things happen. It was just another fork in the road."



ABOVE: Falcon Head Football Coach Troy Calhoun '89 bends the ear of Athletic Director Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Hans Mueh.

TOP RIGHT: In retirement, Gen. Mueh enjoys plenty of golf and fishing.

RIGHT: Then-Vice President Joe Biden pauses for a photo with Sally and Gen. Mueh during USAFA graduation.



He returned to USAFA in 1986, becoming permanent professor and head of the Department of Chemistry in 1987. He later served two years as vice dean of the faculty.

Throughout his tenure as professor, Gen. Mueh always kept one foot in athletics, serving as the link between the superintendent and athletic department as the faculty representative.

FORK IN THE ROAD

In 2004, Gen. Mueh was asked to break in the new USAFA athletic director. But when the candidate backed out at the last minute, then-Superintendent Lt. Gen. John Rosa unexpectedly approached Gen. Mueh about taking on the AD role.

"Life is full of lucky occurrences," he says. "This was one of those."

Gen. Mueh retired from the Air Force and accepted the new role, making just a one-year commitment. Eleven years later, he left the job.

"I became the first civilian athletic director," he says. "I am forever grateful that they had the confidence in me to say you're

the natural person to be the athletic director."

Over the course of his tenure, Gen. Mueh says his team accomplished much, including more than \$100 million in construction projects. He also was proud of his role in helping set up the Mountain West Conference, which thrives today.

But the most significant win, he adds, was establishing the Air Force Academy Athletic Corporation, which supports Falcon sports.

"It took me seven years to do that," he reports. "We started that initiative in 2006. In 2013, the Secretary of the Air Force signed it into being."

Despite having a small student body, USAFA has always been able to hold its own on the fields of friendly strife, Gen. Mueh notes. It's not a surprise to him.

"We don't get a lot of five-star athletes," he explains. "But nobody has teams like we have. They compete for each other, like how soldiers fight for their buddies next to them."

GIVING BACK

Even in retirement, Gen. Mueh stays highly engaged with the Academy and its graduate community. He's served on the Association of Graduates board for six years running and was recently reinstated to the Air Force Academy Athletic Corporation board. He also sits on the Falcon Foundation board.

From where he sits, Gen. Mueh says it's obvious that USAFA continues to produce incredible leaders of character for the nation.

"The future of this country is secure when I look at the cadets that we're turning out to be Air Force and Space Force officers," he says.

A Colorado Springs resident, Gen. Mueh has served on the boards for many local education- and sports-based organizations. His favorite volunteer role has been as a Cheyenne Mountain Zoo board member.

He also is a member of Mission: Readiness — Council for a Strong America.

"Only 29% of kids from 17 to 25 are eligible to serve in the military, whether that's because of drugs, obesity, health issues, whatever," he explains. "We're asking high schools to reinstate physical education in the ones that have dropped PE. That's very important because our youth are falling way behind in terms of overall mental and physical fitness."

DG HONOR

When notified that he'd been selected a Distinguished Graduate, Gen. Mueh says he was speechless.

"I don't stun easily," he says. "It was totally unexpected, because I thought 'Why me?' I think we've probably had 60,000 distinguished graduates, who have all gone out there and done amazing things. But I'm humbled and honored. I will try to live up to the level of the group that I have just joined."

He thanks his wife, Sally, and his children for the love and support they've offered through the years. 