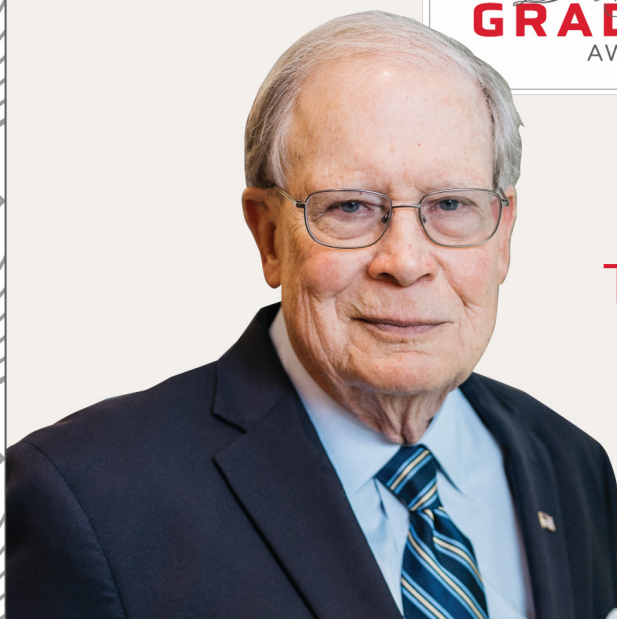


*Distinguished*  
**GRADUATE**  
AWARD



MR.  
**TERRENCE "TERRY"  
O'DONNELL**

CLASS OF  
**1966**

By Bryan Grossman

**T**errence "Terry" O'Donnell '66, senior counsel at Williams & Connolly LLP, sits in his Washington, D.C., law firm's conference room contemplating the role that fate has played in his career. Outside the large windows behind him, helicopters intermittently skim the Potomac River like metallic dragonflies.

"When I got out of the Academy and decided to go into the Office of Special Investigations and go to law school, I was not sure at all where it would lead me," he admits. "I knew I wanted to take a hard look at having a career in the JAG Corps. I knew I was interested in politics, in international political science. But I think the biggest surprise was what a role fortune has had in my career development."

As fortune would have it, O'Donnell, among other accomplishments, captained the U.S. Air Force Academy's swim team and occasionally made the dean's, commandant's and superintendent's lists; performed counterintelligence work during the Vietnam War and earned a Bronze Star; graduated from Georgetown Law School and received an appointment to three different positions by three different U.S. presidents; acted as U.S. representative to the United Nations Program for Prevention of Crime; acted as chairman of the USAFA Board of Visitors; served as general counsel of the U.S. Department of Defense and as executive vice president of Textron Inc.; earned the DOD Award for Distinguished Public Service; was deputy counselor to the president of the U.S. Olympic Committee; served on the Administrative Conference of the United States; and practiced law first as partner (1981-1989) and then as senior

counsel (2012-present) at Williams & Connolly LLP.

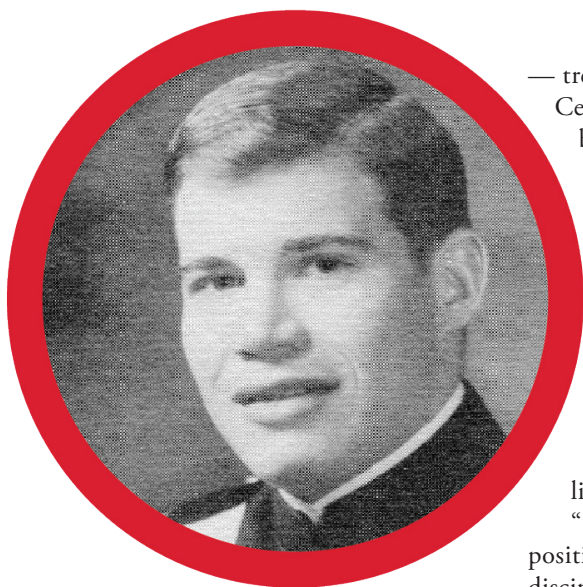
But a humble O'Donnell concedes luck is meaningless without preparation and credits his time at the Academy for readying him for the positions he's held since taking his oath nearly 60 years ago.

#### **BULLDAWG FROM BIRTH**

Gen. Emmett O'Donnell, Terry's father, served 35 years between the Army Air Corps and Air Force and went on to become president of the United Service Organizations. A 1928 West Point graduate, the elder O'Donnell inspired his son to follow in his footsteps.

"It was his experience that piqued my interest in the Academy," O'Donnell says. "[My father] played lacrosse and football at West Point. He was in the early flying game — he took B-17s from Hickam [Air Force Base] to the Philippines in one of the first large unit movements. He was a squadron commander, helping Gen. [Douglas] MacArthur command, and ended up working for the legendary Gen. [Henry] 'Hap' Arnold at the Pentagon. [Gen. Arnold] gave him his first star the day I was born and sent him to Saipan as commander of the 73rd Bomb Wing, which was the first B-29 wing to go to Saipan. In that capacity, he led the first B-29 raid on Tokyo, a historic event involving 111 bombers.

"In those days, it was very prominent to have nose art on the front of the aircraft," he explains. "Most of them were very attractive women with catchy phrases below. But my father's B-29 had a big, fat, ugly baby in diapers with a bomb cocked over its shoulder. The name of the aircraft was Terrible Terry.



So having been born that year, my father, I think, wanted to commemorate my birth by putting a bomb in my hand on [his] aircraft.”

O'Donnell says of his father: “He was a real warrior and an old-school conservative. He told me as a youngster, ‘First you get the \$15, then you get the bicycle.’ That was his philosophy in life: You earned your way.”

O'Donnell attended high school in Hawaii and admits he wasn't nearly prepared enough when he first entered the Academy in 1962.

“I had perhaps too much fun in high school, and I really didn't know what I was going to face when I got to the Academy,” he recalls. “When I entered Basic Cadet Training, it was a shock, going from the beaches of Hawaii to 7,250 feet above sea level. I never quite acclimated to the early runs, circling the parade field at high port arms, taking meals under combat conditions. But I was determined to get through it, and I did. I got great support from my classmates, who became the 13th Squadron Bulldawgs. It was perhaps the most significant test I can recall in my life, both mentally and physically.”

O'Donnell says athletic pursuits occupied much of his time at the Academy.

“In addition to academics and military training, I focused on intercollegiate athletics — swimming and water polo,” he says. “I recall vividly the 5 a.m. workouts in the fall and winter

— trekking down to the to the Athletic Center pool, working out, coming back for breakfast and going back to the Athletic Center for physical training. In those days, you had judo, boxing, wrestling and unarmed combat, and having already swum maybe 3,000 or 4,000 yards, we'd beat the hell out of each other in the boxing ring. By the time I got to my first class, which happened to be mathematics, sometimes I had a little difficulty absorbing it.

“[Sports] kept me occupied in a positive way,” he adds. “Obviously, the discipline that you learn in endurance sports like swimming sticks with you all your life — that desire to win, the desire to be as good a swimmer or good an athlete as you can also applied to everything else you did at the Academy.”

Athletics aside, O'Donnell says he entered USAFA with specific career goals in mind, but they didn't pan out.

“I wanted to fly like my father,” he says, “but I learned very quickly at the Academy that unless I got a flight training waiver for my eyes, I was not going to be eligible for pilot training, and no waiver was forthcoming.”

Despite this setback, O'Donnell quickly found his niche.

“I developed an interest in international affairs, political affairs and, in particular, law,” he says. “We had a terrific Law Department when I was a cadet, and I assume it's still just as good.”

But one USAFA lesson O'Donnell still utilizes often has nothing to do with academics.

“The major point that I learned, which has stayed with me, is that you could do a lot more than you thought you could do,” he says. “And that applied to me throughout my life, because my grades were nothing to write home about. But the understanding that you could succeed if you put your mind to it stayed with me for life. And of course, without the great faculty at the Academy, I don't think I would have developed the interest in law, and I would have never pursued that line, which has been the core to my subsequent career.”

## AFTER THE ACADEMY

Following graduation, O'Donnell attended OSI counterintelligence training in Washington, D.C., and then was off to Vietnam.

“There, we ran counterintelligence source nets around each airbase, recruiting Vietnamese who would then recruit people in the villages to give a heads up when the [North Vietnamese] were bringing in 122mm rockets to shoot at our aircraft, or sappers ... to blow up aircraft,” he says. “After analysis of the intelligence, the Army and Marines would act on the information and interdict the village where the armaments were building up. I traveled to all the air bases in Vietnam on a regular basis. It was a long and very frustrating year in the sense that the helicopters would come in every day with casualties, so we were losing an awful lot of troops there. And we lost some excellent Academy graduates during that conflict.”

When he returned from Vietnam, O'Donnell took a leave of absence without pay from the Air Force to finish law school.

He earned his law degree and joined the Judge Advocate General Corps. While O'Donnell waited for his bar results, President Richard Nixon established the Cost of Living Council, and the Department of Defense was directed to send lawyers to support the effort.

“Because I was not a member of the bar yet, the Air Force could easily dispose of me because there were a lot of things I couldn't do,” he says. “I couldn't try cases; I couldn't appear before tribunals and the like until I got my bar acceptance.”

While on the council, O'Donnell met Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, who oversaw the project.

“In June of '72, as a result of working for them, I was given an offer at the Nixon White House to come on board in a political role in anticipation of the '72 campaign. And being disappointed at not being able to fly and not sure I wanted to make a career in JAG, I accepted the offer ... and stepped down as an active-duty officer. I worked in

the Nixon White House on the National Republican Convention in '72, and then on the election, which Nixon won by a landslide."

Immediately after the election, O'Donnell became special assistant to White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman, who resigned shortly thereafter because of the Watergate scandal.

Upon Haldeman's resignation, Gen. Alexander Haig became chief of staff. Gen. Haig told O'Donnell, "I understand you come from a good military family, and I checked into you. We're going to keep you on the staff."

"I didn't want to leave the White House in the middle of Watergate as a lawyer," O'Donnell says. "It just wasn't a good way to start your legal career."

When President Nixon resigned in August 1974, President Gerald Ford, on his first day in office, asked O'Donnell to serve as his personal aide.

"It was a fabulous opportunity for a young man," O'Donnell says. "I would take people in and out of the office, take notes at meetings, kind of run his daily schedule, traveled with him. When they would play *Ruffles and Flourishes* and announce him back-stage, I was there to put the speech in his hand."

O'Donnell, once again, says he was fortunate to be given such prestigious opportunities, but adds he was prepared.

"There's no question that having been to the Academy was an important credential in being asked to do something like this," he says. "And I traveled with [Ford] on every trip that he took. And two or three come to mind as particularly memorable. One was to Vladivostok, where Ford and Leonid Brezhnev, the general secretary of the Communist Party, met on arms negotiations."

O'Donnell also fondly recalls traveling with Ford to Finland, where the president, along with about 40 other world leaders, signed the Helsinki Accords; and to the bicentennial celebrations in 1976, when Ford and O'Donnell flew "all over the East Coast. ... It was just an unbelievable day."

Toward the end of Ford's administration, the president appointed



ABOVE: Terrence O'Donnell '66, left, accompanies President Gerald Ford in the fall of 1974 to accept credentials from several foreign ambassadors.

RIGHT: President Gerald Ford, right, and Terrence O'Donnell '66, center, in the fall of 1969 during a campaign "whistle stop" train tour through Michigan. (Courtesy photos)



O'Donnell to be the United Nations' U.S. representative to its Program for the Prevention of Crime.

"In hindsight, it was more of an honorific title," O'Donnell says. "I reviewed a bunch of documents and some of the U.N. initiatives, but the U.N. moves at a glacial pace. And as I noticed, and I'm sure you've noticed, crime persists today, so we didn't prevent much crime. But the goal was a good one."

The memorable experiences didn't

end with the Ford administration. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan appointed O'Donnell to the Air Force Academy Board of Visitors and, following a second three-year appointment by Reagan, O'Donnell was elected chair of the board.

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush took office and assembled his administration. O'Donnell already knew Bush's then-secretary of defense, Dick Cheney, from Cheney's service as chief of staff for Ford.



Pope Paul VI greets Terrence O'Donnell '66 during President Gerald Ford's visit to the Vatican in June 1975. (Courtesy photo)

"Cheney went to the president and asked him if he would consider nominating me as the general counsel of the Department of Defense," O'Donnell says, adding he was confirmed by the Senate in 1989.

"It was a great job," he says. "I was the senior lawyer for the entire Department of Defense overseeing 7,000 lawyers, working with great JAG officers for all services, and civilian lawyers involved in procurement and international negotiations. And in the summer of '90, President Bush declared that Saddam Hussein's attack of Kuwait would not stand. That began Desert Shield, which was the buildup to the hostilities the following winter in Desert Storm.

"That was a very interesting period because we were exercising emergency powers; we were securing transport to Saudi Arabia for a half-million troops; we were in status of forces negotiations with our allies. Ultimately, Desert Storm was very quick and a total victory. We had very few casualties on our side, and we drove Saddam Hussein and his forces out of Kuwait in a matter of days. ... So that was probably the most significant event during my service at the Department of Defense."

## FORTUNE PLUS PREPARATION

O'Donnell first joined his current employer, the law firm of Williams & Connolly, as an associate at the end of Ford's term in 1977.

"That was also exceedingly fortunate," he says. "I hadn't clerked for a Supreme Court justice; I didn't have the credentials that the lawyers here at this firm tend to have. But they were willing to take a gamble because of what I had done at the White House and so forth. So that led to a very good legal career for me, and it's still ongoing at the age of 80. They haven't thrown me out the door yet."

O'Donnell looks back, connecting the dots with consideration about how one opportunity led to the next.

"I was expendable while I was waiting for the bar exam [results], so JAG sent me over to the White House Cost of Living Council," he says. "Had they not sent me, I would have never met Cheney and Rumsfeld. Had I not met them, I never would have ended up going to the White House. Had I not gone to the White House, I wouldn't have ended up going to Williams & Connolly. I mean, one thing after another. And happenstance, fortune or luck played an enormous role.

"But I can't tell you how many times the fact that I had attended the Academy was very significant in decisions made by others," he adds. "That's something cadets don't understand; they can't be expected to understand how important it is, but they will as their career progresses."

Recognizing the weight the institution carries, O'Donnell remains involved with his alma mater.

"I've been a member of the board of the Falcon Foundation and a member of the board of the Air Force Academy Foundation," he explains. "And I've been in charge of the Nominating and Governance Committee for the Air Force Academy Foundation. That's down in the weeds — bylaws, governance issues, nominating new board members. ... I've enjoyed thoroughly working with them on projects for the Academy, and I think the Foundation has done so much for the Academy, with the [Association of Graduates], but there's so much more to do. We started out way behind Army and Navy, but I think we've caught up. Our AOG and Air Force Academy Foundation are first-class, well governed and effectively executing their mission."

O'Donnell, nominated for this lifetime achievement award by classmate Col. (Ret.) Dick McConn '66, himself a Distinguished Graduate, says the recognition was an unexpected honor because he never thought himself to be in that league, but quickly diverts attention.

"What I would hope would come out of this opportunity," O'Donnell says, "is to help cadets and share our experiences to encourage them as they go through the difficult process of being a cadet for four years at the Academy.

"You get this terrific foundation at the Academy intellectually, academically, athletically, and then you graduate and you don't know where things are going to take you," he adds. "But with this foundation, you have a great chance of doing what you want and doing it well. I know in the second and third year you get kind of down, it gets old, you're communicating with friends at another college, and they're

having more fun. You've got to get past all of that; it's well worth it."


O'Donnell says he wasn't alone in these accomplishments.

"I would like to thank my wife of 55 years, Margy, and my three daughters and 12 grandchildren. They put up with my being gone an awful lot during those White House days and the Defense Department days and legal days. They have supported me all along the way.

"I'd like to thank the AOG and the Air Force Academy Foundation for all they're doing and pledge my support to them to help them accomplish their mission. And those who have supported me going back to the '66 Bulldawgs — 13th Squadron — who have remained friends all these years. And the faculty who took an interest in me, particularly the Law Department. And along the way, those who helped me in one job or another — Secretary Cheney, [attorney] Edward Bennett Williams, lots of people."

O'Donnell says it's important to remain active in the Long Blue Line and continue to support USAFA.

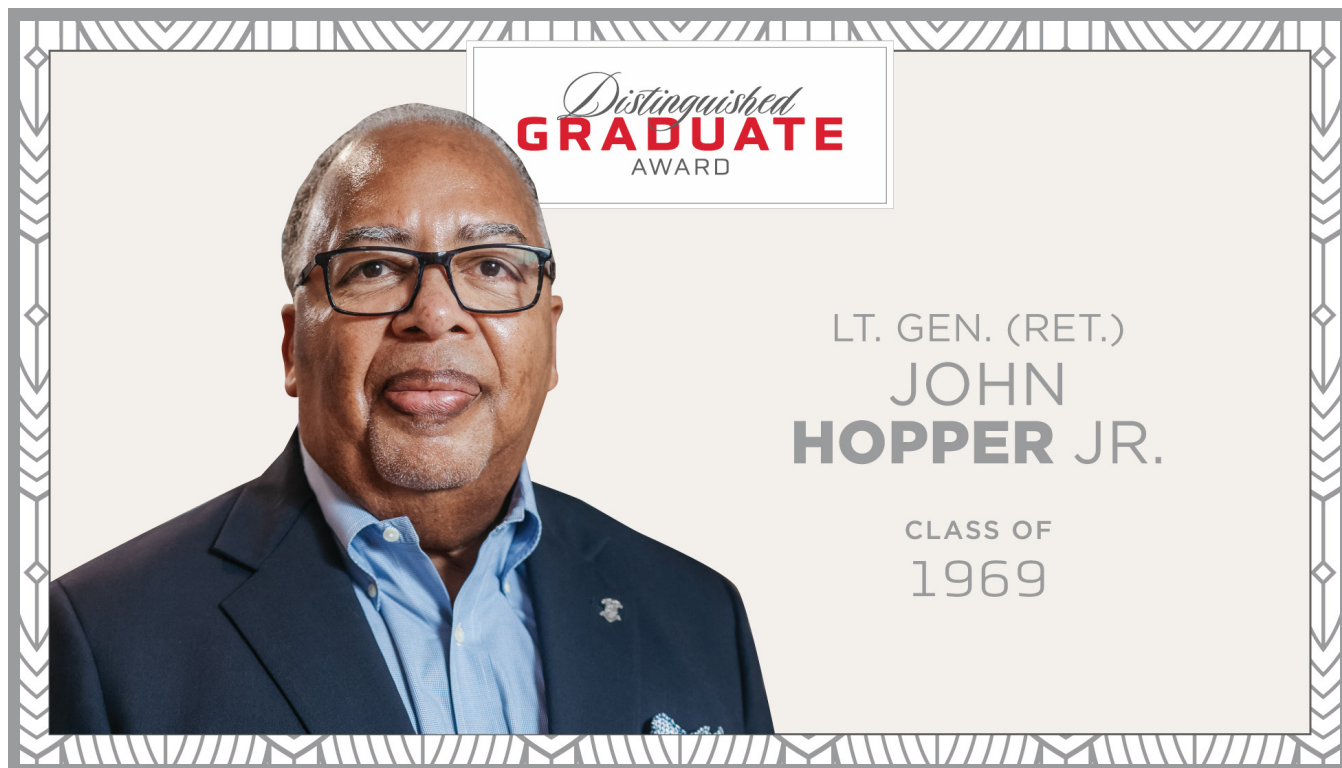
"I think the Academy, because of the across-the-board training, is bringing to our nation a wonderful cadre of people who are going to take leadership roles in the military, politically, in industry. Who knows where they'll go?" O'Donnell says.

"But I am concerned that our education system is not doing a good job teaching young men and women the fundamentals of our great Constitution, of our processes," he adds. "I'm afraid things have turned a little bit too negative and we've lost some focus. The Academy overall is headed in the right direction and can offset some of these trends. There are disputes now: Is it as hard as it was? Is the Academy too easy? Is it too woke? But the core objective — the pursuit of excellence and integrity — remain the same. I think that's where we benefit greatly as a country: from our Air Force Academy and the other academies as well. That's why I'm dedicated to helping; I can't think of a better way to help than through the Academy." 



ABOVE: Terrence O'Donnell '66 (at left with binder) with President Gerald Ford's motorcade in 1976. O'Donnell worked with Secret Service to find a location where Ford could step out of the limousine to shake hands with the crowd.

BELOW: From left: Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gary Palmer '66, Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edward "Randy" Jayne II '66, Terrence O'Donnell '66 and Brig Gen. (Ret.) Graham "Ed" Shirley '66 in the White House Rose Garden at the Commander-in-Chief Trophy presentation to the Falcons football team. (Courtesy photos)



By Bryan Grossman

**M**uch like the rising temperature on June 4, 2024, the *Checkpoints* team steadily climbed to the third-floor office in the Alexandria, Virginia, home of Lt. Gen. John Hopper Jr. '69 and his spouse, Patricia.

As the interview begins, Gen. Hopper, who served as the 18th commandant of cadets and retired from the Air Force as vice commander of Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB, Texas, says it coincides with the 55th anniversary of his U.S. Air Force Academy graduation.

That accomplishment is extraordinary on its own, but it's even more exceptional considering a military career wasn't a blip on Gen. Hopper's radar while growing up in small-town Clarksville, Tennessee.

He says his higher education ambitions included attending Fisk University, listed among the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities. But his father, a U.S. Army career NCO, had other plans for his son; he encouraged Gen. Hopper to attend Ohio State University, advice inspired by an assignment in the Buckeye State.

Meanwhile, a guidance counselor, perhaps seeing military leadership potential, arranged a meeting with an Air Force liaison officer during Gen. Hopper's senior year of high school. That meeting forever changed his trajectory.

#### **A NURTURING COMMUNITY**

Had he not attended the Air Force Academy, it's a good bet that Gen. Hopper would have gone down a much different path. He may not have climbed the ranks to become a general officer or the commandant of cadets. He prob-

ably wouldn't have acted as the longest-serving CEO of the Air Force Aid Society or have been instrumental in opening combat specialties to women through his work on the Military Leadership Diversity Commission.

Because of the course he chose, the Distinguished Flying Cross honoree also helped battle veteran homelessness as chairman of the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He has also served as a Falcon Foundation trustee for more than a dozen years.

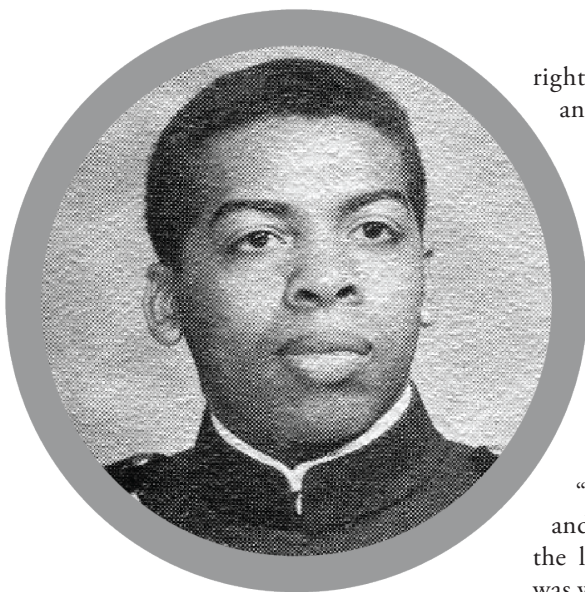
Before attending the Academy, serving his country and advancing to the highest strata of military service, Gen. Hopper's life began in 1946 at his paternal grandmother's house in Clarksville, Tennessee. The town, Gen. Hopper says, has two claims to fame: Fort Campbell, which straddles the Kentucky state line, and Wilma Rudolph, the 1960 Summer Olympic Games track and field gold medalist.

"She lived right across from my maternal grandmother's backyard," Gen. Hopper says. "As little kids, you didn't want to make Wilma mad because she could clearly chase you down."

Gen. Hopper says his community was tight-knit.

"My first-grade teacher was my dad's first-grade teacher," he says. "My second-grade teacher was my best friend's mother. It was that sort of situation — a very nurturing community."

Gen. Hopper attended segregated schools in Tennessee until he entered the fourth grade, when an assignment took his father to then-West Germany. It was his first time on an airplane, but it certainly wouldn't be his last.



“We landed in Germany,” he recalls, “and went to the hotel on Rhine-Main Air Base, which I would visit some 30 years after as a C-141 pilot. We stayed an extra couple of days before going to our final destination, Darmstadt, because the Harlem Globetrotters were in town and doing one of their overseas shows. It was quite a start to our German adventure.”

Gen. Hopper moved back to Clarksville after the seventh grade but, during his junior year of high school, Gen. Hopper’s father received an assignment to Fort Hays in Columbus, Ohio. Gen. Hopper didn’t want to move.

“I was sure my grandmother would support me staying there, living with her, and finishing high school in Clarksville,” he says. “She did not; it was a family conspiracy.”

Earlier that decade, President John F. Kennedy’s administration sought to increase minority participation rates in the military and at military academies.

“I benefited from that,” Gen. Hopper says. “I talked to a liaison officer in the spring of 1964, but it was too late to apply for the [USAFA] Class of ’68, which was probably good. I wouldn’t have made the cut, I don’t think.”

Gen. Hopper instead received an offer to attend the USAFA Preparatory School.

“The Prep School has been a learning experience that I would not trade,” he says. “‘Enjoy’ may not be the exact

right word — but the Prep School was an enjoyable experience.”

Thanks to his time as a Husky and exposure to the military through his father’s career, Gen. Hopper says he was ready when he entered the Academy. He explains that USAFA’s honor code was one of the strongest draws.

“Through my junior and senior years, I began to realize what a privilege it was to live in that environment,” he says.

“Doors were open in the dorms, and wallets were on desks. Things in the lost and found didn’t stay lost. It was where your word was your bond. As we got closer to graduation, it became even more precious because I realized [USAFA] was a bit of an ivory tower and the outside world presented a more corrosive environment, perhaps not intentionally so. But you would have to work harder to demonstrate integrity and live that sort of life, which I think was one of the challenges the Air Force was preparing us for. I valued that.”

Academically, Gen. Hopper majored in general studies, and, militarily, he was part of the survival training cadre and taught survival in the summer training courses. Then, the summer between his second- and first-degree years, he was the cadet commander for basic survival training, a group commander-equivalent job.

And, like most cadets, Gen. Hopper participated in intramural athletics.

“I particularly liked the way the Air Force Academy approached [athletics]. As freshmen, there was a lot of emphasis on some basic sports. Wrestling and boxing were part of that process. Wrestling, I enjoyed, but boxing, not so much. Several of my classmates were excellent boxers. ... They matched us up by weight, and I think I weighed about 175 pounds. I got matched against Dick Rivers. ... But nobody told me Dick Rivers was the Golden Gloves champion for greater St. Louis or something like that. So, the part where Mike Tyson says, ‘Everybody has a plan until I hit him in the face’ — Dick Rivers knows that. I can’t say

that he knocked me out because then I probably wouldn’t have been able to go to pilot training. But I was displaced for a bit.”

## AFTER THE ACADEMY

After courting for more than four years, Gen. Hopper married Patricia Rhodes, of Colorado Springs, in August 1969, and she joined him as he rushed off to pilot training at Laughlin AFB, in Del Rio, Texas.

Following pilot training and just two years after commissioning, he was assigned to fly the C-130 from Taiwan, from which U.S. forces flew in direct support of U.S. forces fighting in Vietnam. Gen. Hopper’s combat experience was soon no longer confined to the boxing ring and “the fields of friendly strife.”

The 15-month assignment didn’t allow spouses or children, though many brought their spouses over at their own expense and lived on the local economy. Gen. Hopper did the same and invited Patricia to join him in Taiwan. She took the risk and arrived in mid-May but, within three days, their housing plan fell apart, and Gen. Hopper was on the flying schedule for a 10-day rotation to Vietnam. She spent those 10 days, not knowing anyone, in a Taiwanese youth hostel. Finally finding housing, “It was, in a sense, commuting to the war,” he says.

In 1971, he piloted a C-130 flight to resupply friendly forces in a country where the Air Force did not usually operate. Gen. Hopper and his crew took enemy fire during that mission, and his aircraft was badly damaged. Patricia received a call claiming he’d been shot down.

“I just can’t imagine what she went through,” he says.

“The call was well meaning, but that was not true. We were shot up but not shot down,” he says, adding the damage was severe enough that he began formulating an evasion plan in case of a crash landing. Gen. Hopper’s C-130 leaked fuel, and his crew attended to systems damage throughout the return flight to Cam Rahn Bay Air Base.



LEFT ABOVE: Caravaning to Tennessee for holiday break, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) John Hopper Jr. '69, left, as a cadet, along with his acquaintances, hunker down at a motel after a snowstorm closed Interstate 70 at the Colorado-Kansas border.

LEFT BELOW: Lt. Gen. (Ret.) John Hopper Jr. '69 and wing command chief, CMSgt. (Ret.) Larry McDowell, following Norton Air Force Base's last operational mission prior to entering the base-closure process in March 1994. (Courtesy photos)



one of the wing commanders in Desert Shield/Desert Storm."

"I was excited, and he said, 'Well, before you get too excited, it's a C-130 wing,' which I thought was interesting. I hadn't flown the C-130 since '72," Gen. Hopper says.

Shortly after, Gen. Hopper left his family at Norton and boarded a plane for Thumrait, Oman, where he acted as the commander of the 1660th Tactical Airlift Wing (Provisional) during Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

"It was one of the best leadership opportunities anybody could ask for," he says.

Gen. Hopper adds that when he departed for the Middle East, U.S. intelligence believed Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, and his wing was the designated large aircraft decontamination base in the southern Arabian Peninsula.

"And part of my wing was an air evacuation hospital, so contaminated crew members, contaminated soldiers, sailors, would be evacuated to our base to be treated," he says. "All of a sudden, at night, I'm thinking, 'Boy, I might be writing a lot of letters [to surviving family members] over the next day or two.' Fortunately, I didn't have to do that, but it's one of the things you think about as a combat wing commander."

#### HOLDING THE LINE

The lieutenant general has left an enormous impression on his alma mater both during active duty and as a civilian.

He was first assigned to the Academy from 1977 to 1981 and acted as deputy

"We saw the ground crews running toward us," he says of the moments immediately after landing. "They all had broom handles and saws, and they were cutting off lengths of broom handle and using those to plug the holes in our fuel tanks because we were just streaming fuel, so we were pretty lucky to get back."

Gen. Hopper was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for that mission.

Nearly two decades later, in 1989, Gen. Joe Palastra Jr. stepped down as commanding general of United States Army Forces Command and was re-

placed by an "up and coming four-star named Colin Powell," says Gen. Hopper. At that time, Gen. Hopper was assigned to the Operations Directorate as chief of the Exercises Division at U.S. Forces Command Headquarters, Fort McPherson, Georgia. When his boss asked what he wanted to do next, Gen. Hopper said, "Go back to flying."

That conversation made its way to Gen. Powell. Gen. Hopper's next assignment was as director of operations at Norton Air Force Base in California. By late fall, his wing commander said, "Hey, you're being considered to be

director of cadet logistics, aide to the superintendent and air officer commanding for Cadet Squadron 12, the Dirty Dozen.

However, he says one of the most rewarding and challenging positions he held at USAFA was that of commandant of cadets from 1994 to 1996.

"I loved the time as commandant, but it was an interesting and stressful time," he says, adding that there "were things I wish I could have done better."

Gen. Hopper points to the sexual assaults plaguing the Academy in the '90s as an example, adding there was a sense that some cadets, particularly women, were perceived as having lesser value, which led to unhealthy behaviors.

"And if we were to believe the statistics, if 100 new cadets are walking through the door, I think the number was 25%. So, 25 of those cadets, men and women, had already experienced some sort of sexual trauma," he explains. "If you know that, it affects all of your experiential training."

But his overall service as commandant, he says, was positive and rewarding.

"I was very pleased with the cadets," he says. "I'm just glad I don't have to compete with them. I used to say that they're the same as we were when we were cadets — now I have to say, 'except they're bigger, faster, stronger, smarter and perhaps even better looking.'"

## OUT OF UNIFORM

Gen. Hopper's selfless service didn't end with his retirement from active duty; one example is his work heading the Air Force Aid Society. The society's mission is to provide financial and educational support to airmen and their families. Gen. Hopper, the organization's longest-serving CEO, says it's been around "since there has been an Air Force. It was established by [Gen.] Hap Arnold and his wife, Bea. It is, in a sense, one of the world's best self-help machines."

Gen. Hopper was also instrumental to the work of the Military Leadership Diversity Commission, an effort chartered by Congress to diversify Depart-

ment of Defense leadership.

"[There was an] acknowledgment that ... underrepresented groups in the NCO corps were fairly consistent with and mirrored the population of those underrepresented groups in the country," he says. "In the leadership positions, it was a very different story."

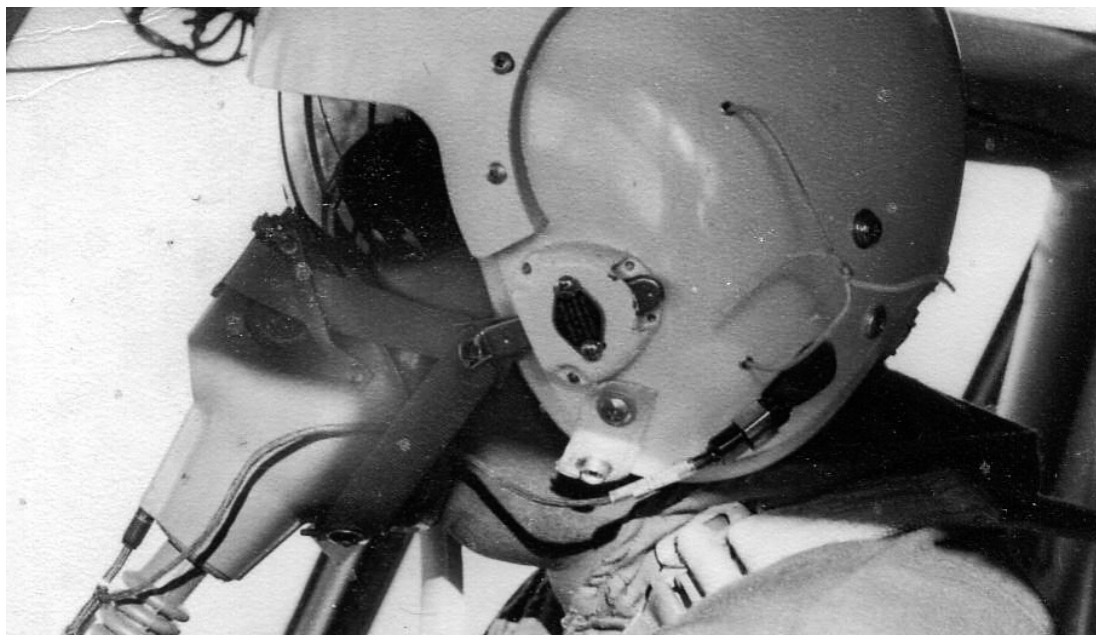
"In the uniformed services, we don't hire in the middle of the process. If we don't grow it, then it ain't going to be there when we need it in the senior positions," he says. "That growth process has to be where that diversity gets amplified through the care and feeding of

the next generation of leadership."

The commission examined all aspects of developing the next generation of leaders, which, among other outcomes, opened combat specialties to women.

"The controversy is always that that's a step in the wrong direction," Gen. Hopper says. "Some associate opening access to those career fields with lowering the standard to enter the field, which is not the case."

"I can remember when we had no women maintenance officers or maintainers, and one of the reasons was a



ABOVE: Then-1st Lt. John Hopper Jr. '69 getting in some high-altitude-low-opening personnel drop training.

RIGHT: Lt. Gen. (Ret.) John Hopper Jr. '69 at his T1-A "fini" flight in 2005, at Randolph AFB, Texas. On the right is instructor pilot Capt. LeRon Hudgins '96. (Courtesy photos)



woman couldn't go around lifting an 80- or 90-pound toolbox," he adds. "And of course, the answer to that is, I know a lot of guys that can't go around lifting an 80-to-90-pound toolbox as well. Then, some enterprising person built these little trolleys that you put your 80-to-90-pound toolbox on, and you pull it behind you as you walk along the flight line. So, our reasons were not good; but the bottom line is, the standard stays the same."

Then, there are Gen. Hopper's efforts with A Soldier's Home. Nearly a century and a half ago, two California families donated almost 400 acres in what would become West Los Angeles, he says. "It was intended to provide a place for those who had fought America's wars — the wounded, disabled and those needing support."

The site once included a hospital, housing and access to transportation.

"It was kind of a bustling operation, and then it deteriorated," Gen. Hopper says. "The land was leased out ... and lost its designation as A Soldier's Home."

"So, a group of veterans got together," he adds, "they sued the government and the VA and said, 'You are failing to meet the obligation of what this land was given to you for.' The court ruling was: 'Yes, you did. You need to rebuild it. And in fact, an oversight committee will help you in this process.'"

Gen. Hopper was the first to chair that committee.

"It's just a super worthwhile project. Kudos to the current VA secretary, who has really been a huge help in moving this forward," he says.

Gen. Hopper also remains connected to the Long Blue Line through his service on the Falcon Foundation board, helping hopefuls reach the Academy via a similar path to his.

"They more than repay the Falcon Foundation's confidence in them and the Air Force Academy's confidence," he says. "When you look at the performance of the Falcon scholars, you will see investing that extra year is a big signal of their willingness to do well at the Air Force Academy."

## A DISTINGUISHED CAREER

"Honored and humbled, it's a distinguished group," Gen. Hopper says of being named a Distinguished Graduate. "[The honor] emphasizes the solidity of the institution and what the Air Force Academy is all about."

He adds, "Being an Air Force Academy graduate certainly is the framework that my life took place in. It built not just the boundaries, but it built the places to exceed the boundaries. It built the places to be all you can be. The limits that are out there are the limits you put on yourself."


But he's also quick to thank others who have helped him along the way, beginning with his spouse, Patricia, and their two children.

"Paul Stein ... was superintendent when I was commandant. He could not have been a more supportive, experienced officer to work with," Gen. Hopper says. "Chief [of Staff Ron] Fogelman is a personal hero of mine and perhaps the finest officer I've ever had the opportunity to serve close to. And then myriad others."

"And, frankly, all those people while growing up, that small-town nurturing experience," he says. "I wouldn't trade that for the world."

Gen. Hopper also thanks his classmates — "too numerous to mention," he says. "There have been many, many officers and NCOs that I should thank, but I certainly can't thank them all."

Gen. Hopper concludes by saying the Long Blue Line is strong and its prestige is growing.

"I think the Long Blue Line at the United States Air Force Academy — and we should include Space Force as well — will continue to produce and be joined by men and women of character whose dedication to serving America deserves admiration. And I'm proud to be part of that." 



Lt. Gen. (Ret.) John Hopper Jr. '69 with Col. (Ret.) Linda Egentowich, COO of the Air Force Aid Society, and Col. (Ret.) Sid Heetland, CFO, at a convention held at the Gaylord Hotel in Aurora, Colorado. (Courtesy photo)