

Two Retired Generals Earn AOG Honorary Membership

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Erlind Royer
& Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Jim Head

By Lt. Col. (Ret.) Steven A. Simon '77

The Association of Graduates awards honorary membership to those whose service to the Academy goes well above and beyond the call to duty. Two individuals, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Erlind G. “Lindy” Royer and Brig. Gen. (Ret.) James H. Head, exceeded that lofty requirement and were honored with membership during a Doolittle Hall ceremony on Nov. 15.

Fittingly, the two leaders were inducted at the same time, as their careers and achievements have overlapped a great deal. Both occupied senior positions on the Academy faculty and later in leadership roles for the nonprofit Friends of the Air Force Academy Library. They also coauthored a book together.

Both demonstrated excellence early on, earning Distinguished Graduate status from their ROTC units — Gen. Royer from Montana State University in 1961 and Gen. Head from the University of Kansas in 1964. Both went on to get their doctorate and report to the Academy faculty in the late 1960s.

Gen. Royer received a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois. In 1969, he came to the Academy, where he taught and served

as director of the Radio Frequency Systems Laboratory in the Department of Electrical Engineering.

Gen. Head earned his Ph.D. in physics from the University of Kansas in 1968. His first assignment was as a physics instructor at the Academy, where he later became director of the Nuclear Radiation Laboratory and director of the Advanced Physics Division.

The two officers left the Academy in

the 1970s for career-broadening assignments, gaining valuable skills and experiences that later benefited the Academy upon their returns.

Gen. Royer was away from 1973 until 1983. He served at Electronic Systems Division at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, and at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Belgium. While at SHAPE, he wrote and obtained approval of the first NATO



Brig. Gen. (Ret.) James Head (left) and Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Erlind Royer celebrate their joint induction as honorary members of the AOG. (Photos by Ryan Hall)

policy for electromagnetic pulse protection of war headquarters, as well as the first NATO command and control plan. He also furthered his education, attending the Armed Forces Staff College and National War College.

Gen. Head departed the Academy in 1974 for 13 years, starting with a one-year tour on the Air Staff as a special projects officer responsible for analyzing and reporting on politico-military affairs in Western Europe. He then went to London on exchange with the British Defence Intelligence staff, where he analyzed Soviet and Chinese fighter aircraft performance. Following Air Command and Staff College, he was assigned to the Air Force Foreign Technology Division at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, as a directed energy weapons analyst and later as chief, Future Systems Division, responsible for specialized, long-range intelligence forecasts in support of weapon systems acquisition. Finally, he served at the Air Force Weapons Laboratory at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, where he planned and directed Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars") research on neutral particle beam weapon technologies.

Gen. Royer returned to USAFA in 1983 and became permanent professor and head, Department of Electrical Engineering. In 1984, he added another responsibility to his duties — director of the Microcomputers in the Dormitories Project. When completed in 1986 for one-third of its estimated cost, it was the world's first academic local area network with every student, faculty member and staff member connected to all academic computing facilities. He became dean of the faculty in 1987.

In 1987, Gen. Head returned to the Academy with an appointment as permanent professor and head, Department of Physics. While there, he led the effort to establish nationally recognized research efforts in lasers and optics, space physics, and physics education. He also negotiated an agreement with Air Weather Service to provide manpower and laboratory equipment to stand up the Academy's meteorology minor (now a major). In addition to his command of the Department



LEFT: Brig. Gen. (Ret.) James Head (left) accepts his honorary member designation from Lt. Col. (Ret.) Steve Simon '77.

BELOW: Brig. Gen. (Ret.) James Head speaks to the Doolittle Hall crowd during the Nov. 15 ceremony.



ment of Physics, he served two terms as vice dean of the faculty, first from 1994 until 1996 and then from 2004 to 2006.

In 1992-93, Gen. Head spearheaded the development of the Academy's civilian faculty program in response to a congressional directive. He coordinated and interacted with senior Air Force officials, as well as counterparts at other service academies, facilitating the smooth and successful transition of the Academy's faculty from virtually all military to one with a significant civilian presence.

He also served as the officer representative for the Academy men's basketball team for six years and, with his spouse, Donna, researched and co-wrote *Hiking*

the Air Force Academy, a guide to trails and wilderness areas throughout the Academy.

After retirement, both officers continued to serve the Academy.

Gen. Royer worked in the private sector following his 1991 retirement, and then returned to the Academy in 1998 as a distinguished visiting professor in electrical engineering, a position he held for five years. He then served as a volunteer mentor to cadet design project teams before occupying the Phillip J. Erdle Chair for Engineering Science, where he helped establish the computer engineering and systems engineering majors, in addition to teaching. After that, he helped establish the Academy Center for Unmanned

RIGHT: Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Erlind Royer speaks to the assembled crowd.

BELOW: AOG Board Treasurer Glenn Strebe '87 (left) and Lt. Col. (Ret.) Steve Simon '77 (right) present Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Erlind Royer with his honorary membership.




BELOW: The honorary member awards await their presentation to the honorees.



bership may be awarded to non-graduates who have rendered outstanding and conspicuous service to the Air Force, the Academy and/or the AOG. Honorary members must be recommended by a member of the board and receive at least 80% acceptance by all members present at a quorum of the board. Honorary membership is limited to 25 living persons.” Both retired officers received unanimous support.

At the induction ceremony, Gen. Head reflected that, “This recognition was totally unexpected and beyond my imagination. It was not even a dream... just not ever a consideration in my mind. I am thankful to the AOG and for all who helped me along the way ... mentors, colleagues, and especially family. I am truly humbled by this honor.”

Gen. Royer offered similar thanks and thoughts, and his remarks included a humorous riff on the early difficulties he had with the personnel system, which could have derailed his career. Fortunately, he persevered.

Gens. Royer and Head are among the fewer than 50 people to receive honorary membership in the AOG. The first honorary membership was awarded on Oct. 3, 1981, to Mrs. Gail McComas, the Academy’s first Cadet Wing hostess, who served from 1955 until 1977. Other selectees include former Arizona U.S. Sen. Barry Goldwater, World War II aviation hero (and AOG headquarters building namesake) Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, and former Dean of the Faculty Brig. Gen. Robert McDermott. 

Aerial Systems Research (ACUASR), and then worked to integrate the remotely piloted aircraft program with the ACUASR.

After his retirement in 2006, Gen. Head continued his support of Academy basketball, this time as president of the booster club Friends of Air Force Basketball, a position he held for 10 years. Under his guidance, the club provided tens of thousands of dollars to benefit the men’s and women’s teams and their cadet-athletes.

More recently, however, Gens. Royer and Head’s connections and contributions to the Academy have been even closer. Both have been active in the Friends of the Air Force Academy Library for years and both currently serve

in leadership positions. Gen. Royer is the president of the organization, and Gen. Head is its secretary.

Finally, they joined forces to research and write *A History of the Permanent Professors of the United States Air Force Academy*. The book describes the establishment of the Academy and its academic program and traces its evolution over the decades. It profiles the Academy’s first 100 permanent professors, from Robert F. McDermott to David J. Caswell. The authoritative work was published in 2018, with the AOG hosting the book launch and a celebration event in Doolittle Hall.

The AOG bylaws govern the honorary member program: “Honorary mem-