

GENERAL JAMES P. MCCARTHY

receives AOG honorary membership

BY CHRISTOPHER A. STEWART



The Association of Graduates proudly presented retired USAF General James P. McCarthy with an honorary AOG membership Nov. 11 during a banquet in McCarthy's honor. McCarthy, who got his start in the Air Force in the ROTC program at Kent State University, played a key role in the maturation of the Air Force Academy. And he continues to touch cadets' lives as the Academy Research and Development Institute professor of national security in the Academy's department of political science.

"I just don't think anyone can understand what an honor this means to my husband," said McCarthy's wife Alice.

"An honorary AOG membership is the highest honor the graduate community bestows upon supporters of the U.S. Air Force Academy," said Jim Shaw, '67, president and CEO of the Association of Graduates. "Honorary memberships are awarded only to individuals who have rendered outstanding and conspicuous service to the Air Force and/or the Air Force Academy."

Of his 35 years in the Air Force, McCarthy says his most rewarding assignment was to the Air Force Academy. He served as an Air Officer Commanding for cadet squadrons 2, 14 and 15 in 1964-1967. As an AOC, McCarthy experienced Academy life in its budding years.

"The most important thing is that I learned more than I was able to give in that assignment, just being in the environment, living the cadet life like the AOCs are supposed to do, understanding all of the things that the cadets were taught, and then knowing that, as a leader in a squadron, you had to comply with those same things yourself," McCarthy said.

While at the Academy, McCarthy started the cadet soaring program. "We started it as a club and we appealed for some non-appropriated funds to fund the program," McCarthy said. "We

only had five cadets because that's all we could handle at the time. It was a very limited capability."

The soaring program, which today is one of cadets' highest-rated Academy experiences, began with McCarthy, one sail plane, a winch launch, and five cadets.

McCarthy also played a key role in the development of Jacks Valley, home to 2nd BCT, the second phase of basic cadets' military training and immersion into the Academy experience.

Lt. Col. Jack Geyer, Maj. Earl Mickler and McCarthy went to the near-northern boundary of the Academy and planned for moving part of Basic Cadet Training from the cadet area to the field.

"We're going to put the tents here, the feeding facilities here, the support facilities there," McCarthy remembered the discussions. "Here's where we're going to put the obstacle course, that's where we're going to put the assault course."

McCarthy, who later returned to the Academy as vice commandant, experienced all the elements of Jacks Valley.

"I think it's a wonderful learning experience. It helps you overcome your fears and gives you confidence. And, of course," McCarthy said, "that's what the confidence course is about, but that's what the whole Jacks Valley is really about."

After leaving the Academy following his first assignment here, McCarthy moved to Japan and then Vietnam to command an F-4 squadron, where he flew 152 combat missions.

McCarthy's career in the Air Force continued with 11 years at the Pentagon and a tour at the National War College. He then came back to the Air Force Academy in 1974 as the vice commandant.

"Probably the most significant thing is that I was given the responsibility for planning for the admission of women at the Air Force Academy. And not only did the Cadet Wing not want women to come to the Air Force Academy, but neither did the faculty and staff. And so our biggest challenge was to design a plan that recognized that acceptance of women was probably our principle hurdle. The rest of it would fall in place. And so we spent about a year, year and a half, planning and preparing for women at the Air Force Academy. And, of course, the women that came in were superstars and did very, very well," McCarthy said.

For more than three years McCarthy was stationed at Stuttgart, Germany, where he had day-to-day responsibilities for all U.S. forces in Europe as the deputy commander in chief, European command.

"Those were pretty demanding times," McCarthy remembered. "The Berlin Wall came down, [and] I was welcomed in Moscow like an old friend ... We provided significant forces and operations out of Turkey supporting Desert Storm. And then, in the aftermath, a project called Provide Comfort, which was to bring the Kurdish people out of the mountains of northern Iraq."

While retired, McCarthy is still very active within the Air Force community. He is the chairman for the task force on Operation Enduring Freedom lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq. He previously chaired the task forces on lessons learned for Kosovo and Bosnia.

"The task forces are made up of retired senior general officers and some senior civilians that were either DOD officials or had other experiences in industry," McCarthy said. "And we go in and, during the combat phase, look at what's going on, try and understand what the limitations are and how they could be overcome; and we report back directly to the Secretary of Defense."

McCarthy's attachment to the Academy runs much deeper than professional affiliation. "Our son Mark is a graduate of the Class of 1985, and he was killed in an F-16 off the coast of Bosnia," McCarthy said. "And his classmates and friends responded to us very warmly and sympathetically. And so a number of those classmates from a class that I had no Academy association with have become close to us. And so it's just another example of how that circle of friends from the Academy, or the Academy family, expands under various circumstances."

Today McCarthy is in his twelfth year of teaching at the Academy, and he says that the Air Force Academy continues to build leaders of character for the Air Force and nation. "The Academy attracts some of the finest young people in the nation, and you have to work hard to be able to teach them, to lead them, and that can be very, very satisfying," McCarthy said. "Yes we give them academic experiences, military experiences, athletic experiences, but when you gather them all together we're looking for leadership; and the fundamental principle of leadership is character." ✓

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