

# ‘Man Behind the Curtain’

Kroboth honored for selfless service  
to USAFA graduate community

By Jeff Holmquist



**I**n the waning days of his 45-year career serving and supporting the Long Blue Line, Maj. (Ret.) Tom Kroboth was inducted as an honorary member of the Association of Graduates during a Dec. 5, 2023, ceremony.

“This is certainly long overdue,” Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Hans Mueh ’66, a member of the AOG board of directors, commented during the gathering. “What a special and distinguished career supporting USAFA and its graduates.”

Kroboth has long been considered a valued part of the USAFA family — a key contributor to *Checkpoints* magazine and a mainstay at Jim Glaza’s ’60 Jurassic Park tailgate party hosted by the Academy’s first four classes — but his induction cemented his place in the institution’s history. Affectionately known as “Kro,” Kroboth was joined by family, friends and colleagues for the special gathering at Doolittle Hall.

“I’m proud to be named an honorary member,” he says. “It’s exciting and humbling.”

Calling him “the man behind the curtain,” Gen. Mueh suggested that Kroboth was the unassuming early employee of the AOG. He was the lone member of the AOG’s communications team in the early years and among just a handful of employees of the alumni organization back then.

During his lengthy tenure with the AOG, Kroboth served as editor of *Checkpoints* magazine and director of publications for the organization. For the past 20 years, he’s worked part-time as Gone But Not Forgotten and Class News editor, among “the most widely read pieces in *Checkpoints*,” Gen. Mueh says.

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Gould ’76, then-CEO of the AOG and the Air Force Academy Foundation, reported that the board of directors voted unanimously to induct Kro as an honorary member.

“It didn’t take much to convince the board,” he says. “From honesty, integrity, selflessness and excellence across the board, you epitomize our core values. I hope that you feel this invitation for you to become one of us is heartfelt, because it is.”

Proof of Kro’s selfless service is found inside each edition of *Checkpoints*, Gen. Gould notes. There are no bylines identifying the significant work he’s been doing for decades.

“There’s no credit-seeking on Tom Kroboth’s part,” he says. “He just published this year in and year out, four

editions a year, for 40-some years and not looking for any credit. You deserve all the credit, and we are so honored to be able to bring you into the AOG as an honorary member.”

## CORRALLING A MUSTANG

Expelled from Central Catholic High School in Allentown, Pennsylvania, for smoking in the men’s bathroom, Kroboth decided to enlist in the military in 1955.

He initially joined the Marine Corps Reserve under the delayed entry program, expecting to officially swear into that service in the fall. But when he arrived for inprocessing, the line for the Marines was terribly long. No one was standing in the Air Force line, however, so Kroboth enlisted with the nation’s newest military branch instead.

“This airman was almost a Marine, but luckily for us he chose the blue,” Gen. Gould says.

He served as an enlisted airman for 12 years, rising to the grade of technical sergeant. He was a boom operator in the KC-135, KB-29 and KC-97 during that time, assigned to Strategic Air Command. He was first stationed at Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin, Texas, and later headed to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington.

Kroboth was then selected for the Airman’s Education and Commissioning Program and attended Syracuse University. While there, he earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism and a master’s degree in mass communications. He also



Maj. (Ret.) Tom Kroboth, second from right, celebrates his induction as an honorary member of the Association of Graduates with his wife, Jan, and, from left, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Gould '76, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Hans Mueh '66 and Gen. (Ret.) Steve Lorenz '73. (Photos by Ryan Hall)

met and married his wife of 52 years, Jan, while getting his degrees.

Kro gained editing and writing experience for the Syracuse newspaper while finishing his coursework, and then received an Air Force commission.

"I'm a Mustang," Kroboth says proudly. "That's what they call officers with prior-enlisted time."

After a brief stint as an Air Force recruiter at Syracuse and assignments in Korea, Germany and MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, Kro headed to USAFA, where he has stayed ever since.

### FINDING HIS NICHE

Kroboth arrived at the Academy as a major in 1978, assigned to the Directorate of Gifts & Alumni Affairs, the Academy agency that originally handled AOG operations, as director of gifts and memorials. In that role, he also contributed to USAFA's alumni publication, then known simply as the *Association of Graduates Magazine*.

"He was really on the ground floor of all AOG operations," Gen. Gould says.

Kro transitioned from the Air Force in 1981 rather than be transferred to a new base and job. He retired one day and came to work for the AOG the next, at the same office and the same desk, in the same position.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, he was essentially the AOG's entire communications staff, responsible for *Checkpoints* magazine and the Register of Graduates.

He helped grow the magazine's size and quality and incorporated new technologies, including the use of computers.

"Tom was dragged kicking and screaming into the digital age," Gen. Mueh says. "But he did it anyway because he knew it would make the product better."

Kroboth's first computer password was "NoWay," his silent protest to the untimely retirement of his trusty electric typewriter that remained on his desk for decades after.

He held the title of editor and director of publications until 2001. Kro then served as assistant editor until 2004, when he switched to a part-time position.

Kroboth officially retired from his part-time role at the end of 2023.

### POSITIVE IMPACT

Gen. (Ret.) Steve Lorenz '73, president of the Falcon Foundation, nominated Kro for honorary membership designation.

In his nomination packet, Kro is described as one of a handful of people who have had a direct and positive impact on literally every Air Force Academy graduating class, from 1959 to 2023.

"I think that the one word that describes Tom and Jan is service," he told the crowd. "Service to our nation, service to our Academy, service to our graduates and service to the AOG."

He noted that the couple has also sponsored more than 20 cadets through the years, having a lasting impact on the lives of future officers.

"Everyone you touched you've made better," he added.

"Tom Kroboth has certainly met and exceeded the requirements for being named an honorary member," says Wyatt Hornsby, vice president of marketing and communications for the AOG and Foundation. "That's why this is such a momentous occasion."

In accepting the honorary membership, Kroboth thanked a long list of mentors and friends who encouraged and supported him along the way, including former AOG Executive Director Lt. Col. (Ret.) James Wheeler '64; former AOG Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gary Howe '69; Col. (Ret.) Dick Rauschkolb '70; Lt. Col. (Ret.) Dick Coppock '61; and Col. (Ret.) Jock Schwank '60.

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— Gen. (Ret.) Steve Lorenz '73

The Honorary Member program permits the Association of Graduates to recognize nongraduates who have championed the AOG's mission to "serve and support the United States of America, the United States Air Force, the United States Air Force Academy, and the graduate community." The designation is limited to 25 living recipients. Kroboth is the 44th individual to be inducted as an honorary member in the history of 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. 