



2005

DISTINGUISHED GRADUATES

THE U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY AND ITS ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATES RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THE WINNERS OF THE DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE AWARD. RETIRED GENERALS HANSFORD T. JOHNSON, '59, AND MICHAEL E. RYAN, '65, BOTH ARE DESERVING OF THE AWARD THAT HONORS GRADUATES FOR THEIR SERVICE TO THE NATION.

BY MATT KLEVE

GENERAL H. T. JOHNSON

General H. T. Johnson's illustrious military career began at Clemson College in South Carolina where he joined the Reserve Officers Training Corps. Though the ROTC program was a good start, his heart had been set on attending a military academy. So as he continued his college studies, he also continued applying to the military academies. After his sophomore year, he finally received appointments to both the Naval Academy and the brand new Air Force Academy.

From then on it was a military career of firsts; beginning with being a member of the Academy's first graduating class. At graduation, he was the outstanding graduate in thermodynamics and aerodynamics. Thirty years later, he became the first Academy alumnus to rise to the rank of General.

"I never expected things to happen," Johnson said reflecting on his career. "They just happened. I tried to prepare and opportunities came along, but I never sought and did things to further my career other than studying and working hard."

During 33 years of commissioned service, he accumulated more than 7,800 hours of flight. More than 1,000 of which were in combat. Johnson volunteered for duty in Vietnam in 1967, where he served as a forward air controller; a job requiring immense courage. During his tour, he flew 423 combat missions. Seventy-one of those were over North Vietnam or the demilitarized zone directing support of South Vietnamese and Marine forces. For his actions, Johnson was awarded a Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, and 23 Air Medals for exceptional courage and skill demonstrated in combat.

The only assignment Johnson said he ever actively pursued in his Air Force



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1. C1C H.T. Johnson looks forward to a bright future.

2. The Johnson family celebrates a promotion.

3. General Johnson and his wife, Linda.

career was to come back to the Academy. In 1968, after his tour in Vietnam, Johnson achieved that goal, returning to his *alma mater* as an assistant professor in the aeronautics department. In the classroom, he said, it was helpful to be able to use real-life situations from his service in Vietnam to convey academic theories, "I was pleased that I was able to go to combat first, and be able to relate those experiences to cadets."

General Johnson was directly involved with virtually every conflict from Vietnam to the War on Terrorism. He lead Strategic Air Command operations and directed the refueling and strategic reconnaissance forces during the bombing of Libya in April 1986. In 1987 he was the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Central Command during Opera-

tion Earnest Will, protecting Kuwaiti ships in the Persian Gulf. In the late 80's he was appointed Commander of the U.S. Transportation and Military Airlift Commands, directly supporting Operation Just Cause in Panama as well as the movement of troops and supplies to and from the Persian Gulf for Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

General Johnson became the first commander of Air Mobility Command while still serving as Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Transportation Command.

He retired from the Air Force in 1992 after 33 years of commissioned service, and his success continued, as he proved himself in the private sector. Johnson served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Credit Union National Association. Later he was the CEO of EG&G, a major government contractor. He was also with the USAA Capital Corporation, responsible for providing all non-insurance services to USAA members. Johnson was appointed by President George H. W. Bush and President Bill Clinton to



serve on the 1993 Base Realignment and Closure commission.

Service to country continued for Johnson when he was tapped to be the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Environment just one month before the September 11th terrorist attacks. In February 2003 he became acting Secretary of the Navy. He once again was in a leadership role, this time during OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, as well as continuing operations in Afghanistan.

He recently was appointed by the Speaker of the House and began service on the Academy's Board of Visitors, something he was hoping to do in his retirement. "I wanted to give something back to the Academy. I thought this would be a good way to be more attached to the Academy." He adds that his academy experience set the tone for his lifetime of service, "Academics were important; however, the mentoring from other cadets, the Air Training Officers, Air Officers Commanding, the staff, and faculty had the greatest impact on how I interacted with and led others."

GENERAL MICHAEL RYAN

One flight with his dad in a B-26 was all it took for General Michael Ryan to be hooked on flying. His father pushed forward on the controls and told him let go of a pencil he was holding. In amazement, a young Michael Ryan watched as the pencil seemed to float in front of him. That was the experience that set him on a course that included a long career as an Air Force officer and a lifetime serving the nation. "I just wanted to make the pencil float, I was focused on flying. That was what I wanted to do."

Ryan first came to the Academy as a football recruit. Following a year at the Prep School, he eagerly joined the Class of 1965 on the terrazzo. Growing up with a career Air Force father instilled in him a desire to serve his country, and he wanted to begin as soon as possible. Shoulder problems kept him from his full football potential, but he says the Academy helped him find his academic potential saying, "I needed the discipline the Academy had with respect to academics."

Ryan says the most memorable part of his cadet experience was the strong friendships with classmates through a trying time when everyone was attempting to meet the Academy's high standards. "That formed a basis of what you expected out of life."



1. Then-Capts. Mike and Jack Ryan talk to their father Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John Ryan during the brothers' assignments in Vietnam.

2. General Ryan and his wife, Jane.

3. The Ryan family.

Ryan's older brother, Jack, was also in the graduating class of 1965 and had three years of college before coming to the Academy. Jack often tutored his brother and friends in math and science.

General Ryan said that "It was a big help having a brother there," and after graduation that help continued. The two served together as F-4 pilots in Vietnam. Tragically, Jack was killed in an F-4 crash after returning home from the war.

Then-Capt. Mike Ryan flew 100 combat missions over North Vietnam, where his courage under fire earned him the Distinguished Flying Cross and 12 Air Medals.

Ryan progressed through the ranks of leadership in his Air Force career, commanding at the squadron, wing, numbered air force and major command levels. While Commander of 16th Air Force and NATO's Allied Air Forces Southern Europe, he planned and directed combat air operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, resulting in peace accords for that war torn nation.

Following his father's footsteps, Ryan was appointed the Air Force Chief of Staff in November 1997. He was the second Academy graduate to serve in that position.

He describes his time as Chief of Staff as very challenging in the history of the Air Force. "We were in the midst of the draw-down. We were also at the lowest ebb in the funding stream for the Department of Defense ... Our struggle was to keep the force together." Through this time he said it was important to "[K]eep the people on board, caring for people and their families, and making sure that they were trained and challenged so that they would have the wherewithal to do the job that we ask them to do."

Ryan was at the forefront of the transition to Air Expeditionary Forces, the changing from a cold war force to modern-day forces. This brought improved readiness, stability, and predictability to airmen and their families.

Through almost four decades in uniform Ryan says one thing he learned at the Academy has carried him through in

all aspects of life; integrity. "Throughout my Air Force career, dealing with issues, [integrity] carried me forward in a lot of ways. When I had doubts about what to do, I thought, 'Do the right thing.'"

Though retired from military service for more than four years, so far he says he's "flunking retirement," being as busy as he's ever been. He serves on several boards dealing with national security. He also runs a private national defense consulting firm, Ryan Associates.

General Ryan has continued to improve the Academy that formed the way he lives and leads. He was the Chairman of the Ryan Commission, which conducted a thorough review of the Academy's Athletic Department and its mission performance. He also served on the Association of Graduates' Blue Ribbon Council that made significant recommendations for the operation of the association.

At least for now, Ryan says he'll continue to "Work till you're dirt." According to him, "It's a good philosophy." ✓