

2008

Every year, the Air Force Academy and the Association of Graduates selects two alumni who have exemplified the core values with a lifetime of service, achievement and philanthropy. Nominated by their peers and chosen for their depth of character, the Distinguished Graduates personify everything that this great institution strives to create in a leader. The two recipients for 2008 are no exception. They have led rich lives as both military and civilian leaders and have taken great strides in giving back to the Academy which helped to shape their careers. Role models for all future generations, the 2008 Distinguished Graduates are Donald Shepperd, '62, and John Martinson, '70.

Distinguished Graduates



Major General Donald W. Shepperd

In its fourth graduating class, 1962, the Air Force Academy produced a young second lieutenant named Donald Shepperd. In his 36-year career as an Air Force officer, Shepperd served as a tactical fighter pilot, air liaison officer, flight instructor, forward air controller, squadron commander, and finally, Director of the Air National Guard at the Pentagon. This lifetime of service has earned Major General Shepperd the honor of the Air Force Academy's 2008 Distinguished Graduate Award.

Like many Academy graduates from the 1960's, Shepperd was thrust into the tumultuous skies over North Vietnam. Stationed at Bien Hoa Air Base, and later at Phu Cat Air Base, the young fighter pilot flew F-100's, beginning the tally of what would eventually become 247 combat missions over the course of his career. Shepperd proved his mettle dodging anti-aircraft fire as a MISTY forward air controller from 1967-68 with the 416th TFS.

"I had dreamed about being a pilot and flying ever since I was about four years old," Shepperd recalled. "The Air Force Acad-



emy gave me everything I needed to fulfill my dream. It gave me the opportunity to become a pilot, to fly fighters, to go to war and to do things in civilian life. It instilled the values and the knowledge which set the basis for the rest of my life. I look at the Academy experience as having given me the opportunity and the foundation to be a responsible human being.”

As the Vietnam War came to an end, Shepperd transitioned into flight instruction, returning to the states as a captain in Pennsylvania and later Arizona. In August 1978, he received his first squadron command of

the 152 Tactical Fighter Squadron, Tucson IAP, Arizona. Shepperd went on to attend the Air War College and Research Fellow Center for Aerospace Doctrine and Education. As the 1980’s came to a close, he was promoted to brigadier general and placed in charge of the 102nd Fighter Interceptor Wing, Otis Air National Guard Base, Massachusetts.

“The most important thing that I got out of the Academy is a sense of honor, integrity and responsibility,” Shepperd recalled. “Honor goes without saying, that’s what the Academy experience is all about: the opportunity to serve your nation and to lead other

people in peace and in war. . .the opportunity to serve in so many ways is something that you just don’t get in many places. It’s not about how high you go, it’s about what you leave behind that counts. And it’s about what you do to prepare the people underneath you to reach their capabilities and their dreams.”

The early 1990’s saw yet another transition for Shepperd as he was promoted to major general and stationed at the Pentagon as Director of the Air National Guard in Washington, D.C.. There he developed strategic planning and oversaw logistical operations for over 117,000 Air Guard members in more



than 1,300 units across the world. General Shepperd's sphere of influence covered the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands, his policies and procedures an invaluable asset to America's continuing dominance as the world's greatest air power.

When faced with the prospect of delivering a message to the Cadet Wing, General Shepperd was quick to issue a selfless piece of advice: "I can tell them the one secret to good leadership which will serve them well for the rest of their lives: care more about the people underneath you than you care about yourself. If you put that to work, the people underneath you will take care of you and take care of you well. And they will reach the heights they are capable of."

After his retirement from the Air Force in 1998, General Shepperd turned his military expertise towards providing commentary for news agencies such as CNN and ABC radio in Phoenix, New York and Baltimore. He has traveled throughout the Middle East and became a sought-after lecturer on the subject of terrorism. General Shepperd lives with his wife in Tucson, Arizona.

In a final thought on the Academy, he noted simply, "I made life-long friendships that you simply can't make in any other profession. I have people who are near and dear to me who I met at age 17. . . and now, here we are more than 50 years later, still very close friends. It's something you just don't get in other professions."



John H. Martinson

As a venture capitalist, John H. Martinson finances and guides the nation's leading software entrepreneurs. A 1970 graduate of the Air Force Academy, Martinson took his commission and flew more than 500 North Vietnam missions out of Korat Royal Thai Air Base, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross as a captain.

Upon returning home from the service, Martinson turned his professional efforts towards the world of business. Armed with an MS in Astronautics from Purdue University and an MBA from Southern Illinois University, he entered corporate America with the tenacity of a spirited cadet in Jacks Valley. In 1975, Martinson worked as analyst for the Vice Chairman at American Cyanamid in Wayne, New Jersey. Planning for the Fortune 500 chemical company was only the beginning. In 1977, he moved to Exxon Enterprises where he participated in a \$2 billion investment program to innovate office automation equipment such as word processing, facsimile and digital PBX.

From 1979 to 1986 at InnoVen Capital, he identified software and technology companies spearheading a \$100 million program funded by Monsanto, Emerson Electric and Anheuser Busch. In 1986, Martinson founded Edison Venture Fund in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. With Martinson at the reins, Edison invested over \$700 million in 160 software companies, completing 13 IPOs and 90 successful exits. As Managing Partner,

he led Edison to become the leading venture capital firm in the Boston to Washington corridor. Investors include Honeywell, JP Morgan Chase, MetLife, Invesco, Prudential and many other major institutions.

Martinson recalled his Academy experiences helped transcend a lifetime in the technology industry. "First, I received an outstanding engineering education which helped me become an investor and advisor to technology companies. Second, I gained leadership skills which enabled me to build an investment firm, lead a trade association and mentor entrepreneurs."

In addition to his career achievements, Martinson has a long history of community service and sponsorship in the academic world. He is a primary contributor to the Air Force Academy's Just-In-Time teaching methodology, which utilizes a combination of technology and web based applications to build curriculums. As a program sponsor at Purdue, Rutgers, Penn State, Northwestern, Rowan and many other universities, the Martinson Family Foundation supports K-12 teachers in mathematics and science.

Martinson relayed some well-learned advice to the new generations of Air Force Academy cadets. "They will enjoy multiple careers: one in the military, one in civilian life, one in voluntary service and one in charitable giving. The Academy prepares you for all four of those phases which may occur at different lengths and under different circumstances. AFA's Core Values apply throughout these multiple careers."

A father, scholar and philanthropist, John Martinson has led a life of innovation and service. Mirroring his favorite historical figure, Thomas Edison, John has strived to channel his talents for the advancement of his community, country, and children.

Martinson left a few parting words for new cadets to consider as they enter the next phases of their careers. "The most important lesson is that you can accomplish so much more than you ever thought possible with your mind and your body. You can set your goals considerably higher because of your strength of character, perseverance and clear thinking developed at the Academy and in the Air Force." ■