



2012 DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE

LT. GEN. (RET.) MARCUS ANDERSON CLASS OF 1961

JUST NORTH OF SAN ANTONIO, Texas, in the quiet rural community of Fair Oaks Ranch there sits a modest house surrounded by trees and cacti. Small groups of white tail deer bound gracefully across the roads, roaming the neighborhood as they snack mischievously on lawns and flower gardens. It's just another sunny day in Texas when Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Marcus Anderson '61 answers the door with a welcoming smile.

It has been 52 years since the fighter pilot left the Academy as a freshly minted second lieutenant, and the past half century has given this graduate a colorful career of memories and service to reflect back upon. Anderson folds his hands neatly in his lap, the sky blue gemstone glinting from his Academy ring, and sets out to recount his earliest memories of USAFA. "Traveling from Seattle, Washington

down to Denver was the first time I had ever been on an airplane," he begins. "Showing up at Lowry Air Force Base and jumping right into Basic Cadet Training was a real eye opener. The intensity of the whole experience is what struck me right from the outset. There was no time to do anything other than what the AOCs told you to do. All of the drills, obstacle courses and everything else was like a high speed train rushing by and it was all we could do to just hang on."

Like it did for most graduates, Basic Cadet Training flew by in a blur of screaming, mud, exhaustion and determination, moving the Class of 1961 into their first semester at America's premier military institution.

"Time is of the essence," Anderson recounts. "One of the biggest challenges at the Academy is getting everything done. Time management becomes one of those things you

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really have to pay attention to. You have to get the most important things done first—because it's inevitable that something's going to have to slip just a little. Academics presented another challenge. We had a heavy work load with a lot of difficult courses."

Anderson is careful to point out that despite the time crunch and difficult course work, he and his cadet colleagues still managed to enjoy themselves at the Academy. "When I was there we had a much smaller Cadet Wing than we do now. You get to know just about everyone in your class, and those friendships have lasted ever since. That's one of the great advantages of our time at the Air Force Academy."

After graduation it was on to pilot training where Anderson would earn his wings and find himself in the fighter jet cockpit. After a series of assignments stateside, he eventually landed at the helm of the F-100 at Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam, in the 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron. Anderson would later go on to fly F-4 Phantoms at Ubon AB, Thailand. "My favorite fighter was the one I was flying at the time!" the pilot recounts. "All in all though, I'd have to say that the F-15 was the finest flying machine I had the opportunity to pilot."

As Anderson's career progressed, he found himself faced with a unique opportunity to return to the institution which gave him his start. "I was very surprised when I was selected to be the Commandant," he says. "I certainly wasn't expecting that assignment." Anderson smiles as an old memory returns. "The first thing that happened when we flew into Denver was they lost my hang-up bag with all my uniforms in it. I had to start off my first day on the job in civilian clothes! I never did get that hang-up bag to this day."

Anderson illustrates the myriad changes which the Academy had undergone since his time as a cadet. "Coming back as Commandant was really my time to reconnect. I had been in the operational Air Force for 20 years with maybe one or two visits to the Academy during that time. The day to day interactions with all the cadets makes for a really great job. When I was a student we had just over 300 people in our class. Now, as Commandant, there are over 1,300 cadets per class, and 20 percent of them are female. In my opinion, the women did a great job. They were very eager to succeed, they worked hard and I give them a lot of credit. Our female graduates have definitely proven their value in the active Air Force many times over."

After wrapping up his term as Commandant, Anderson pinned on his second star and served as the Director of Operations at Headquarters, Tactical Air Command followed by tours as Commander of 3rd Air Force, U.S. Air

Forces Europe, Royal Air Force Station Mildenhall, United Kingdom, and then as Commander of the Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. Promoted to Lieutenant General, Anderson completed his military career as the Air Force Inspector General, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force in Washington, D.C. and retired in 1996.

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Retirement, however, was anything but the typical extended vacation that many Americans strive for. "One of the real rewards and benefits of your retirement years is that you have the opportunity to give back," Anderson notes. "Not just to the Academy, but to your local community as well. I served on the AOG Board of Directors shortly after I retired from the Air Force; it was not only very rewarding but kept me connected to the Academy."

Gen. Anderson finds himself very optimistic for today's cadets. When asked to offer a bit of advice for USAFA's next generation, he says simply, "No matter what task you've been assigned, do the best job you can do. Every job is a great job so long as you make it so. Work hard and don't be looking ahead to the next assignment while you're still in your current job, for that is where your focus belongs."

Anderson also remains very active in both his church and the local San Antonio community, having served on the city council. "The idea of working hard and then giving back to help others is simply a part of our culture as Academy graduates." ▣