

BART HOLADAY, CLASS OF 1965
DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE
2013



“I’LL PROBABLY NEVER FORGET MY FIRST DAY AT THE ACADEMY,” BART HOLADAY SAYS WHILE SITTING IN HIS LIVING ROOM, THOUGHTFULLY TRAVELING BACK DOWN MEMORY LANE AS THE FIREPLACE CRACKLES PEACEFULLY BENEATH THE MANTEL. IT IS A FRIGID WINTER AFTERNOON AND A FRESH BLANKET OF SNOW COVERS THE YARD OUTSIDE. A CLEVER SMILE CROSSES HOLADAY’S FACE AS THE MEMORIES COME SLIDING BACK FROM THE PAST.

“We got off the bus and things seemed reasonable enough ... then I went up to the Terrazzo and things started to happen. I probably got there a little earlier than I should have—after some basic drilling, push ups and a lot of harassment,



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demanding. I struggled with everything. It seemed to me that there was always more to do than there was time to do it. We were constantly trying to prioritize and figure out what needed to be done the soonest, and then move on to the next thing.”

Graduates of all generations can certainly empathize with the seemingly impossible time crunch at the Academy—as those who rise to the top ranks of the Cadet Wing seem to have an uncanny ability to bend space-time to their will. As a cadet, Holaday was a varsity athlete, class president and Wing Commander eventually earning a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford University. Yet none of those accolades came to fruition until well after his lesser-known stint as a pugilist.

“When I was a freshman,” recalls Holaday, “I decided I would try my hand at intramural boxing. My first match was against Jim Ingram ’64, who was the Wing Open champ in my weight class. During the first round, Jim hit me in the jaw and my mouthpiece flew not only out of the ring but over the bleachers. I’m pretty sure I set the all time USAFA distance record that year.”

A few semesters after the mouthpiece was recovered, Holaday found himself on the varsity football squad. “My favorite sports memory (and I’ve quite often considered it the highlight of my life) was when we played Nebraska in 1963. This was in Lincoln at their homecoming, and they were ranked number three in the nation with an 18 game winning streak. We beat them! And I’ve often said life never got as good as that again ... that was probably my all time fondest memory of the Academy.”

With the glory days of the gridiron not far behind, Holaday stepped into active duty where he served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, making several trips to MACV Headquarters in Viet Nam. He explains that the character training at the Academy was crucial during his military career.

“The Honor Code,” Holaday says, “and all of the ethical preparation we had was terribly important.

I was taken down to my squadron. Standing next to me was my good friend Mike Smith, who had arrived two hours earlier (what a mistake he made!). So, my first memory is of Mike, he’s been doing pushups, he’s exhausted, and as one upper classman is right in his face, Mike vomits all over the guy ... obviously it was a very bad day for Mike from that point on.”

Holaday goes on to recount the tough summer of 1961, a time of relentless cadre, endless drilling and late night runs with rifles held high overhead. “It pushed me in every way,” Holaday remembers. “Physically, mentally, emotionally, it was very

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Another critical skill which would go on to serve me best in my professional career was the development of resiliency and persistence—learning to be knocked down, get back up, try something else and move forward. Having the ability to learn from failure was also important.”

Holaday insists that so often in life we try to avoid failure and, while that is an excellent overall strategy, sometimes the inevitable simply cannot be avoided. “In my experience,” he recounts, “the most important lessons I’ve learned have been from things I’ve failed at, because failure teaches you so much more than success does.”

Upon leaving the Air Force, he was recruited to a senior leadership position in the Department of Defense, serving as Director of the Econometrics Division in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Afterwards, Holaday went on to spend over 20 years as a venture capitalist, ultimately serving as an officer and board member of the National Venture Capital Association.

Years in the business world brought back many important lessons learned at the Academy. Holaday explains, “I’ve often said that in life, with trust, almost anything is possible. Without trust, very little is possible. Every relationship one has in life is based on trust. In business, the longer you’re in business, the more important trust becomes. Trust is founded on very simple principles ... doing what you say you’re going to do, being there when you

say you’re going to be there, following through and always being true to your word.”

As a philanthropist, Holaday founded the Dakota Foundation, an organization dedicated to funding entrepreneurial, non-profit organizations that help people help themselves in achieving greater economic self-sufficiency. An enthusiastic and life-long supporter of USAFA, he is also the Founding Chairman of the USAFA Endowment. “Today,” Holaday says, “the Academy is facing a very difficult time. We have sequestration, government shut down and reduced budgets. It is a time when every resource that can be made available to the Academy is significantly important.”

In 2011, the Academy dedicated the new Holaday Athletic Center. USAFA’s latest 92,000 square foot indoor sports training facility was made possible by a generous donation by the Holadays which set the bar for future capital projects. The center has proven vital to a number of varsity sports teams who struggle against the dangers of Colorado’s intense, late summer thunderstorms which roam the afternoon skies during practice times.

“When we first started the Endowment,” explains Holaday, “we said appropriations will fund the Academy to the level of sufficiency, but we really need a level of excellence. It is now more important than ever to fund that level of excellence—and that has to come from donors. Furthermore, given the situation in Washington, that task will be more difficult than ever. It’s a time when I think it’s exceedingly important that each of us consider all that we have gained from the Academy and what we can do to give back in this time of need.”

Today, Holaday serves as a trustee of the Falcon Foundation and also funds a post-graduate Fellowship at Exeter College, Oxford University, that sends a top graduate of the Air Force Academy to Exeter each year. “The best advice I can give today’s cadets is to appreciate what a fine education they are being given and to take advantage of every opportunity the Academy offers. It is a unique institution that gives us the chance to challenge ourselves in every direction.”