



2015 DISTINGUISHED GRADUATES

The United States Air Force Academy and the Association of Graduates are proud to announce the winners of the Distinguished Graduate Award for 2015. The award recognizes Academy graduates whose singular and distinctive contributions to our society and nation have set them apart from other graduates. Gen. (Ret.) Gregory Martin '70 and Paul Madera '78 will receive their awards at a formal presentation during Academy Founders Day on April 1, 2016.

GENERAL GREGORY S. MARTIN, CLASS OF 1970

Gen. (Ret.) Gregory S. Martin never expected to be a United States Air Force Academy cadet, let alone a career officer.

"I was not an intellectual giant," he readily admits.

But Martin had always been fascinated by flying, growing up with a father who flew B-17 and B-29 bombers in World War II, and he zeroed in on following at least the flying aspects of his father's career in the Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force.

"I was heavily influenced by the Air Force experience," he recalls. "I became infatuated with the idea of flying. I just thought that would be a neat thing to do."

In 1958, the *National Geographic* published an article about the new United States Air Force Academy and Martin was hooked. Subsequently, he learned that two family friends, who were a few years older than he, were cadets at the Academy.

"These guys were like gods to me," he recalls.

By the time he was in seventh grade, Martin began applying himself in school to maximize his chances for getting a USAFA appointment.

In a stroke of what turned out to be good luck, his father was assigned to the Pentagon in 1965 and the family had to move for his senior year in high school. "Had I not made that move, I would not have gone to the Academy," he suggests.

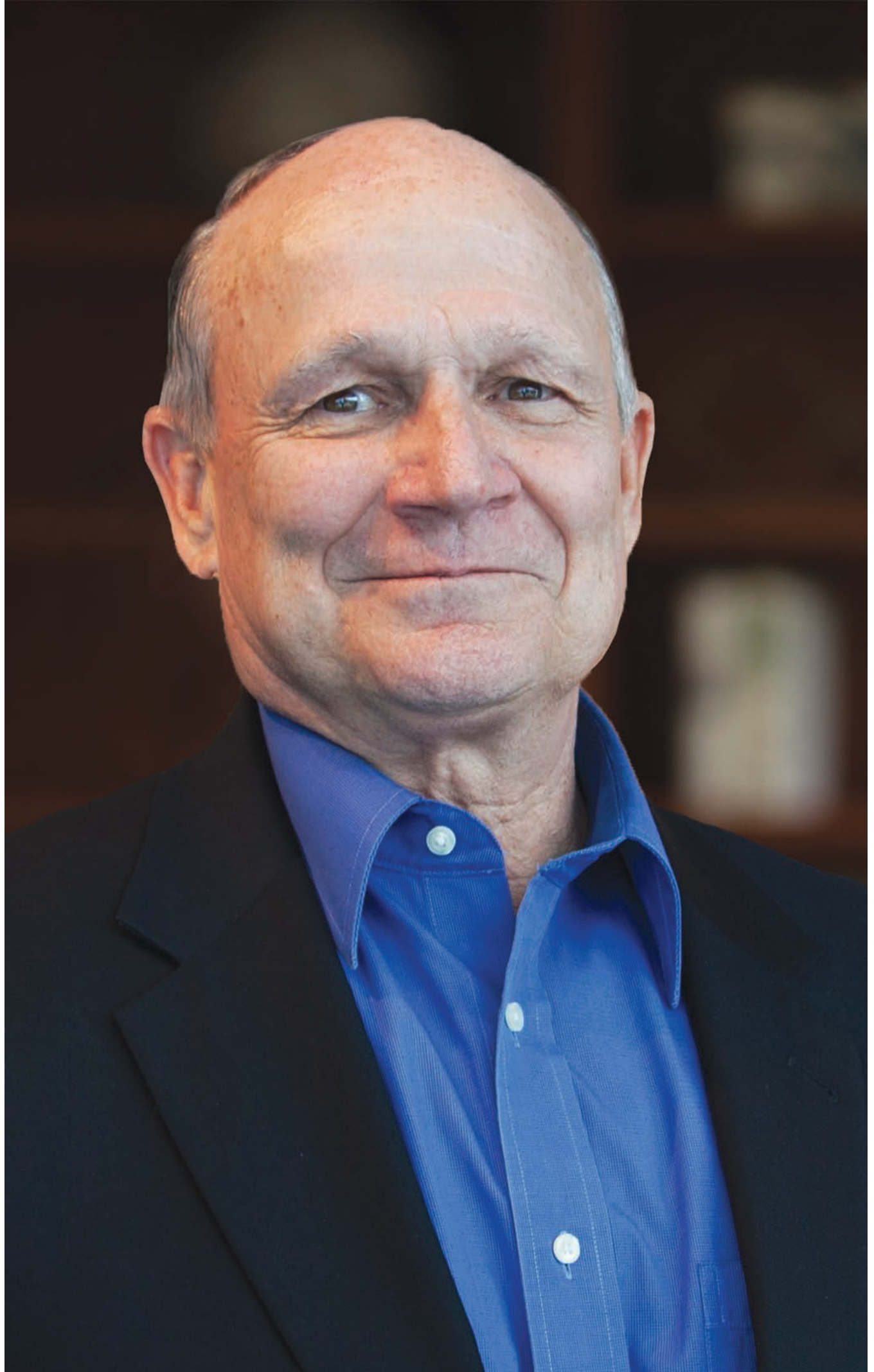
Before the move, Martin had begun writing to congressmen who represented the various communities where his family had lived.

Of the 18 congressional leaders he wrote to, most rejected his request for an appointment because his family no longer lived in those states. Fortunately, a U.S. representative from Upstate New York — where the Martin family had lived for just a few months — hadn't ever received any requests for an appointment to the Air Force Academy. He requested an interview with Martin in Washington and, shortly thereafter, he put Martin's name forward for consideration.

Martin didn't realize that the Academy started offering appointments to nominees in the January to February timeframe. By the time he received his appointment offer, it was April 27, 1966. By that time, he had accepted the inevitable that he would not be offered an appointment and had planned to attend another well-known university. When he opened the letter and read the offer of an appointment, he admits a slight feeling of disappointment.

"I said to myself, it must not be that good if they would accept me. Those guys I worshipped were at the Academy and now the Academy had accepted me?"

The appointment letter soon turned his outlook to one of excitement as Martin learned to truly appreciate the opportunity that was being afforded him by attending the Academy. ►





Gen. (Ret.) Gregory S. Martin speaks during his retirement ceremony in 2005.

But it wasn't until later the next year that Martin fully realized just how lucky he was. During a psychology classroom lesson on bias, an instructor pulled the records of each cadet to tell them how they had ranked against all incoming freshmen.

"There are some numbers that you never forget," Martin recalls. "When I entered the Academy, I was 1,021 out of 1,035. I'm 14 from the bottom of the class."

Making the Leap

"Within my first three days at the Academy, I began to learn about the academic and extracurricular accomplishments of my classmates," he recalls. Martin remembers catching a glimpse of the Cadet Chapel during one moment of self-doubt and telling himself he needed to pray because he wasn't going to be at the Academy for long.

"But then you just take it day by day. You end up seeing other people who had great entry numbers ... but for some reason, some did not do well, which really surprised me," he recalls. "In the end, it's not about the numbers. It's about what's in your heart and about your desire. I decided I'm going to be here and make it work."

Martin eventually switched his major from engineering to geography because of the challenges he faced with math beyond calculus.

Martin excelled in the required military training and blossomed when he became involved with the school's parachute team.

Martin would win the national collegiate parachuting championship in 1969. He would continue to instruct others through jump school.

"I was loving what I was doing. It was great," he says. "I was never down on the Academy. On weekends, the team members were practicing for or traveling to parachute competitions. And if the weather was bad, we were tired and didn't have a yearning to go up to Denver or other places to relieve our frustrations about being stuck in a boy's college."

Martin eventually graduated 214th out of a class of 745, but he was excited about his next challenge — flying fighter jets.

War Stories

A distinguished graduate from pilot training, Martin landed a flying job in the front seat of an F-4.

"I had to pinch myself because this is what my dream was," Martin recalls. "It was a very exciting time for me."

He eventually flew in Linebacker I and Linebacker II during the Vietnam War, helping to affect the course of the war and to secure the release of Vietnam prisoners of war.

"When I went over, it was pretty clear we weren't going to win," Martin says. "My friends would ask why I would do this if we didn't even care about winning. I said because we have a chance to get our prisoners back and that's a worthy goal. Plus I was kind of a tagline kind of guy. 'My country, right or wrong.'" Still, Martin admits, he returned to the States a changed person.

"I saw people who made mistakes under pressure, I saw people who died, I lost friends, I saw people who were incredibly heroic," he recalls. "But it was almost like I was part of a movie. I was part of it, but I never saw myself as having done anything exceptional. And I came back with a little different philosophy about war. War is the last resort, not the first."

When America's involvement in the Vietnam conflict ended, Martin was assigned to Holloman Air Force Base and was involved in supporting the European nuclear mission. It was during a top-secret sortie certification test that Martin nearly derailed his career.

Martin and his backseater were chosen to participate in this particular test and did very well. But when they were finishing up their tasks and putting their materials away, the squadron commander told the crew that a top-secret mission folder had been discovered on the ground.

"I figured I was toast and my career was over."

A full-blown investigation was conducted and concluded that a compromise of the material had not occurred.

Two months later, Martin was shocked to learn that his commander ranked him No. 1 in the squadron during the implementation of a new controlled Officer Evaluation Report process.

"He had judged me on my overall performance," Martin says. "The lesson I learned? How you conduct yourself day-in and day-out is noted. Integrity and taking responsibility for your mistakes

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are the hallmarks leaders look for in their subordinates. I’ve made lots of mistakes, but most of them were forgiven because I was honest about it and I was actually trying to do the right thing.”

Martin would eventually log 4,600 flying hours in various aircraft types. He also received numerous awards, including the Distinguished Service Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Career Advancement

Gen. Martin would go on to serve as commander of the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron, 479th Tactical Fighter Training Wing 33rd Fighter Wing and 1st Fighter Wing. He was later assigned as vice director of the Joint Staff’s Force Structure and Resources Directorate, director of Operational Requirements for the U.S. Air Force, and deputy to the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition.

Martin would eventually become commander of the U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Allied Air Forces Northern Europe, a job that he initially felt overwhelmed by.

“I’ve been given jobs that I didn’t think I was ready for,” Martin comments. “The USAFE job was one of them. That was a steep learning curve for me.”

Working with 19 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies required an understanding of the region and its fragile diplomatic environment, Martin says, and an appreciation for the ability of the alliance to keep the peace.

Martin was at USAFE when the 9-11 attacks occurred in 2001. He notes it was a challenging time to be in command, as Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom were launched.

“Those were high intensity things that we were doing,” he recalls.

Gen. Martin’s final assignment was as the commander of the Air Force Materiel Command at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where he commanded 80,000 personnel — both Air Force members and civilians.

Martin says he felt good about his tenure there, as he worked hard to recognize the civilian workforce as an important part of the team rather than as a commodity.

Martin helped institute a volunteer physical assessment and physical training program for civilian workers. He also initiated an orientation program to teach new employees about the Air Force, its mission, its values and their responsibilities.

“And when they completed the acculturation classes, they were awarded a special Air Force pin to signify that they were on the Air Force team.”

Additionally, Martin offered valued employees leadership training so that they could advance in their careers if they wished.

Martin retired in 2005, leaving the military after a nearly 40-year career. But he certainly wasn’t content with just playing golf.

Staying Connected

Following retirement, Martin became a mentor with the Joint Forces Command’s Capstone, Keystone and Pinnacle courses.

“I work with new general officers to inform them about the operational and strategic environment they will have to operate in when dealing with ambassadors and other nations,” he says.

Martin also has served as a consultant and board member for nearly a dozen aerospace and defense corporations since retirement and currently fulfills that role with five different companies.

He has performed duties as chairman of the National Academies’ Air Force Studies Board, president of the National War College Alumni Association and chairman of the Falcon Foundation, which provides scholarships to college or preparatory schools for those seeking eventual admission to USAFA and a career in the Air Force.

In addition, Martin works as a mentor and leadership consultant with the University of Tennessee, University of Virginia and University of North Carolina. Martin hopes to continue staying connected and support the Long Blue Line, a heritage that he is grateful for.

“I don’t know how you disengage from that and not wither away,” he explains. “I won’t force myself on anybody, but when I’m asked, I’m delighted to help. It keeps you kind of connected and engaged and current.”

Martin and his wife are building a home in Colorado Springs and will relocate to Colorado. The move will allow them to reconnect with their daughter, Tracie Martin, who teaches at USAFA.

Thank You

Gen. Martin says he’s grateful to the many leaders and mentors “who took the time to motivate, inspire, counsel, correct and then ultimately lift me up throughout my life and career.”

“These are the people who deserve recognition,” he says. “I was smart enough to listen to these people and take to heart what they said. They are the ones who took the time to develop me and care that I was doing the right thing.”

Although he has many people to thank, Martin is reluctant to start naming individuals in fear of slighting the many great professionals who contributed immensely to his good fortune. Nonetheless, there are a couple of individuals or groups that “just can’t be forgotten” including: former CS-15 AOC, Ed “Sledge” Montgomery ’59, and the CS-15 classmates and underclassmen who continue to this day to offer their encouragement and counsel; his civilian executive directors at AFMC who offered insights on the Air Force civilian workforce; and clearly, his parents, his wife Wendy’s parents and Wendy and their children, Tracie, Todd and Tyler, “who have never ceased to amaze me with their love, resilience and devotion to our family and the Air Force. I am a better person and American because of these people and many, many others I haven’t mentioned by name.” ►