

GEN. (RET.) STEPHEN R. LORENZ | CLASS OF 1973

If you ask Gen. (Ret.) Stephen Lorenz about his distinguished military and civilian career, he quickly deflects any credit associated with the accomplishments listed on his lengthy resume.

Instead, he heaps praise on the dozens of people along the way who helped him learn, and strive toward excellence and making a difference.

“The Air Force lets ordinary people do extraordinary things,” he suggests. “There are so many people — throughout my entire career — who I owe so much to for the honor and privilege of having served in our great Air Force and beyond. No person is an island.”

Lorenz calls himself a “regular guy” who approached his full potential when others trusted his leadership skills and promoted him to increasingly challenging jobs. But if his career is proof of anything, it’s that perseverance pays off.

He’s famous for telling all incoming freshmen to “never give up, never give up, never give up” and he learned that lesson the hard way.

“The measure of a person’s success is not what they actually accomplish,” he smiles. “The measure of a person’s success is the adversity they overcome . . . and everybody has adversity. You just keep showing up, taking the two-by-fours in the face, and dusting yourself off. Then you keep moving forward.”

Keeping His Focus

It was Lorenz’s goal since he was 9 years old to attend the Air Force Academy.

A third-generation U.S. airman, Lorenz talks fondly of his grandfather — Edward J. Lorenz — who enlisted in 1918 and was among military aviation’s early pioneers. The elder Lorenz was one of the pilots, under the direction of Gen. Billy Mitchell,



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to conduct successful bombing tests on the captured German battleship Ostfriesland in 1921.

“My grandfather flew bi-planes,” Lorenz reports. “He told me that, in his pilot training class, 30 percent of his classmates were killed in training. Every time he took off, he didn’t know if he was going to land safely or not.”

Lorenz’s father also served in the Air Force and moved his family to various assignments around the globe. While stationed at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Lorenz’s father took Lorenz to Colorado Springs to check out the relatively new United States Air Force Academy.

Lorenz was so impressed, he set an early goal to attend the institution.

“For the next eight years, we moved eight times and I attended eight different schools, including four high schools,” he recalls. “But I kept my focus on one thing — that someday I was going to become a cadet at the United States Air Force

Academy. That’s what I wanted more than anything in the world.”

Finally, on June 23, 1969, Lorenz and his family arrived at USAFA and his Air Force journey officially began. Lorenz became a member of the “illustrious” Class of 1973.

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Academic Challenges

Because he had moved so frequently during his high school years, Lorenz arrived at the Academy with deficient math and science skills. He’d eventually have to retake aeronautical engineering, electrical engineering and computer science classes in order to stay on track to graduate.

“It wasn’t because I didn’t try,” he reports “I worked very, very hard.”

Lorenz credits his instructors, coaches, air officers commanding (AOCs), classmates and family members for helping him achieve graduation.

“Two magical letters got me through this school — EI ... extra instruction,” he smiles. “I had more EI sessions than probably just about anybody who ever graduated from this school.”

During one particularly difficult academic stretch of his second-class year, Lorenz was restricted to his room for many weeks. To motivate himself, he taped a Class of 1973 class ring brochure on the wall in front of his desk.

“I would look at it and remember this is why I’m here ... to earn this ring and to be a member of the Long Blue Line,” he says. “That’s why, to this day, I wear the ring. I’m proud of this ring, because it took so much to earn.”

As graduation day approached, Lorenz admits that he felt a bit depressed. All he’d ever wanted to be was a cadet, and now he had to leave USAFA and head into the real Air Force.

“I would trade places with the lowest Doolie right now and I would do it all again,” he smiles. “But only if I got his body, because I couldn’t do it with this body.”

The Real Air Force

Along with 85 percent of his classmates, Lorenz was pilot qualified. He went off to pilot training at Craig Air Force Base in Alabama.

His first assignment was at Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota. During that assignment, he married his wife, Leslie, whom he calls “the love of my life and fellow Air Force teammate.” (Now married 42 years, they have three children and five grandchildren.)

Through his Air Force career, Lorenz would fly 3,600 hours in 10 different aircraft. His primary aircraft, however, was the KC-135.

By 1982, Lorenz headed to the Pentagon to work as a legislative liaison, eventually becoming the deputy chief of the Senate Liaison Office.

He’d return to the KC-135 in 1986 as an instructor and flight commander. He’d later become commander of the 93rd Air Refueling Squadron at Castle Air Force Base in Merced, California.

After graduating from National War College, Lorenz would be assigned as the Japan desk officer for the Joint Staff at the Pentagon.

“This is what I knew about Japan,” he says, making a zero with his fingers. “I’ll never forget escorting the Japanese ambassador to the United States to visit Gen. Colin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and beads of sweat were on my forehead because I was afraid Gen. Powell would ask me a



question. I was so new that I was afraid I wouldn't know the answer."

But with hard work and lots of study, Lorenz says he eventually became an expert on Japanese-American relations.

Lorenz would then become chief of the European and North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Policy Branch. After leaving the Pentagon, he would go on to command an operations group and two flying wings that both won best wing honors in their respective numbered Air Forces.

Then Lorenz was selected as commandant of cadets at USAFA, serving from 1996 to 1999.

"What a wonderful assignment," he says. "I learned a lot, and I got to hang out with more than 5,000 bright shining teenagers — who are now, a large number of them, colonels and lieutenant colonels. I learned as much from them as they learned from me."

From USAFA, Lorenz would be assigned as director of plans and programs for the U.S. Air Forces in Europe at Ramstein Air Base in Germany.

Numbers Guy

"I'll never forget when one of my bosses — a great leader and distinguished gradu-

ate — Speedy Martin, Class of '70, called me in," Lorenz recalls. "He said, 'Tomorrow we're going to announce that you're going to be the Air Force director of the budget. What do you think about that?' I said, 'Sir, I'd rather be a commander.' He said that was not in the cards now."

Just days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Lorenz arrived again at the Pentagon to serve as the budget director.

"The smoke was still in the building," he recalls. "I'll never forget my first staff meeting. There's my staff of great Americans, whom I'd never met before, and they start briefing me on what it's like to run the budget."

Just moments after the briefing started, the staff members had to excuse themselves because they had to work on the supplemental budget.

"My entire staff got up and left me all alone," he laughs. "I never, in four years as director of the budget, got an orientation. But I learned the hard way, and I learned to depend on my people. They were the experts."

Lorenz and his team managed an expanding Air Force budget of over \$100 billion, which at the time seemed like an overwhelming task.

ABOVE

(Left) Gen. Stephen Lorenz and his wife, Leslie. (Right) As Commandant of Cadets at USAFA, then-Brig. Gen. Stephen Lorenz (center) is joined by cadets by giving a thumbs up to another bright and shiny Air Force day.

PREVIOUS

Cadet Stephen Lorenz achieved his dream when he was accepted to the United States Air Force Academy.

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Lorenz speaks on leadership whenever he gets the chance.

"But I knew that I could do it because of the training and education that I received here at the United States Air Force Academy," he says.

Lorenz would then spend three years as commander and president of Air University. He helped lead the largest organizational restructuring of Air University in the institution's history.

To close out his Air Force career, he then served nearly three years as commander of Air Education and Training



Command at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio.

“I planned none of my military career,” Lorenz notes. “I had no agenda. I just wanted to be the best I could be at whatever it was. And the jobs I didn’t want ended up being the best ones for me.”

Endowment Days

After retiring from the military, Lorenz agreed to return to USAFA to become president and CEO of the USAFA Endowment. He served in that capacity from 2011 to 2015.

“Bart Holaday called me one day and asked if I’d consider coming here,” Lorenz recalls. “I came to the Springs and moved into my 90-year-old father-in-law’s basement, because we didn’t have a place to live. I took over the job in May 2011, and I got to meet a lot of great people who care very much about this school.”

During his tenure, the nonprofit raised over \$80 million for the Academy and cadets. His team managed the construction of the donor portion of the new Polaris Hall.

Lorenz says he discovered that all the non-federal agencies that work on behalf of the Academy and cadets — USAFA

Endowment, Falcon Foundation, Association of Graduates, Air Force Academy Athletic Corporation, Friends of the Library, Air Force Academy Foundation, and Academy Research and Development Institute — form a “team of teams” to do incredible things for his alma mater, cadets and graduates.

“I spent almost five years doing that ... trying to make a difference, to help these bright young shiny cadets who will go on to replace us and lead us through the challenges ... and there are a lot of challenges today,” he says. “We’re just lucky to have them volunteer to come to serve at our Air Force Academy and graduate and become officers and leaders in the United States Air Force.”

Lessons Learned

When he was a cadet, Lorenz readily admits he hated the core curriculum at USAFA.

“The Academy made me take courses that I didn’t want to take,” he smiles. “I wanted to stay in areas where I was comfortable.”

Looking back over his career, however, Lorenz recognizes the brilliance of having cadets take a variety of courses and enjoy a broad range of experiences.

“The core curriculum was the best thing that ever happened to me. It forced me to expand outside my comfort zone and to grow academically,” he explains.

The three most important lessons he learned as the son and grandson of airmen and as an Academy cadet were the Air Force core values — integrity, service before self and excellence in all you do.

“Integrity is the bedrock of everything,” he explains. “And, by the way, it gets tougher doing the right thing all the time, especially when you become more senior.”

Service before self, he continues, is important if you’re interested in making a difference in other people’s lives.

“You’re here not for yourself, you’re here to serve others,” he explains.

In addition, being excellent in all things can be a challenge throughout one’s career, he says. But always striving to do better is a valuable goal.

“Never stop growing. Never stop

improving. That is so important,” he suggests. “I learned that here at the Academy.”

Lorenz on Leadership

Lorenz continues to pass along leadership lessons he learned during his military career. He wrote a book, “Lorenz on Leadership,” in 2012 and there are more than 29,000 copies in print today.

When he has the chance, he speaks with cadets and others about the leadership challenges they will face in the years ahead.

None of the lessons he shares are original with him, he claims. They are a compilation of his experiences throughout the past four decades, and he wrote about real examples of leaders whom he has come across.

“I had 58 bosses and they each taught me something,” he notes. “I’ve been blessed to work with great people. So, I started writing the lessons down ... and I started using them as principals that I taught my squadron, and then my groups and then my wings, all the way through.”

Lorenz reports that 99 percent of people show up to work every day wanting to do a good job.

“They don’t show up at work and say, ‘I can hardly wait to screw up,’” he says. “Your job as a leader, as a commander and as a mentor is to help them self-actualize. There’s nothing more rewarding to a leader than to watch your people self-actualize and achieve greatness.”

DG Honor

Lorenz says he was shocked, honored and humbled to be named one of this year’s USAFA Distinguished Graduates.

“I just hope I can continue to live up to the high standards that are set by those individuals who are current distinguished graduates,” he says. “Everything happens for a reason. It all leads toward a common good, and it’s all about service to others.”

Lorenz thanks his family, his classmates and many mentors he’s had along the way who made his career of service possible.

“I was blessed that I got to serve something bigger than myself,” he says. “I just hope that I lived up to my grandfather’s and my father’s expectations of service to our nation. 