



GENERAL JOHN MICHAEL LOH



THE HONORABLE
HEATHER ANN WILSON

2009

DISTINGUISHED GRADUATES



General John Michael Loh Class of 1960

Achieving excellence over a 35-year military career and subsequent civilian endeavors, General John Michael Loh stands as a shining example of a U.S. Air Force Academy graduate. General Loh was a distinguished graduate of both the Academy's second class and his pilot training class. He flew 204 combat missions in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969. While in Vietnam, what he perceived as misapplications of airpower led him to pursue two goals for the rest of his career—to play a leadership role in modernizing the Air Force with new aircraft and systems, and to advance the contribution of airpower in national defense strategy.

Loh looks back to his time at the Academy as an influential milestone in preparing him for his career. "The Academy provided an outstanding and unique background in leadership and character," he recalls. "This is from the standpoint of living by the honor code and leadership from the standpoint of learning self discipline, understanding

how to think logically and how to reason critically. These were lessons which served me for 35 years."

After Vietnam, he developed and advocated the operational requirements for tactical systems including the F-16, F-22, Night Targeting Systems, advanced weapons, and Electronic Warfare systems. Because of his commitment, by the end of the 1980s, airpower was able to reassert itself as a dominant force.

As Air Force Vice Chief of Staff in 1990, General Loh directed the development of the initial strategic air campaign for the 1991 Iraq War. This plan reaffirmed airpower as a major force when it is unconstrained, relentless, and applied properly—the lessons he learned from Vietnam. General Loh's military career culminated with his position as the last commander of the Tactical Air Command and the first commander of Air Combat Command. Following his retirement from active duty, General Loh continued to serve on executive and national commissions. He also devoted his time and talent to the Air Force Academy.

Sharing fond memories of his time at USAFA, he enjoys looking back on the hardships which would eventually build him into a young officer. "Our obstacle course was at Lowery AFB," Loh explains. "We didn't have upper classmen at BCT. Instead, we had Air Training Officers. They tended to be pretty rough, because they'd all been taken out of their fighter cockpit assignments to come to the Air Force Academy and oversee the cadets. Needless to say, they tended to take their frustrations out on us basic cadets. That eight-foot wall is still something that I have nightmares about!"

After retiring from the military, he served as an advisor on the cadet Honor Code and as a guest lecturer in the Aeronautics Department. General Loh is a sabre society member, and also a substantial donor to the Academy and its mission.

"The most important advice I can give to cadets today is to work hard. Nothing comes easy in the Air Force, so you have to work hard. Be humble and have a sense of humor. It's okay to laugh at yourself every once in a while that will help to release the tension you'll experience."

Today, Loh works as an advisor and consultant to the Air Force. "Right now," he explains, "I'm just trying to help the Air Force continue to develop new systems that will lead us into the next generation of combat aircraft and spacecraft. I also do a lot of public speaking about leadership, and what the Air Force means to our nation. Now more than ever, we need to recall our Air Force history and all of the great things our flyers have done since the beginning of aviation. It's essential to remind people that air power is vital to our national security. We are the air power experts, and that's a lesson that has to be taught and re-taught each and every day."

Duty, honor, dedication, and leadership clearly define General John Michael Loh. The spirit, character, and unique accomplishments of this remarkable graduate personify the core values of the United States Air Force Academy.

The Honorable Heather Ann Wilson Class of 1982

Heather Wilson was the first Air Force Academy graduate in American history to be elected to the U.S. Congress, where she served from 1998 through 2009. Wilson was in the third Air Force Academy class to admit women. As a cadet, she served as Vice Wing Commander and Commander of Basic Cadet Training in Jack's Valley.

"For me," Wilson says, "going to the Academy opened doors that I never even knew were there. I was the first person in my family to go to college, and this

was a full ride scholarship. It was life-changing, no question. I think it was a first-class education.”

Among her memories of Basic Cadet Training, Wilson recalls fondly, “I grew up in New Hampshire. Coming from sea level, I remember wondering ‘where is all the oxygen?’ for about the first ten days of Basic Cadet Training,” she says with a laugh.

Upon graduation, she earned a Rhodes Scholarship and completed both Master’s and Doctoral Degrees in International Relations from Oxford University in England. As an Air Force officer, Wilson planned the bed down of cruise missiles in the United Kingdom and served at the U.S. Mission to NATO in Belgium. After leaving active duty, Wilson became the Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the National Security Council staff at the White House where she advised the President and his National Security Advisor on U.S.-NATO relations during the era in which the Berlin Wall came down and the Warsaw Pact collapsed.

“Like most grads,” she says, “the honor code rates right up there with me. Living with integrity has been invaluable to me.” Following her tenure on the White House Staff, she founded a New Mexico company that provided business development and program planning services in the United States and the former Soviet Union. Her entrepreneurial success was followed by service as the Cabinet Secretary for the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department, where she led major reforms of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

In 1998, Wilson won a special election to the United States House of Representatives. As a Member of Congress, she was a prominent leader on a broad range of national security issues, particularly related to strengthening American intelligence in the years following 9/11. “I think one of the main strengths of the Academy’s education system is a very broad core curriculum. There were times in Congress when we were dealing with anything from nuclear power regulation to eradicating bovine tuberculosis. I really felt as though

my education gave me the ability to tackle problems from different perspectives.”

While in Congress, Wilson served on the USAFA Board of Visitors and developed a model program to reach out to qualified minorities and first generation college applicants. At one time, she had more nominees attending the service academies than any other Member of Congress.

“Politics is another form of public service,” she explains, “and people who go to the Academy are generally attracted to public service. It is a different realm, requiring different skill sets. As grads and former officers, we’re used to looking at a problem, applying resources to that problem and getting the job done. Public service tends to be more about consensus building and framing issues. It can be frustrating for people who are accustomed to getting the mission done.”

When asked to give advice to the new generation of cadets, Wilson says definitively, “Follow your passion. Find out what’s important to you and pursue it. Seize the opportunities that come along and do your best every day.” ✓

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