

WAYNE A. DOWNING

General Wayne A. Downing, a member of the Class of 1962, has brought extraordinary credit to the United States Military Academy through his lifetime of uniquely distinguished service to the Nation. As a combat leader, educator, global strategist, and national security expert, Wayne Downing's critical contributions to national defense and security have immeasurably raised the prominence of West Point as an institution vital to the American way of life.

Wayne Downing served the Nation in critical roles during three decades of our Nation's wars. Upon commissioning into the Infantry, he embarked on a thirty-four-year military career, rising to the rank of four-star general and the position of commander of all United States Special Operations forces. His reputation was that of a smart, decisive, forceful, and caring leader, known in particular for his unwavering determination to accomplish any mission assigned and provide his soldiers the best possible support. Since retiring from the Army in 1996, General Downing has repeatedly answered the call of public service. He is one of our Nation's foremost advisors and experts on fighting the war on global terrorism. General Downing's career has epitomized the phrase "lifetime of service to the Nation" and exemplified ideals inherent in Duty, Honor, Country.

Granted a competitive appointment to the United States Military Academy as the Son of a Deceased War Veteran (WW II) from the State of Illinois, Wayne Downing's early military career included assignments on Okinawa and in the Republic of Vietnam with the 173d Airborne Brigade, followed by instructor duties at the Infantry School and company-level command in the 1st Training Brigade at the United States Army Infantry Training Center, Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1968. He then returned to Vietnam to command Company A, 2d Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, followed by duties as the Battalion and then the 2d Brigade Operations Officer.

Following graduate school at Tulane University, Wayne Downing served as a senior operations research/systems analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Then a major, he served successively as operations officer and then executive officer of the 1st Battalion (Ranger), 75th Infantry, Fort Stewart, Georgia, in 1975 and 1976. A series of commands followed: he commanded Task Force (Alaska), 24th Infantry Division from 1976 to 1977 and the 2d Battalion (Ranger), 75th Infantry Division from 1977 to 1979. Following completion of the Air War College and a tour as secretary to the Joint Staff, United States European Command, Vaihingen, Germany, he commanded the 3d Brigade, 1st Armored Division in Germany. His culminating field grade command was activation and command of the 75th Infantry Regiment from 1984 to 1985. There, he also oversaw the activation of a third Ranger Battalion and guided its integration into the newly formed regiment, which also included the 1st and 2d Ranger battalions, previously independently operating units.

Promoted to brigadier general in 1985, Wayne Downing advanced to the forefront in the special operations community. In November 1989 he was appointed commanding general of Joint Special Operations Command, U.S. Special Operations Command, based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In December of that year he commanded the joint special operations forces that were so successful during the swift liberation of Panama during Operation Just Cause. One year later, during Operation Desert Storm, General Downing commanded a joint task force of 1200 American special operations forces who conducted highly effective attacks on the Iraqi SCUD missile infrastructure. Deep behind enemy lines, the direct action of special operations forces led to the end of the SCUD attacks on Israel and dramatically reduced the overall ballistic missile threat in the theater of operations. These operations directed by General Downing were largely responsible for thwarting the Iraqi regime's attempt to use attacks on Israel to break up the allied coalition. In August 1991, he was appointed commanding general of the United States Army Special Operations Command. In 1993, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the United States Special Operations Command. In this capacity he trained, equipped, and deployed 47,000 special operators from the Army, Navy, and Air Force in worldwide deployments in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives and the Global Combatant Commanders. He retired from active duty in 1996, highly decorated by his Nation and many of its allies. His retirement from public service was short lived, however, as global terrorism became increasingly active. Following the deadly attack on Khobar Towers in June, Wayne Downing led a 40-person presidential task force that investigated the attack and made recommendations on how to better protect Americans abroad. Three years later, he was appointed by the U.S. Congress to the National Commission on Terrorism, which advocated implementing an aggressive global strategy to combat the rising, undeclared war of terrorism against the United States. The national emergency that began on September 11, 2001, drew him from retirement yet again; he accepted appointment by the President as the National Director and Deputy National Security Advisor for Combating Terrorism. In this position his responsibilities involved coordinating the diplomatic, law enforcement, intelligence, financial, and military facets of the global war on terrorism.

In recent years, General Downing has often returned to West Point, where he has served since 2003 as the Distinguished Chair of the Combating Terrorism Center. At West Point, he has helped to develop the next generation of the Long Gray Line, providing an extraordinary mentor and role model for the Corps of Cadets. He also serves as a visiting faculty member at the University of Michigan Ross Business School, where he conducts seminars on leadership and transformation management.

Accordingly, the Association of Graduates of the United States Military Academy takes great pride in presenting the 2006 Distinguished Graduate Award to Wayne A. Downing.