UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE ACADEMY

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McDermott Library

Recognizing the accomplishments of
Brig Gen Robert F. McDermott
Dean of the Faculty
"Father of Modern Military Education"

Brig Gen Robert F. McDermott, USAF, Retired

Born in Boston, Brig Gen McDermott was educated at the Boston Latin School and the Norwich University before he graduated from West Point in January 1943. He earned his MBA at Harvard University in 1950 and was awarded an honorary LL.D. in 1962 by St Louis University.

Brig Gen McDermott was a command pilot who flew 61 combat missions and served as Operations Officer of the 474th Fighter-Bomber Group in the European Theater. He was presented the Bronze Star, the Air Medal with 5 oak leaf clusters, and the European Theater of Operations Ribbon with six battle stars, as well as the Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, and Commendation Medal that he received for his meritorious staff work. Following the war, he was on General Eisenhower's staff in Europe and then served a tour in the Pentagon. He went on to dedicate 4 years on the West Point faculty as Assistant Professor of Social Sciences before being assigned in 1954 to the United States Air Force Academy as the Professor of Economics and Vice Dean of the Faculty. He was appointed Dean of the Faculty in 1956. One year later, President Eisenhower named him Permanent Professor. He was appointed permanent Dean and promoted to brigadier general in 1959.

As Dean, Brig Gen McDermott presided over the first ten graduating classes. He introduced the enrichment program into the Academy curriculum. This was the most revolutionary innovation in service academy education in modern times. The enrichment program challenged each cadet to advance academically as far and as fast as he could in accordance with his aptitudes, interests, and prior preparation. The curriculum enrichment program eventually led to

the adoption of academic majors so that every member of the class of 1966 and subsequent classes graduated with a major. Under Brig Gen McDermott's direction, the number of academic majors increased until each cadet could choose his major from among 28 different specialties.

Other achievements of Brig Gen McDermott for which he has been recognized are numerous. He is credited with the development of the "whole man" selection system for admission to the Academy. This selection system gives recognition to the candidates' morale, physical, and leadership attributes as well as their academic potential and achievements. He was instrumental in the initiation of the cooperative masters program. Under this program, selected First Classmen usually take some graduate study here and then go to cooperating civilian institutions for up to 8 months to finish the requirements for a masters degree.

Brig Gen McDermott's leadership resulted in the Academy receiving accreditation before the first class graduated--the only such case in the history of American higher education. Many of his innovations were subsequently adopted by the nation's other service academies. It was for these achievements that Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington, a national scholar of the military profession, was the first of many to call him the "Father of Modern Military Education." His outstanding effort established the foundations of the Academy's academic excellence today. The superior performance of Academy graduates over the years bears witness to this distinguished officer's career.