

Army War College honors four 'Outstanding Alums' during birthday 111th celebration

by Thomas Zimmerman

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Retired Lt. Gen. Clarence McKnight, Class of 1972, retired Maj. Gen. Robert Gaskill, Class of 1972, retired Lt. Gen. Donald Jones, Class of 1978, and the Honorable (retired Col.) Robert Poydasheff, Class of 1976, were honored by the Army War College Foundation as Outstanding Alum during a ceremony Dec. 11. Photo by Scott Finger.

The video can be found online [here](#)

Dec. 11, 2012 -- Four outstanding Army War College alumni were honored Dec. 11 for their continued service to their nation and military long after retirement as part of the celebration of 111 years of educating and developing strategic leaders during a ceremony in the Bliss Hall Auditorium.

Retired Lt. Gen. Donald Jones, Class of 1978, retired Lt. Gen. Clarence McKnight, Class of 1972, retired Maj. Gen. Robert Gaskill, Class of 1972 and the Honorable (retired Col.) Robert Poydasheff, Class of 1976, were the honorees.

“Do you realize you are in the presence of living history of legends of American military service?” asked **Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo**, Army War College Commandant, of those gathered in Bliss Hall. “They knew the nation needed a small core of senior professionals to raise the next generation of those who would defend freedom. Class of ’13, it is not often you get to put eyes on and hear from those to whom you are legacy. I just hope you realize the significance of this moment and who is in your presence.”

Cucolo said that the students in the class should also look at the honorees as examples that service

doesn't end when you take off the uniform.

"Today you will hear examples of even further redefinition of success through service in life after the military," he said. "These individuals redirected their energies and continued to contribute to their communities and their nation. These special graduates have made our nation better for their efforts. I hope they have given you all food for thought as you each ponder how you will consider your own futures."

The honorees each spoke about what their time at the War College meant to them and helped them in their Army and civilians careers.

"It was an amazing time to meet so many wonderful people that I learned from immensely," said McKnight. "I found that the principles, ethics and desire for understanding strategic concepts in a global we looked at and discussed here served me well."

"Being here had a tremendous effect on me, not just for my time in uniform, but once I got out as well," said Jones. "I realized the importance of giving something back, which is why I've gotten involved in many services that help our Soldiers, including the Gold Star Mothers, Survivors Outreach Services. I see every day the stress that these deployments have on them and their families and I apply what I've learned here to help them."

"My time here helped me to develop a frame of reference for the challenges I encountered for the rest of my career," said Gaskill. "It inspired me to look at the total problem rather than just the immediate problem."

"It was a fantastic year," said Poydasheff. "It made me realize how important of a role the War College plays in developing principled leaders who will take the reins of government and the military. The time that my great classmates and I spent here and the skills of analyzing complex problems and remaining transparent prepared us well for the rest of our lives."

"It was great to hear from them about their time here and how it helped shape their careers, both in and out of uniform," said student **Gloria Duck**. "They reminded us that service doesn't stop once we retire, it continues on. Service to the community is just as important."

The outstanding alum program begun in 1996 as a way to recognize graduates who contributed in some substantial way after their retirement from government service through community or volunteer service and are sponsored by the Army War College Foundation, Inc.

2012 'Outstanding Alums' Award recipients citations:

Retired Lt. Gen. McKnight, Jr., Class of 1972, has distinguished himself since his retirement by continuing to selflessly dedicate himself to communities in and beyond government. He completed his active service in 1987 as the Director, J6, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, arguably the most critical military position in Command, Control, and Communications in the Department of Defense. McKnight then dedicated himself to exploring new ways to use technology to permit customized curricula for individual learners, be they in the military, K-12 system, or in higher education. In 1992, he wrote that after 35 years of active service, he still felt he was a citizen soldier. He embarked on a challenge to develop and maintain high-tech skills in the Reserve and National Guard forces, better connecting the industrial base with the capability of the nation to surge during crisis periods. He co-founded the Community Learning and Information Network, or CLIN, a non-profit entity launched initially by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and later in collaboration with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. This was based on digital technology partnership between the public and private sectors linking learning and information for all. This effort also promoted the development of the National Guard's Distributive Training Technology Project, honored by an award from the Smithsonian Institution for visionary use of information technology to produce positive social, economic, and educational change. With a vision to explore the feasibility of a nationwide system to improve public education through distance learning, he recognized the potential of utilizing National Guard armories on a shared-usage basis as distance learning classrooms. He has been tireless in his efforts to advance education and integration of technologies into all sectors. He was a key member in the establishment of the National Science Center headquartered in Augusta, GA, designed to bring math and science programs to all children across the country. He has been a long-time member of the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association, a large, non-profit organization committed to enhancing professional standards for communications and electronics in the Armed Services. McKnight has continually mentored associates to offer professional advice and to provide concrete assistance with real-world communications issues, utilizing his specialized talents for the improvement of numerous communities.

Retired Lt. Gen. Jones, Class of 1978, has distinguished himself since his retirement by continuing to selflessly dedicate himself to communities in need. He completed his active service in 1991, after serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Manpower and Personnel Policy. Following his retirement, he served for ten years as Vice President and Senior Vice President of the American Red Cross focused on Disaster Relief and Services. He then returned to Texas and actively took up other volunteer activities supporting veterans and active Soldiers. His focused efforts have been instrumental in the establishment of the Survivor Outreach Services and Tragedy Assistance for Survivors programs; the Spiritual Fitness Center and Resiliency Campus; the Warrior Transition Unit Facility; and the Gold Star Bereavement Facility. He has aggressively supported the PTSD-TBI Care program for Soldiers and their families at Scott and White Hospital through Military Homefront Services, a program to provide anonymous, free and unlimited mental health services to service men

and women and their families who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. He has traveled throughout Texas, defining the need for these programs, requesting assistance, making face-to-face appeals, and securing the critical resources needed to support these important programs. He is an outstanding example of what a dedicated volunteer can accomplish when focused on supporting Soldiers during a time of war and crisis. He has also served as a member, Vice President, and President of the Ft. Hood Chapter of the Association of the U.S. Army, producing some of the best scholarship and Soldier support programs in AUSA. He also served a full term as the President of the Fourth AUSA Region, has been an active supporter of the Military Child Education Coalition, has headed up the NASA summer scholars program, helped underwrite specialized mental health care of Soldier and their families, and worked to provide personal care items for hundreds of Wounded Warriors at Darnell, Brooke, and Walter Reed Medical Centers. At the national level, he has also served as a Special Assistant to the President for Emergency Preparedness, and on an Evaluation Group assessing the World Trade Center Disaster for the Office of Domestic Preparedness, Department of Homeland Security, and much more. Jones is a selfless officer whose positive impact on Soldiers and veterans has been truly substantive and lasting.

Retired Maj. Gen. Gaskill, Sr., Class of 1972, has distinguished himself since his retirement by continuing to selflessly dedicate himself in an extraordinary way to helping others. He completed his active service in 1981 as the Deputy Director of the Defense Logistics Agency, and has embodied the military veteran spirit of “still serving” in the 30 years since. After his retirement from the U.S. Army, he has engaged in multiple educational, religious, professional, civic, and mentoring activities. For twenty years, he served on the adjunct faculty team at Northern Virginia Community College, teaching accounting, business, and public management. As part of that College’s outreach program, he taught classes at the Prince William County Police Academy, Defense Logistics Agency, and the District of Columbia Prison at Lorton, Virginia. From 2006-2009, he served on the Northern Virginia Community College Board as the county representative, advocating for better opportunities for young people as they matured into full citizens. Since 1996, Gaskill has been an active member of Unity in the Community, a non-profit, grass-roots civic organization serving Prince William County and the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park, Virginia. He is a past Chairman of this organization which promotes multicultural and interfaith understanding and cooperation, and which provides leadership in preventing, stopping, and responding to hate crimes and other hate activities. He has been a long-time member of The ROCKS, a professional military organization that provides mentoring and professional career development to its members and to pre-commissioning students. As an active member of the Washington Chapter, he serves as an Alumnus Advisor to the Howard University Reserve Officers Training Corps cadre and cadets. Gaskill received the NAACP’s “Giving Back Award” in 2011 for his exceptional efforts to promote civil and human rights for all. He has also modeled his strong commitment to servant leadership as an active Elder in his church at every level, teaching, volunteering, and serving those with critical needs in many communities. Gaskill’s dedication to others provides an

exceptional example of character and leadership for all.

Retired Col. Poydasheff, Class of 1976, has distinguished himself since his retirement by committing his time, resources, and expertise for the betterment of his communities. He completed his active service in 1979, after assignments as Legislative Counsel to the Secretary of the Army and Staff Judge Advocate at Ft. Benning, Georgia. He went directly into public life in Columbus, Georgia, and began serving this complex community in virtually every sector – business, education, legal, and community affairs. He served as City Councilor for eight years and then was elected and served as Mayor from 2003-2007. This community is home to a large military population, but it had never had a former military mayor. As mayor, Poydasheff initiated the revitalization of the south portion of the community, an area that had become less and less attractive and suffered from increased crime, lower property values, and a general lack of attention. During his tenure, he created a non-governmental organization, Columbus South, Inc. that brought together the community leaders, business leaders and citizen organizations in the area and developed a comprehensive program of growth. He also worked with Columbus State University to create a downtown campus that fundamentally improved the nature of the downtown. He created the One Columbus initiative to help the community be one that prides itself for the diversity of its citizens. Poydasheff also served as an educator and mentor, as an Adjunct Professor at Strayer University, Columbus State University, Beacon University, and Troy University. He has served on the Boards of Hughston Hospital, Brookstone School, Doctors Hospital, the Columbus United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, the American Red Cross, the Military Order of the World Wars, the Columbus Civilian-Military Council, the Columbus Symphony, the Springer Opera Arts Association, Georgia Legal Aid, and many others. He has served as a Past President of the Chattahoochee Valley Chapter of the Association of the U.S. Army and as Past Chairman of its Legislation Committee. He has worked tirelessly as a Legal Advisor to the Ranger Memorial Foundation, the National Infantry Association Advisory Board, the National Infantry Foundation, the National Armor and Cavalry Heritage Foundation, the Cavalry and Armor Association, and the Society of the 3d Infantry Division. Poydasheff has devoted his life to service, stepping up and making a difference.

The ceremony concluded with video highlights of the **Army War College's 111 years --**

- Established in 1901 by Secretary of War Elihu Root to serve as the Army's General Staff as well as its senior school to prepare officers to strategize and develop capacities for future crises.
- Graduated in 1905 its first class of Army and Marine Corps officers
- Reopened in 1919, after two years suspension for World War I, with revised curriculum of historical studies, responsible command, and the effects of political, social and economic factors on national defense
- Educated, in the interwar years, key World War II leaders including generals Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton, Omar Bradley and Admiral William Halsey

- Reopened and relocated at Fort Leavenworth in 1950, after WW2 closure
- Relocated in 1951 to historic Carlisle Barracks, adjacent to the college town of Carlisle
- Integrated, in 1978, international officers to advance strategic understanding and relationships
- For 60 years at Carlisle Barracks, evolved the curriculum to reflect and anticipate the strategic environment
- Continued, through the post-9/11 years, to educate officers through professional and intellectual development for future requirements and responsibilities.

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