

## In Defense of Freedom

| BY CRAIG MANSON |

*The following is adapted from Judge Manson's April 2004 remarks honoring the United States Air Force Academy's 50th anniversary and designation as a national historic landmark.*

**NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS** are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. They are extraordinary places that have meaning to all Americans. The Air Force Academy joins fewer than 2,500 other historic places bearing this special designation. **AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR**, I oversee the National Park Service, which is responsible for the National Historic Landmarks Program. As an academy graduate, and former faculty member who served in the regular Air Force, the Air Force Reserve, and the Air National Guard, I am particularly thrilled about the honor bestowed on this institution on its 50th anniversary. **THE NOTION THAT THERE SHOULD BE** a school to train the professional warriors of air power took hold almost immediately after the military significance of the airplane was understood. Other nations moved quickly to establish such institutions. France, Greece, even Turkey, were all training air force officers in their own academies before there even was a United States Air Force. **AND IT WOULD BE MORE THAN** half a century after that day at Kitty Hawk before Congress authorized the creation of the United States Air Force Academy. Then-Secretary of the Air Force Harold Talbot appointed a commission to select a site. The commission considered 580 locations in 45 different states before finally recommending 3 to the Secretary, including a site along the Rampart Range. It is fitting that an institution that represents America's highest values and America's greatest strengths should be situated in one of America's greatest naturally beautiful places. **THE DESIGN OF THE BUILDINGS** by architects Louis Skidmore, Nathaniel Owings, and John Merrill provoked controversy and outrage at the time. Walter Netsch's 17-spire chapel design was denounced in Congress as sacrilegious and offensive. Why 17 spires it was asked? Well, every cadet learned the answer to that. Twelve for the apostles and five for the chiefs of staff! **AND YET CONSTRUCTION PROCEEDED** and was completed in about three years at a cost of less than \$150 million. Imagine that for a major military construction project! **OF COURSE WHAT MAKES THIS SITE EXCEPTIONAL** is not just the

buildings but what they represent. Heritage. Tradition. Given meaning through ever-upward progress in defense of American values. American military air and space power exercised in defense of freedom around the world. The American commitment to win the war on terrorism and defeat terrorism throughout the world. That's what these buildings represent. That's what the people who pass through these buildings represent. They are the history of America in the latter half of the 20th century, and in the 21st century and beyond. History is too important to be left to historians. History is about all of us and therefore belongs to all of us. **FOR ME, THE YEAR 1954 HOLDS PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE.** The year the Air Force Academy was born was the year I was born. It was also the year that on May 17th the United States Supreme Court declared "... we find the doctrine of separate but equal has no place in public education." The case of *Brown*

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*v. Board of Education* defined the world in which I and my generation, and the Air Force Academy itself, would grow up. **WE KNOW AND HONOR CERTAIN NAMES** in the history of the Air Force Academy but we must not fail to recognize that the history of this institution is also shaped by the names of people that will never go on buildings or be mentioned in heritage programs. **VISITING THIS REGION LATE IN THE 19TH CENTURY**, Katharine Lee Bates wrote in one stanza of her famous poem—

O beautiful for heroes prov'd  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved  
And mercy more than life.  
  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And every gain divine.

**THIS WAS A PRESCIENT HOMAGE** to the men and women whose commitments to America led them as cadets, faculty, and staff here to the beginning of the long blue line, here to America's Air Force Academy.