

## TEN QUESTIONS

# Pete Dawkins

ACG interviews West Point's famed soldier-scholar-athlete.

**P**eter M. "Pete" Dawkins is an all-American hero, a class of 1959 West Point graduate who is the epitome of the soldier-scholar-athlete. He won the 1958 Heisman Trophy while playing under Earl "Red" Blaik, one of the greatest college football coaches in history. Dawkins was chosen as a Rhodes Scholar and played rugby while earning his graduate degree at Oxford and later earned a PhD from Princeton. He won medals for valor in Vietnam, and his photograph appeared on the April 8, 1966, cover of *Life* magazine. He retired from the Army as a brigadier general and then conquered the Wall Street business world over the past three decades. ACG interviewed this American icon soon after he presented the annual Pete Dawkins Trophy to the Most Valuable Player at the 2013 U.S. Army All-American Bowl in San Antonio, Texas.

**ACG** You won the Heisman Trophy as an Army halfback in 1958. What are your memories of the Army-Navy games you played?

**DAWKINS:** I had an unusual run in that we lost one, tied one, and won the one my senior year. So I've had the full kaleidoscope of emotions, from deep despair at a loss to the joy of a victory. My senior year was terribly cold and the turf was frozen, and just before I went out for the coin flip as captain of that team, Coach Blaik said to me, "Now listen, don't try to run back for a touchdown, just make sure you don't fumble." So with those words echoing in my ear, they kicked off to me and an opening appeared, so I cut sharply to my left and my elbow got hit by one of my own players, and the ball went about 20 feet in the air. Navy recovered and scored two plays later. So much for the beginning of my final game of football at Army. But we got the lead and won that game, which is a joyous moment in any Army ballplayer's life.

**ACG** What are your memories of legendary Coach "Red" Blaik?



**Capt. Peter M. "Pete" Dawkins, serving as an American adviser in Vietnam, was featured on the April 8, 1966, cover of *Life* magazine.**

**DAWKINS:** I had enormous respect and admiration for "the Colonel." He had his own style, and of course is legitimately revered as perhaps the most legendary college coach of the century. Vince Lombardi in his autobiog-



**Dawkins is currently the only West Point cadet ever to have been brigade commander, president of his class, captain of the football team, and a "star man" (in the top 10 percent academically) at the same time. In addition to playing football, Dawkins was the assistant captain of the West Point hockey team.**

raphy makes a statement that everything he ever learned about football he learned as an assistant to Red Blaik at Army. Blaik was a tough taskmaster and a formal man who wore a three-piece suit and a fedora hat on the sidelines, and one of his best friends was Douglas MacArthur. Many of us couldn't wait for Saturday because it was easier than the practices. But he was somebody whom we admired and respected enormously and felt very fortunate to have played for.

**ACG** After West Point, you became a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford?

**DAWKINS:** I felt very fortunate to have had that opportunity for both athletics and education. I had never seen a rugby game before I went to Oxford, but because of my background in American football, I was invited to try out for the team, and I advanced in six weeks from never having seen a game to playing for Oxford University, thanks to a lot of people taking me under their wing. Academically, it was a perfect counterpoint to my West Point education, with the two systems being very different. At West Point you solved complicated problems, but at Oxford you determined what the right questions are.

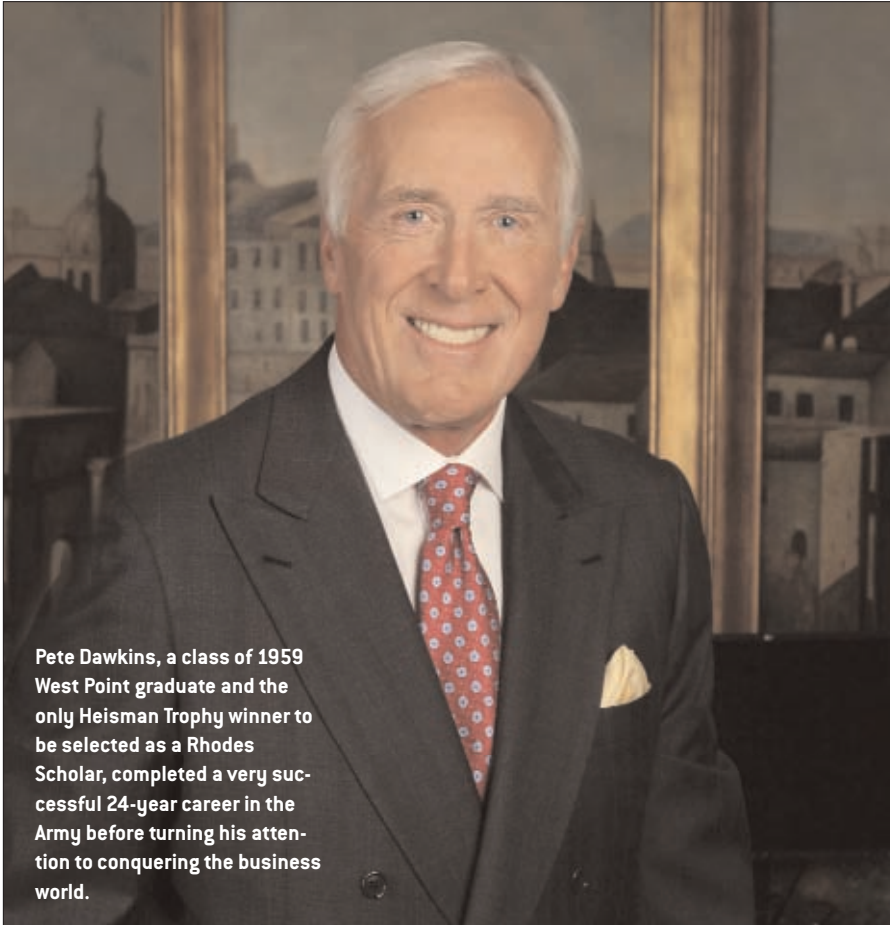
**ACG** What about your service in the Vietnam War?

**DAWKINS:** I was in Vietnam during the earlier part of the war in the mid-1960s before the big U.S. troop buildup and I was the senior adviser to the Vietnamese 1st Airborne Battalion. I had come from the 82d Airborne Division as my initial troop assignment in the United States. Then I got involved in the very early stages of the pacification program and went back in the summer of 1967 and worked for General William Westmoreland trying to strengthen the pacification effort.

**ACG** What followed your Vietnam service?

**DAWKINS:** I was due to come back in 1970 to command a battalion, but then Congress did away with the draft, so people didn't

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Pete Dawkins, a class of 1959 West Point graduate and the only Heisman Trophy winner to be selected as a Rhodes Scholar, completed a very successful 24-year career in the Army before turning his attention to conquering the business world.

know whether we could recruit enough people for the Army. So they formed a task force called the Modern Volunteer Army to figure out how to design, structure and operate an army without a draft. It was an intense period, and we created a blueprint for a volunteer force, despite some scary moments wondering whether we could pull it off.

**ACG** Where did you get your affinity for the airborne branch?

DAWKINS: I commanded a company in the 82d and a brigade in the 101st, which was appealing because elite units, from Seals and Special Forces to airborne and Rangers, bear a strong resemblance to championship athletic teams in spirit, attitude and elements of success. The best airborne answer was from General Maxwell D. Taylor, who while wartime commander of the 101st was asked why he enjoyed jumping out of airplanes. He replied, “I really don’t like it all that much, but I really like the people who do.”

**ACG** You attained the rank of brigadier general before retiring. What are your thoughts on your Army career?

DAWKINS: When I graduated from the Military Academy, I wasn’t one of these people who had set their mind that they were going to be a career military officer. I certainly was looking forward to serving, particularly since there was a war looming, since that is one’s responsibility coming out of West Point. But it just grew on me. I flourished in that environment, never had a job I didn’t like, and it became a calling. Indeed I had some substantial success, since I was a young boy brigadier, having just been selected by the Secretary of Defense Cap Weinberger to be his military adviser to replace Colin Powell, so things were going very well for me. But I had a bad parachute accident years earlier and it finally caught up with me about six months before that, and I had to have emergency back surgery at Walter Reed. They told me that I would never be able to

jump again, and that really affected me a lot because I had always dreamed of commanding an airborne division and now that was clearly not in the cards. I began wondering whether I would be happy being a headquarters general, and somewhat compulsively I decided I didn’t want to do that, so I turned down the job.

**ACG** What are the traits that make great leaders?

DAWKINS: There are five things that I believe define the qualities of a truly effective leader: vision, competence, integrity, courage and trust. I once heard it said that it’s hard to lead somebody if there’s no place they want to go, and I think that’s right.

**ACG** What leaders do you most admire?

DAWKINS: People like Winston Churchill, Douglas MacArthur, Jonas Salk and Donald Dell.

**ACG** Are you interested in military history?

DAWKINS: One of the lasting things that I took away from West Point was our study of military history, including everything from Sun Tzu through Napoleon through the Civil War and through the World Wars, and we studied them both strategically and at a tactical level. To do that, West Point had developed a set of military history atlases, which were 3-inch-thick, oversized books. On the left-hand page is a schematic of some aspect of the battle, and on the right-hand page is the narrative that corresponds to that. For example, as you go through Gettysburg day by day, you have each of the components as they unfolded. Both are dictatorially described and with a very vivid narrative of them, so by doing this you could understand at a different level how the commanders were thinking, what information they had available, and what the technology of the age was. It gave me a real appreciation for how the technology, the intellectual foundation, and the prominent principles all came together to be the basis of these great commanders’ actions. It’s fascinating! ☆

*John Ingoldsby conducted this interview. He is a leading writer on the intersection of sports and the military and is president of IIR Sports & Entertainment Inc. (IIRsports.com), a public relations and media firm in Boston.*