

Harold W. Gehman, Jr. '65

Admiral Hal Gehman's first home at Penn State was in the gone-but-not-forgotten Nittany Barracks. "I only spent one semester there, though, before I moved to better quarters," says the man who would one day retire as a four-star admiral, the highest ranking military officer ever to have graduated from the University.

Even for a man whose father was a Naval Academy graduate and captain, the mid 1960s were precarious. "By the time I graduated there was a war on and a draft," he says. "I remember vividly that my GPA dropped too low once and I was ordered to report for a draft physical." He laughs at the memory, "That got my attention. I made the dean's list the next quarter!" The NROTC student and industrial engineering major wasn't trying to avoid military service; he just wanted to finish his degree first.



Gehman entered the navy after graduating and served in Vietnam as officer in charge of a Swift patrol boat and later as officer in charge of a detachment of six Swift boats and their crews. He ultimately completed an unusual five command-at-sea tours in ranks from lieutenant to rear admiral. "That qualifies me as an old sea dog," Gehman says. Promotions meant not only moving—he's lost track of how many times he's moved but says "it's in the dozens"—but increased responsibilities as well. Promoted to four-star admiral in 1996, Gehman became the 29th vice chief of naval operations. In that role he was a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, oversaw formulation of the navy's \$70 billion budget, and instituted policies governing the 375,000 people in the navy. In 1997, Gehman was assigned as supreme allied commander, Atlantic, and commander in chief, U.S. Joint Forces Command. As such he was one of NATO's two military commanders and assumed command of all forces in the four services in the continental United States.

Though modest about the many ribbons and medals he was awarded during his career—"We don't have bonuses or stock options in the military so we hand out medals instead"—Gehman does acknowledge pride in the Bronze Star with Combat "V" he received. "Because that's a very personal award," he explains.

Gehman retired in 2000, but the federal government has twice turned to him for special public service assignments. President Clinton's secretary of defense, William S. Cohen, appointed Gehman to co-chair the investigation of the 2000 terrorist attack on the USS *Cole* in Yemen. Gehman's reputation for integrity and deft handling of bureaucracy led President Bush to appoint him to lead the investigation into the space shuttle Columbia accident in 2003. "We worked seven days a week on the space shuttle investigation in Houston for the first five months," Gehman says. And he'd do it again if called. "I've received so much from the government that it would be hard to say no if they called," he says.

Penn State has previously honored Gehman as an Alumni Fellow (1998) and Outstanding Engineering Alumnus (2001). He lives in Norfolk with his wife, Janet. They have two grown children.

*This career summary is excerpted from the 2004 Distinguished Alumni Awards Ceremony booklet (June 4, 2004, The Pennsylvania State University).