

# Tom Kerns

## Football standout combined talent, discipline at Army

By John Hartssock

For three seasons, from 1961-63, Army enjoyed a fabulous run on the football field, compiling a 22-8 record that included three victories over nationally-renowned Penn State.

Altoona native Tom Kerns was a big factor in the Cadets' success over that time period, on both sides of the line of scrimmage.

Kerns was able to hold down starting positions at offensive end and defensive tackle for the Cadets — partly because he was a skilled athlete, and partly because of his strict adherence to a sense of duty.

"Today, there is so much specialization (on football teams)," said Kerns, 63, who lives in Chesapeake, Va. and is employed as a facility engineer for the AME Inc. management consulting company that is based in Virginia Beach. "When I played, if the coach wanted you to play (a position), you played it, and there were never any debates or arguments. You just did it. Thirty or forty years ago, kids were just so grateful to have an opportunity to play."

Ron Rickens, Altoona High School's offensive and defensive line coach during Kerns' senior year there, in 1959, recalled Kerns as a coachable team player who carried out assignments conscientiously.

"He did whatever was asked of him," said Rickens, who will serve as Kerns' presenter at tonight's Blair County Sports Hall of Fame induction ceremony. "He was a quiet type of person who just put out 100 percent on the football field. He was kind of a silent leader. He could have gone to a lot of different (colleges), but he chose to go to the (United States Military) Academy." Kerns has always felt a sense of duty and responsibility toward his military service. He turned down major college football suitors like Penn State,

Pittsburgh and Michigan State to play collegiately at West Point.

Then he nearly made the ultimate sacrifice, narrowly escaping death while serving in the Vietnam War.

"I served twice, and I was wounded in my first tour of duty in Vietnam," Kerns said. "I was in the hospital for six months. Two or three inches the other way, and I wouldn't have made it. I had a lot of dear friends who didn't."

But for the privilege of calling himself a soldier, it was all worth it, according to

Kerns.

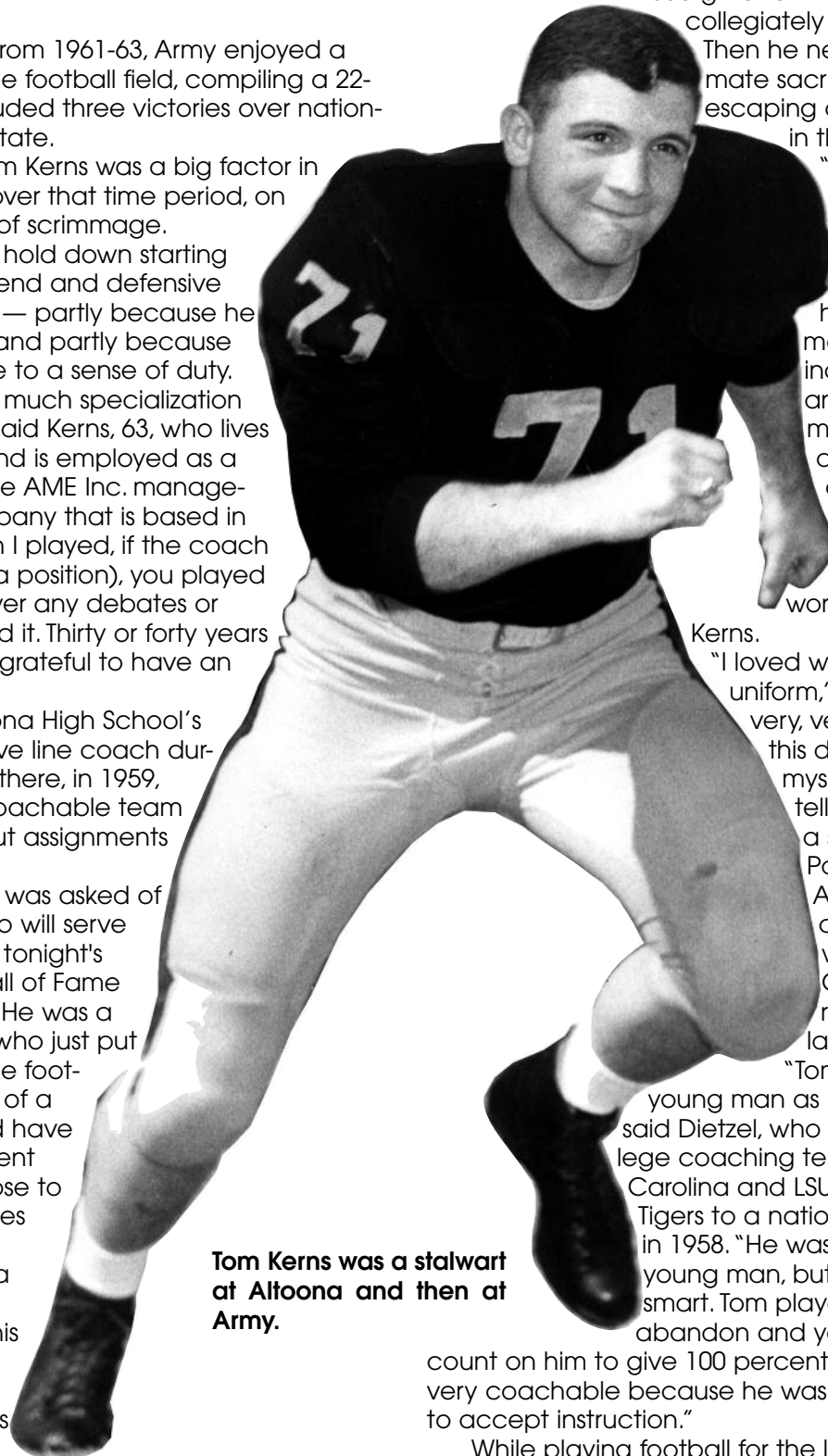
"I loved wearing the (military) uniform," Kerns said. "I was very, very proud of it. To this day, if I describe myself to somebody, I'll tell them I loved being a soldier."

Paul Dietzel was Army's head football coach when Kerns was playing for the Cadets. His praise rings loudly 40 years later.

"Tom was as fine a young man as I've ever coached," said Dietzel, who also had long college coaching tenures at South Carolina and LSU, where he led the Tigers to a national championship in 1958. "He was a very tenacious young man, but he was also very smart. Tom played with great abandon and you could always

count on him to give 100 percent. But Tom was also very coachable because he was intelligent enough to accept instruction."

While playing football for the late, great coach



**Tom Kerns was a stalwart at Altoona and then at Army.**

Earl Strohm at Altoona High School, Kerns received plenty of good instruction in the basics of football. Strohm was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1988.

"When you left Altoona after playing for Earl Strohm, you knew how to block and tackle," Kerns said. "I took that knowledge with me, I refined it, and I had the opportunity to play football in college as a result of it."

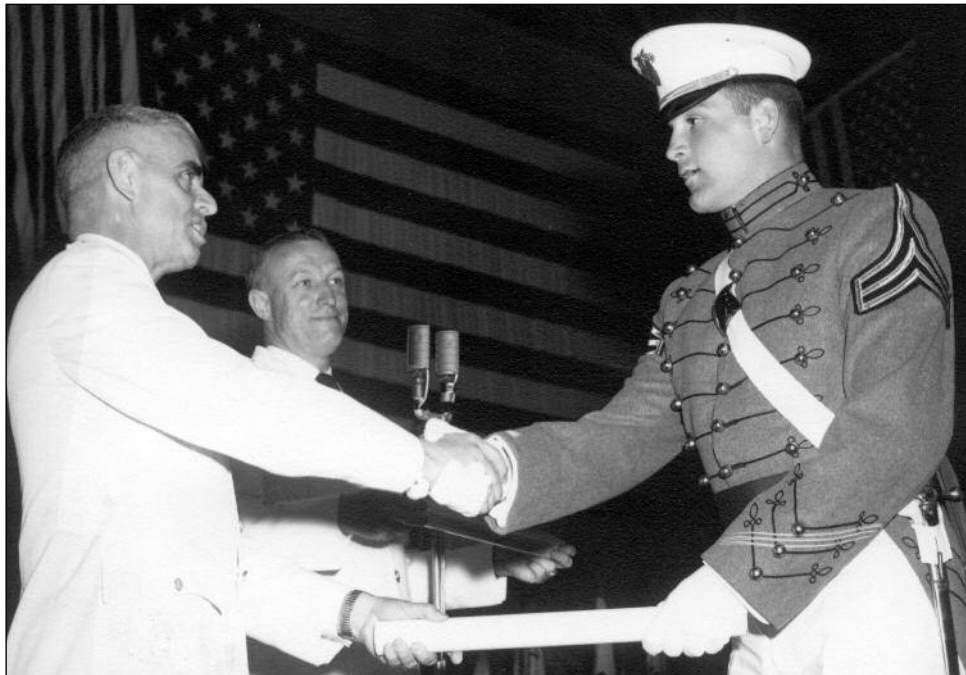
One of Kerns' teammates at Altoona, Ralph Conrad, later took his knowledge of the game to the University of Pittsburgh, where he made his mark as an offensive lineman.

Conrad is also in the Hall of Fame's 2006 induction class.

"Ralph was a year ahead of me in school, and he went to Pitt," Kerns said. "I played against him twice in college, and (Pitt and Army) split those two games. We played them in Yankee Stadium, and we won. The next year, we went over to Pitt, and they beat the dickens out of us. That was not a good day for the Army football team."

Most of Kerns' football days at Army were much better.

"We played against a national schedule, and we were able to compete (successfully) against that schedule," Kerns said of his days with the Cadets, who beat the Rip Engle-coached Penn State Nittany Lions three times during Kerns' stay at Army.



Following graduation from Army, Tom was wounded in Vietnam.

"We were able to compete because as a team, we were very hungry. And our conditioning was a huge factor, too. We trained for 11 months out of the year, not just for football, but also for the United States Army. "And we still had something left in the fourth quarter during our football games at Army. We just believed we were in better shape than our

opponents were."



### Kerns bio

**Sport:** Football.

**Hometown:** Altoona.

**College:** Army.

**Hall of Fame achievement:** Hall of Fame achievement: Tom was a three-year, two-way starter, at Army from 1961-63.

**Current residence:** Chesapeake, VA

## HALL OF FAME ROLL CALL BY SPORTS

**FOOTBALL (28):** Ed Flanagan, \*Galen Hall, Mike Reid, John Ebersole, Steve Lach, Blaine Earon, Maurice "Babe" Patt, Harry "Spook" Temple, Brad Benson, Otto Kneidinger, Troy Benson, Tom Corbo, Steve Hatfield, Bill Iannicelli, Tony Georgiana, Brian Franco, Negley Norton, Ray Prosperi, Mark Raugh, Frank Smith, Jim Curry, Mike Irwin, Jack Hopper, Merle Stonebraker, Pat Fellingner, Jim Merritts, Ralph Conrad, Tom Kerns

**BASKETBALL (9):** Jeff Neuman, Johnny Moore, Lisa (Fubio) Gehret, Pam (Webber) Mitchell, Randy Allen, Dick Johnston, Bill Saller, Doug West, Mike Iuzzolino

**COACHING (8):** William "Skip" Hughes, Earl Strohm, Harry Clarke, Harold Price, Edward "Snaps" Emanuel, Art Taneyhill, John Swogger, Dick Buckley  
\*Galen Hall's candidacy was enhanced by his coaching tenure at the University of Florida.

**TRACK & FIELD (7):** Donn Kinzle, Jim Gehrdes, Dick Bartholomew, Ward McLanahan, James "Rabbit" Ward, Denver "Junie" Smith, Angie Gioiosa

**BASEBALL (6):** Pat Malone, Tom Irwin, Bob Ramazzotti, Tom Healy, Danny Napoleon, Joe Martin

**TENNIS (2):** Bill Parsons, Martin Goldberg  
**WRESTLING (2):** Wade Schalles, Johnny Orr

**BOXING (2):** Dick Conlon, Dave Stoop  
**RACQUETBALL (1):** Fredina Ingold