



Alan Louis Gropman

February 4, 1938 - May 31, 2026

Alan Louis Gropman, retired U.S. Air Force colonel and professor, raconteur and connector, died May 31 in Alexandria, Va. He was 88.

Born Feb. 4, 1938, Alan grew up in the scrappy, multiethnic, working-class West End of Boston. His anchor was the West End House, which encouraged young men to excel through academics, athletics and community. He remained dedicated to those values—as well as the friends he made and the tolerance he learned there—for the rest of his life.

Alan completed his undergraduate degree at Boston University and his PhD in history at Tufts. His 27-year Air Force career included two tours as a C-130 navigator in Vietnam, where he flew more than 670 combat missions and earned major decorations including the Distinguished Flying Cross. He taught history at the Air Force Academy before transitioning to a focus on planning and strategy. Following a tour in Ramstein, Germany, he attended the Air War College. He then served two stints at the Pentagon, separated by an assignment as associate dean of faculty at the National War College. In his final tour at the Pentagon, he supervised five planning divisions as deputy director for Air Force Plans for Planning Integration. He retired from the Air Force in 1986.

Among his other commendations are the Legion of Merit and Defense

Superior Service Medal.

In his second career, Alan taught history and grand strategy at the National Defense University's Industrial College of the Armed Forces, later chairing the grand strategy department. After retiring from NDU in 2011, Alan taught at Georgetown University and at the Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University.

Although he lectured, authored several books and wrote hundreds of articles and book reviews focused on strategy, logistics and mobilization, he was best known for his expertise in Black military history. The book that grew out of his dissertation, "The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964" is the seminal account of that period, and Alan was instrumental in helping the Tuskegee Airmen achieve a collective medal of honor in 2007.

Alan volunteered his time and knowledge to many organizations throughout his life. He was a consummate speech-giver and story-teller, and the ultimate connector. He is survived by his wife of almost 66 years, Jacqueline Gropman of Alexandria; daughter Elizabeth (Darryl), of Potomac; sons Michael (Sherry), of Burke, and Robert (Janet), of Radford, Va., granddaughters Rachel and Sara Chang, and untold family members, friends, colleagues and mentees, and neighbors who appreciated his friendly waves and fist bumps. They will miss him deeply.

Services will be Thursday, June 4, at 2:30 p.m. at Beth El Hebrew Congregation in Alexandria; burial at a later date at Arlington National Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the West End House in Boston. For more details about Alan's legacy, please visit the website of Jefferson Funeral Chapel.

Upcoming Events

Funeral Service

JUN 4. 2:30 PM (ET)

Beth El Hebrew Congregation
3830 Seminary Road
Alexandria , VA 22304