

Dick Jewett

Gen. Jewett hails from a military family. Both his father and grandfather served in the Army and later his son and grandson would serve also. His father was a regular officer in the U.S. Army and Gen. Jewett decided at an early age that was what he to go to the United States Military Academy at West Point. He did not get a congressional appointment but instead took advantage of a regulation that allows the President of the United States to sponsor 80 cadets amongst the 4 classes. Gen. Jewett took and examination to gain one of the spots and passed. He entered West Point in 1927 and graduated in 1931 and was commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Army. He was married a year after being commissioned and a year after that he and his wife had a baby boy.

In an interesting twist of fate he took his exam to enter the academy at Ft. Crook, Nebraska. This later became Offutt Air Force base from which his oldest grandson retired from the U.S. Air Force after 21 years of service!

At the time of Gen. Jewett's graduation the cadets were commissioned and given their first assignments based on the class standing of each student. Gen. Jewett was in the top 6% of his class and so got an early choice of assignment. He chose the Corps of Engineers. Had a variety of assignments before being posted to teach mathematics at West Point in 1938.

He had the rank of major and was teaching there when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. The teaching assignments were for four years a time so he would be due for a new assignment in 1942. Gen. Jewett was very excited as he was hoping to get command of an engineer regiment. Instead he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and assigned, with three other officers from West Point, to the McLean Division of the Transportation Corps in Washington, DC. While this was not the job that Gen. Jewett was hoping for it was nonetheless very important. The task of the McLean Division was to control the worldwide movement of shipping to support the Allied war effort.

Gen. Jewett helped to carry out this important operation until May 1944 when, still assigned to the Transportation Corps, he was transferred to England to assist with the upcoming invasion of France. He called this a "very interesting experience" and he was right. In England he was assigned to BUCO, West. This stood for Build Up Control Office, West. The job of the unit was to schedule the shipment of troop reinforcements across the western half of English Channel to France in the immediate wake of the Normandy Invasion. The unit was set up in an old fort between Portsmouth and Southampton England. The moat had been drained and was used a site for the tent encampment where the men lived. The fort itself was used the offices of BUCO, West.

BUCO, West had a procedure by which units scheduled to ship out in three days would send representatives to the fort. They would then consult with them and prioritize which units were to go first and by which vessels. BUCO, West would then write orders to the units instructing them to concentrate at a central marshalling area on the south coast of England and from there to go their assigned ships for transport to France. BUCO, West

controlled both U.S. and British units. Gen. Jewett's noted with humor that the British and American drivers responsible for loading vehicles on the landing ships had very different methods. The British had drivers in the vehicles with a sergeant to direct them on the ship and into the proper space. By contrast the Americans would have a driver on the running board with his foot on the accelerator back the vehicle into the ship without direction and park it!

The job was behind the front lines but not without its dangers. Once the order for the movement of units was complete it was sent by courier that night to Salisbury where another unit dispersed it to the proper units. This practice stopped after a courier was killed making the high speed drive at night. Afterwards the orders were sent by day for the safety of the drivers.

There was also a BUCO, East that was created to handle moving units of General George Patton's 3rd Army across the eastern half of the English Channel. However, this was actually created as a part of the giant deception plan, Operation Fortitude, that misled the Germans as to the actual landing site of the D-Day invasion. In fact the 3rd Army had not part in the Normandy Invasion.

At the end of July, 1944 Gen. Jewett was transferred to France where he continued his work with the Transportation Corps, ultimately ending up in Paris after its liberation in August 1944. Coincidentally this was not the first time Gen. Jewett had been to Paris. He had been there with his father in 1920-21 after World War One when his father was assigned to posting in France.

While there he was assigned to a railway reconnaissance unit. Their job was to scout out portions of track and rolling stock and locomotives that could be used to transport men and supplies for the Allies. This was not a job he particularly enjoyed, with his background in engineering he still very much wanted command of an engineering regiment. He would drop by the engineering section headquarters constantly to ask if there were any positions open. In November 1944 his persistence paid off and he was assigned as the second in command of the 364th Engineer General Services Unit in Liege, France.

This unit was performing work on roads in Sedan, France and Aachen, Germany up until April 1945. By that time it was apparent that the Allies were going to be victorious and preparations for demobilizing the large U.S. force and shipping them home had to begin. Unlike other soldiers who were being redeployed to the Pacific to fight Japan, Gen. Jewett, as a regular Army officer, had a four year tour of duty in Europe. So instead of transferring to the Pacific Gen. Jewett was assigned to the 1349th Engineer General Services Regiment whose immediate task was to build a redeployment camp for U.S. soldiers at Le Havre, France.

The 1349th Engineer General Services Regiment was unique in that it was a black unit. During World War Two the U.S. Army was still segregated with whites and blacks serving in different units. In the case of the 1349th all of the enlisted personnel and one

third of the officers were black. For Gen. Jewett this assignment had additional significance in that his grandfather had served with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in the Civil War. The 54th Massachusetts was one of the first black units to be able to fight for the Union and earned an outstanding reputation during that war. Interestingly, Gen. Jewett observed that there were not any tensions between blacks and whites in the unit. This is born out by the fact that the unit performed well in the variety of tasks it was called upon to perform. There was also a company of German prisoners of war who were attached to the regiment for awhile making it a truly diverse unit! Gen. Jewett was also surprised to find prisoners also working in the local base store.

By November 1945 Gen. Jewett was in command of the 1349th and moved with it to Karlsruhe, Germany to build facilities for the Army units occupying Germany. Gen. Jewett observed that the Army was only constructing facilities for the occupation forces. The actual rebuilding of the national infrastructure was left up to the Germans themselves.

As commander of the regiment, part of Gen. Jewett's job was to travel to the various regimental worksites and oversee them. On one such trip he passed a train station where displaced persons the Germans had been using for slave labor were being loaded onto trains for transfer to Soviet controlled East Germany. These were people from eastern Europe who the Germans had forcefully moved from their homes in eastern Europe but who now had no desire to go back and live under Soviet control. These people knew that the Soviets did not want to have people in these countries that had had exposure to the western European countries and that they would be executed or exiled to Siberia when they returned. Gen. Jewett passed by this train station on multiple occasions and observed that approximately one third of the people would kill themselves rather than board the trains. He felt that the Allies nations should never have allowed this to happen and if, at the time, more people had been aware of it, it might not have happened.

After the war Gen. Jewett remained in the Army and in the engineers. He retired as a Brigadier General in 1961. He had a career that took him from teaching positions to staff positions and then finally to a command position. He was very satisfied with what he had accomplished in his thirty years of service to his country.

He attends the West Point class of 1931 reunion every five years. As of 2003 there were only 14 graduates still alive out of a class of 297. This shows only too clearly what a dwindling resource the men of this generation have become.