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MAJOR GENERAL ALTON H. HARVEY

William K. Suter¹

We are here today to say farewell to our friend, General Al Harvey. He was a loving husband, a proud father, and a distinguished Army officer. He touched our lives in so many ways. We learned from him and we are all better off for having known him. In this time of mourning, we find great comfort in his commitment and in the truth that death prepares us for eternal life.

Al was born in the small town of McComb, Mississippi in 1932. He always wanted a military career. He grew up on a farm and at an early age, to use his words, he “became acquainted with the south end of a mule headed north.” His father was a railroad conductor for forty years, but he liked living on a farm. Al grew up as an only child. His dad made sure that his son learned all about hard work. When his father died, Al and his mother moved back into town.

After high school, Al attended the Virginia Military Institute with the aspiration of attending a service academy. In 1950, however, the Korean War broke out and he wanted to serve there. His mother didn’t know that he had enlisted in the Mississippi National Guard at the age of sixteen. His guard unit was activated while he was at VMI. His grades at VMI were not as good as he wanted, so he knew that his chances of going to a service academy were slim. He felt compelled to serve in Korea, so he volunteered for active duty in 1951. While in basic training, he joined a newly formed unit and completed Airborne and Ranger training.

He was assigned to a regimental combat team and then attended Officers Candidate School. As a new Infantry Second Lieutenant, he was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division as a Platoon Leader. He volunteered for duty in Korea and was assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division as an Infantry Platoon Leader. His platoon was made up of soldiers from the Puerto Rican National Guard, none of whom spoke English. Al spoke no Spanish. Despite this, he led his men in tough combat under severe weather conditions. He was wounded and awarded the Purple Heart. It was during this time he noticed that Judge Advocate General (JAG) officers served in the division rear and enjoyed fairly good living conditions. He never forgot that.

He returned to civilian life and entered the University of Mississippi. There he earned his undergraduate and law degrees and stayed active in the National Guard.

1. William K. Suter became the nineteenth clerk of the United States Supreme Court in 1991. Previously, he was a career officer and a lawyer in the United States Army, retiring with the rank of major general. He is a graduate of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and the Tulane University School of Law in New Orleans, Louisiana.

He missed the Army and reentered active duty as a JAG officer in 1958. He was a captain and was assigned to the 101st Airborne Division under the legendary Staff Judge Advocate, Colonel "Squeaky" Durbin.

Next came three consecutive years of schooling: the advanced course at the JAG School, the Language School at Monterey, and the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). At CGSC, he and a friend would go duck hunting early in the morning before classes started.

He must have missed his kimchi, because he returned to Korea for a long tour and used his newly acquired language capability. His daughter Connie was born in Korea.

Next came Fort Bragg and then a return to Fort Campbell. The 101st Airborne Division deployed to Vietnam and Al didn't like being left behind in the newly formed 6th Infantry Division.

His love of the Orient helped him land a three-year assignment to the Military Assistance Command in Bangkok. While there, he met Major Bill Suter, the Staff Judge Advocate (SJA) of the Army Support Command, and literally saved him by providing much needed help and advice.

He volunteered for duty in Vietnam and served as SJA of the 101st. Although he tried to avoid it, he next went to the Pentagon where he was Chief of the Criminal Law Division. His boss was BG "Big Daddy" Larry Williams. Al said that Larry was a tough boss. What an understatement! Al said Larry taught him that legal documents should contain no "wasted words," and should be written so that there is "no misunderstanding." Al was responsible for preparing a review of Lieutenant Calley's record of trial for use by the President of the United States.

He attended the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and became Chief of the Defense Appellate Division. He was one of the architects of the newly formed Trial Defense Service. He was sent to West Point on extended temporary duty to supervise dozens of defense counsel who were there to represent cadets during a big cheating scandal.

He returned to the Pentagon in 1976 as a Brigadier General. He again served under "Big Daddy." How lucky can you get? Al, like myself and others, loved "Big Daddy."

Three years later he became the Judge Advocate General of the Army. He described his tenure in that position as rather uneventful. Perhaps so, but those of us who served with him know that he performed superbly. Among other things, he established the JAG Brigadier General position in the National Guard. He also appointed the First Sergeant Major of the JAG Corps.

He retired in 1981 to become Dean of the Mississippi College School of Law. He was back home, but he was not behind a mule this time. He led the school for ten years, during which the school achieved full accreditation by the American Bar Association. He retired again and moved to Florida with his beloved family.

Al was a gifted leader. He summarized his leadership style in these words: "Don't give subordinates jobs they can't accomplish. Give them a task, tell them what you want done, and then back off and let them do it."

Generals have nicknames that the troops call them behind their backs. Al knew that we all called him the "Silver Fox." He had some great hair! After retirement, he confessed that he liked his nickname.

Al was a consummate officer and lawyer. His hallmarks were his kindness to others and his willingness to help those in need. Thirty-five years ago he helped me as a young officer. Years later, after his second retirement, he would often call on my elderly mother who lived nearby and take her to lunch.

Al was a devoted husband and father. He loved his wife, Jean, and their daughters, Connie, Paige, and Lori, more than anything else in life. He was justly proud of them.

Al was a great leader and mentor. He was always a coach. He never missed the opportunity to teach a lesson by recalling an event that he had witnessed. He told good stories that were always laced with humor. He never took himself too seriously.

We are going to miss Al Harvey. We will miss his wit, his common sense, his gracious manner, his patriotism, and his generosity. Our lives are measured by the memories we leave behind. We will carry Al's presence in our memories forever.

