

# GENERAL WILLIAM E. DEPUY

Remarks by Gen. P. F. Gorman, USA (Ret.)

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A husband, a father is dead.

Our hearts go out to the family of General DePuy. We, his friends and professional colleagues, share their bereavement in the limited ways that outsiders can.

A distinguished officer of the United States Army has passed away. Here the Army, in its ancient ways, expresses mourning.

Mourn we all should, for a man whose brilliant mind and fervant spirit touched each of us has passed from our midst.

It is also fitting, however, that we here, all of us, rejoice in his full life of unmatched accomplishment, now inscribed in the annals of the Army, and recorded in the history of this Republic.

My friends, we have come together to commemorate General William Eugene DePuy, who uniquely embodied the American warrior ethos during the past seven decades: tumultuous, conflict-torn years, encompassing a procession of great events that have profoundly affected the attitudes and aspirations of every citizen of this country. General DePuy was one professional soldier who, in his lime, made difference in his chosen life's work. He was, all his life, a force for the improvement of the Army, both in war and in peace. He transformed the institution that he served so well.

DePuy had a fire within him a consuming passion to foster progress in any responsibility that accrued to him. Mission by mission, from the plodding marches of the Louisiana Maneuvers to the triumphant drive across Central Europe during World War II. from the menial tasks of a subaltern in a mobilizing Army in 1941 to his apotheosis as commander of the First Infantry Division in Vietnam, from his origins in mid-America to the highest councils of leadership in this land, he brought to his duty cogency, competence, and deep caring. And he succeeded! Whenever and wherever he put his mind and heart to a task, he did what he set out to do!

Some of his achievements loom above the others, but do not allow my recounting to obscure the centrality of the intensity that he brought to all matters, great or small, within his purview. He was a committed man. With all his considerable intellectual energies, his physical stamina, and his emotions as well, he pursued betterment. I have often thought that his way with any problem mirrored the tactic of celerity, suppression, and indirect approach that he learned during World War II. If his attack promised to stiffen bureaucratic resistance, he suppressed objections and moved to flank, or he quietly penetrated the opposition to seize moral high ground beyond. He aimed in all matters at what he sought in battle: progress at least cost.

Fortunately for the United States, and for its Army, General DePuy eventually rose to the top of his profession, and was able thence to influence broadly its future.

Here was no scholastic, no principle-bound intellectual. DePuy was a pragmatist, generalizing broadly and advantageously from what he himself had experienced, observed, or sensed, or from what he understood of reliable reports. To convince him one had to show him how the matter at issue worked in combat, or a reasonable approximation of combat. He believed that what counted in battle was not what the Army's schools taught, or what weapons were in issue, but how American soldiers, sergeants, and officers behaved under stress.

In this respect, I compare him to General George C. Marshall, for like Marshall, DePuy distrusted officers who yearned for, or worse, depended upon, sets of academically propounded rules, formulaic solutions for the vagaries of combat circumstance. Both taught officers in expect the unanticipated, and schooled them to cope with surprise as a normal concomitant of conflict. Both prized innovators and innovations. Both understood that the Army's principal responsibility, and its main occupation in peace or in war, was in train for future battle, in a place and at a time no man could foresee. Both exhibited a personal commitment to ways and means of fashioning American youth into combat-competent infantry soldiers.

In the months before he fell ill, I spent hours with General DePuy, talking about the past and its portent as he perceived it. Once I asked him if, looking back, he would have done anything different. He replied that he would have spent more time teaching, especially in the years since retiring from the Army. I was astonished: this from a general whom I had often watched lecturing from down in a foxhole to a gathered ring of company leaders on how and why properly to dig; or gesticulating before the map to show his division staff how to think about the campaign they were about to prosecute, and to motivate them to reach for decisive result; or using deft graphics on butcher-paper charts to lead colonels and generals to understand how to modernize the Army. I told him that I thought he had done his share of teaching on active duty, but he would not be dissuaded.

General DePuy was, as far as I know, the first commander of an Army major command to make extensive use of television for training, and I believe that when he retired in 1977, he had taught more subordinates through that medium than any other general before him. He was the same sort of teacher as General Marshall, whom one National Guardsman praised by saying that "he makes us understand."

Teacher General DePuy was, and teacher he remained until the end of his life.

After he retired to his Virginia farm, Highfield, he spent long hours writing for publication, sitting at the kitchen table, scrawling his prose across yellow lined pads. His themes ranged from apologia for minor tactics and grand strategy in Vietnam, to expositions on sound doctrine for future wars. Usually he wrote for ARMY magazine, because therein, he said, young officers would be more likely to read what he wrote, picking up that widely distributed periodical when they had time, perhaps as staff duty officer, or relaxing at night after duty.

It is entirely characteristic of the man that one of his last compositions was a letter to General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, offering suggestions for joint doctrine and training. The Chairman, then working on the draft of JCS Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the US Armed Forces, found his ideas thoughtful and timely.

Of the many commanders I have observed in combat in two wars. General DePuy is the only one I would unhesitatingly describe as an authentic tactical genius. He possessed that tactical acumen the Germans celebrate, an instinctive, uncanny sensing for the location and intent of the enemy, and for the ebb and flow of a battle. Moreover, his grasp of combat kinetics extended to guiding subordinates charged with combat support and combat service support: he would make a broad gesture on the map, saying, for instance, "we will need, within 36 hours, a capability to operate here, for at least a week". Those, subordinates planned and executed well aware, however, that the general would unerringly detect the slightest inconsistency or delay in any of the numerous organizational networks that undergird a division in combat. He himself personally disciplined his divisional voice command communications in Vietnam, and set new standards for austere transmissions amid stress. He visited his troops often, and spoke with individuals or groups in a patient inspirational, tutorial fashion. The soldiers under his command knew that their general fought hard, fought smart, and fought to win.

General DePuy was slight of frame, but impressive of intellect. Original of thought, with an unconventional bias, he was inquisitive, perceptive and pungently humorous. He was in all respects admirably equipped for the prominent role he was called upon to play in American intelligence and Special Operations during the Cold War. I have known no other general officer so quick as he to absorb complex information, to form judgment, and to deliver crisp, cogent decision, in matters small or great.

In 1973, as Assistant Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, his purview included the major restructuring of the Army of the year. He assigned two of his staff officers, to spend a month studying the problem of how to configure the Army in the aftermath of Vietnam. Then, based on their staff study, within one week he decided what to do, persuaded the Chief of Staff to accept his solution, and obtained the approval of both the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of Defense - possibly a standing Pentagon record for lightning-like staff action. Out of that organizational stroke emerged the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, a conceptual breakthrough that modernized the Army. TRADOC was peculiarly his creation, for he was the general staff principal at its birth,

and its first commander: more than any other individual, he established its tone, and set the azimuth upon which it marches to this day.

He picked that name: Training and Doctrine Command.

“Command” is surely was, for to the degree that any general can shape and guide Major Command of the Army, DePuy commanded. We, all of us who served in TRADOC, from the junior drill sergeant at Fort Jackson through the commander of the Combined Arms Center at Leavenworth, felt daily his drive and enthusiasm, his restless pursuit of perfection. He simply ignored any among us who were unprepared to advance with him, but for each of us he deemed able and willing, he devised a particular formula to elicit our energetic pursuit of his goals. He communicated to us a deep faith in the American fighting man. His experience had been that any soldier who understood what was expected of him would unfailingly do his job, even amid the most terrifying and confused of battle circumstances. He taught us to insure that soldiers knew what to do, how and when. Working for him was always a challenge, for we were all hard pressed to keep up with his ever-active mind, but I can attest that I enjoyed under his command more freedom of action, and more assured support, than under any other commander for whom I ever served, in peace or at war. General DePuy was a resolute, concerned, bold, adaptive and innovative leader, and like all great leaders, he brought out the best in all of us.

"Doctrine" was one of the main purposes of TRADOC, and command at Fort Monroe empowered General DePuy to pursue the preoccupation of his lifetime: those ideas that, lodged between the ears of soldiers of all ranks, led to concerted action under fire. TRADOC, as he conceived it, was to serve not just the forces in the continental United States, as had its predecessors, but was to serve all the units of the entire Army - wherever they might be located, whatever their mission - by developing the concepts and the material they needed for combat, and by training soldiers and leaders to fill their ranks. With General Robert J. Dixon of the Tactical Air Command, he opened a new era of Army-Air Force collaboration on how to fight on the modern battlefield, and together they sponsored a new genre of doctrinal publication addressing joint warfare. DePuy perceived "doctrine" as an operational term, that consensus that enabled tactical, operational, and strategic coherence within the force afield, and underwrote requirements for new equipment. He sought to shape both, to modernize the Army mind as well as Army materiel. He enjoined TRADOC to ready the Army to win the first battle of the next war, and to develop equipment and training techniques so that it could do so fighting outnumbered against a well-armed enemy. Victory in that first battle, he held, would stem, from superior doctrine as well as superior weapon systems. For him, the rudimentary combat element, the rifle squad, was above all else an idea shared by its members, no matter what their numbers, no matter what their equipment. For him a foxhole was an embodiment of crafty ways to foil a foe's attack, and to accomplish a squad's mission with minimum loss. He knew that no weapon system, however endowed by advanced technology, could function effectively without combat-proficient operators, maintainers, and replenishers, and he understood that a maladroit tactician could compromise the best of these. He perceived battalions as instruments for controlling ground with surveillance, fire, and movement. He described brigades, divisions and corps as systems of systems, requiring of a commander, above all else, synchronization. Thus, he bade TRADOC; develop, write and teach.

So began the evolution of contemporary doctrine. General DePuy put the doctrinal pot to boil. In fact, in telling us in TRADOC how we should work on producing doctrine, he used the metaphor of the pot-a-feu on the stove in a French farm house, the ever ready stew to which various partakers of the family's meals were expected to contribute vegetables now, a piece of meat then. He was certain that TRADOC's doctrinal recipe would not be right with our first efforts. Convinced of likely imperfection, he directed that the 1976 version of Field Manual 100-5 be published in loose-leaf, ring-bound notebook, the easier to change the manual once better ideas were presented. That adaptable edition of FM 100-5 soon gave way to fresh-written successors, but the antecedents of contemporary doctrine -that of the Army, and now joint doctrine as well - can be traced to DePuy's black-pot on the **TRADOC** stove top.

"Training" was TRADOC's other principal objective. I doubt if the Army has had, in this century, a general officer who devoted more time and effort to small-unit tactics. TRADOC itself came to reflect General DePuy's determination to improve the ability of our Army to succeed in close combat. He ruled that his subordinates would evaluate TRADOC's schools and training centers by the performance of soldier-graduates in the force, especially by their demonstrated combat-related skill and knowledge.

One year ago, at his farm, talking about training and its importance to the future of the Army, he told me that it was easy enough to find a general who understood how to draw the arrows across his operation map to the discomfiture

of an enemy, but that there were only a few senior officers who understood what truly happened at the point of those arrows, and even fewer who knew how to train soldiers to advance the point. General DePuy considered all military training a simulation of war, and at TRADOC he vigorously pursued more evocative, more instructive simulations of close combat. He inaugurated the Army Training Evaluation Program, and the training technique known as Tactical Engagement Simulation. He launched the progenitors of the equipment and facilities now associated with these - the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System or MILES, and the National Training Center. The present-day Joint Readiness Training Center, the Combat Maneuver Training Center, the Battle Command Training Program, and the Army's latest forms of simulation, such as SIMNET and the Close Combat Tactical Trainer, are all lineal descendants of his prototypes. Again his instincts proved to be both reliable and fortuitous.

Late on a, February afternoon in 1991, amid a blowing sand storm in Iraq, 2d Squadron, 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, was moving in the van of the covering force of VII Corps with the mission of finding Iraqi Guard units. Find them the Squadron did, a brigade equipped with late model Soviet-made tanks and other armored fighting vehicles, dug in around the Iraqi Guard's own armor training center. In five hours of combat, heavily outnumbered, the American cavalymen demolished that brigade. This year General Larry Welch, former Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, and General Carl Vuono, former Chief of Staff of the Army, had an opportunity to examine that battle in detail with troops commanders, platoon leaders, and platoon sergeants who had fought the action. General Welch noted that none present had previous combat experience, and observing that the performance of the American Army in first battle of previous wars had been mediocre at best, he asked them how they explained the squadron's smashing success. Here is the recorded reply of one troop commander:

Sir, this was not our first battle. This was our tenth battle! We fought three wars at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California; we fought four Wars at the Combat Maneuver Training Center, Hohenfels, Germany; and a lot of other simulations like SIMNET, the Unit Conduct of Trainer, and the Battle Command Training Program. Yes sir, we had been "shot at" before. Many times this war was just like our training.

General DePuy would have asked for no better response.

In our talks, he told me that he sensed that the ARMY was making progress. He attributed much of the gain to the Army's decision to employ centralized selection from the most highly qualified officers for battalion and brigade command positions. However, he also credited doctrine and training - the contribution of TRADOC - for raising the Army's readiness for battle from about the 20% level to at least the 60% level; moreover, he believed that the Army had learned how to add to that percentage. He was quite optimistic that, despite the structural pruning, the budgetary uncertainties, and the strategic amorphisim now confronting the Army's leaders, the force would become more proficient, more effective, year by year.

Three decades ago in a letter to the editor of West Point's alumni magazine. William E. Depuy posed a poignant question about Army leadership, and about life and death. He had visited his regimental commander from the Battle of France, George Bittman Barth, on the occasion of that old soldier's retirement. He penned for West Pointers a, description of Colonel Barth's taking command after the regiment had been badly mauled during its first battle amid the hedgerows of Normandy. It was an infantry unit, he wrote, composed of "plain, ordinary, bewildered Americans."

Hounded by misfortune, utterly devoid of leadership, this regiment had lost its soul .... By the strange chemistry of leadership (Col. Barih's) inner strength, supreme confidence, and bull dog determination flowed into the hearts and minds of that regiment and rekindled the flame that burned so low ... his was the magic that turned bad into good, which lifted the crushing weight of failure from thousands of battered spirits and inspired to devoted sacrifice a motley of common men...

As I walked down the steps of Wainwright Hall into the gathering December night I couldn't help but think that the old breed is moving on, and I couldn't help but wonder where will we find the men to fill their shoes?

Willaim E. DePuy, by his life and work, answered his own question. The answer is that our Army found in him a breed of leader ready to meet the strains of the Army's severe contraction in the aftermath of Vietnam, prepared to provide a sense of direction and of purpose to Americans bewildered by the meandering, of politics, and battered by

the ostracism of the American public. The Army found in General DePuy a breed of leader who could inspire the entire institution to pull itself up by the bootstraps. The Army found in him a breed of man prepared to fill the shoes of his predecessors. Indeed, the Army found him capable of teaching leaders of future generations to take his place, when their turn came.

General DePuy, rest in peace. There will never be another soldier exactly like you, but you have armed your Army for the future. Your impress is on the Army of today and the Army Of tomorrow. When rifles bark again, and cannons roar once more, American soldiers will fight advantaged by your crystalline mind. Rest in peace.