

U.S.

Lt. Gen. Sidney Berry, West Point Chief, Dies at 87

By DOUGLAS MARTIN JULY 17, 2013

Lt. Gen. Sidney B. Berry, a decorated combat veteran who ushered women into West Point as superintendent of the United States Military Academy in the 1970s and confronted a grievous cheating scandal there, died on July 1 in Kennett Square, Pa. He was 87.

The cause was congestive heart failure, a complication of Parkinson's disease, his son, Bryan, said.

General Berry was a military luminary from the day a fellow cadet christened him "our leader, owner of the place," in his academy yearbook. He was the first in his graduating class to achieve the rank of general.

Serving in the Army in the Korean War, he was wounded, awarded two Silver Stars for valor and promoted twice in the field, to captain and major. In the Vietnam War, he was again wounded and won two more Silver Stars. He was one of two military assistants to Robert S. McNamara, the defense secretary in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

In 1970, Life magazine ran a 10-page profile of General Berry titled "Case Study of an Army Star." The article said that many predicted he would rise to Army chief of staff, the service's highest position.

"Sid Berry expresses the ideal of the American soldier," Lt. Gen. William DePuy, assistant vice chief of staff, told Life. "He is what the profession would like to believe

itself to be.”

General Berry, who became the 50th superintendent of West Point in 1974, was not pleased when Congress authorized the admission of women as cadets the next year. His major objection was that because women could not serve in combat — a policy abolished early this year — a West Point education would have no purpose for them.

General Berry, who had daughters of his own, also worried that women would lack the physical strength to be in the cadet corps, and that they might be a distraction to men on the campus.

But after thinking about resigning if he failed to prevent the admission of women, General Berry said, he decided to do “what a good soldier does.” He began developing a curriculum to accommodate the women who would begin arriving in July 1976. The academy adopted lighter training rifles for them and let women take courses in self-defense rather than boxing and wrestling. Hazing of plebes, as new cadets are called, was curbed somewhat. The traditional gray uniforms were adapted to women’s figures. And General Berry came to believe women could do the job.

“Upon re-examination, I have concluded that West Point will be strengthened by the admission of women,” he said in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1976.

Women represented 10 percent of the original class. Today the academy limits enrollment of women to 16 percent of cadets, roughly matching the percentage of women on active duty in the Army.

General Berry also had to contend with a vast cheating scandal in 1976 involving an electrical engineering take-home test. More than 220 cadets were implicated and 152 expelled, then the sole penalty for violating the academy’s code of honor.

The episode led General Berry to commission a thorough reappraisal of the code, which not only prohibits lying, cheating and stealing but also orders cadets not to tolerate those who do. Though he made clear that his personal predilection was

for tough justice, he strove to make the system reflect the thinking of a new, more collaborative generation of cadets who were less willing to inform on one another.

A fact-finding panel found that the code was overly rigid — that it demanded, in effect, “unattainable human behavior.” A first remedial step was to suspend the cadet-run board that ruled on violations, usually harshly, and replace it temporarily with a board that included officers. Another step was to give the superintendent the right to impose lesser penalties than expulsion. Factors like intent and personal circumstances are now taken into account in determining violations and punishment.

The secretary of the Army, Martin R. Hoffman, allowed most of the dismissed cadets to return after a year.

Sidney Bryan Berry was born on Feb. 10, 1926, in Hattiesburg, Miss. When he was 7, his mother died of sepsis during pregnancy. He was an Eagle Scout.

He faced a difficult choice when he received, on the same day, a draft notice and notification of his appointment to the military academy. He was inclined to enter the military because friends of his were already serving, he told *Life*. But his father, a country lawyer, persuaded him that there would be more wars and urged him to go to West Point.

He graduated in 1948, earned a master’s degree in international relations from Columbia University and did postgraduate work at the American University of Beirut. As a general in Vietnam, he personally flew a helicopter to rescue enlisted men trapped by North Vietnamese troops. He was 48 and a major general when he became the West Point superintendent.

His final Army assignment was commanding the 62,000 soldiers of V Corps in Europe. Its two infantry and armored divisions and armored cavalry regiment defended the Fulda Gap in Germany, the Soviet Union’s shortest route to the Rhine River.

After retiring from active service, General Berry was Mississippi’s public safety commissioner. In that post, he admitted women to the state’s highway patrol.

In addition to his son, he is survived by his wife, the former Anne Florine Hayes; his daughters, Nan Berry Davenport and Lynn Berry Bonner; 12 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Sharing the West Point campus with women took some adjustment, General Berry told U.S. News & World Report in 1977. He recalled his momentary embarrassment when a female plebe asked him to dance at a school function. He said he paused for only a second before accepting.

“Knowing I would go down in history as the first superintendent to dance with a plebe,” he said, “I told the young lady that I would be delighted.”

A version of this article appears in print on July 18, 2013, on Page A15 of the New York edition with the headline: Lt. Gen. Sidney Berry, 87, West Point Chief, Is Dead.