

GEORGE P. CURTIN

MG US ARMY



George P. Curtin was born, 5 November 1918, at Curtin, PA, the fifth of seven children of Major Hugh Laird Curtin and Thomazine Harris Potter. He was the first to reach Eagle level in his community's Boy Scout Troop.

His initial military service was a thirty day stint at Citizens Military Training Camp (CMTC), Camp Meade, Maryland in 1935. It was a four year program leading to a commissioned officer status.

While he was in school that year he joined the local National Guard unit, Troop L, 103rd Cavalry, (later it became the machine gun troop). Note that he was in both cases two years below the minimum age requirement of 18 years old for attendance.

While at the camp he served a one day assignment as orderly to the regimental commander, Colonel Milton Baker, a WWI friend of his father, who was also the Superintendent of Valley Forge Military Academy. Colonel Baker offered him a scholarship at his school if he played a musical instrument. As a consequence, he took lessons on a horn and was accepted for the band at the academy. His horn playing left something to be desired so the band master switched him to playing cymbals in the marching band. He was quite good. He attended the school for two years. He was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the Field Artillery. His National Guard unit had

been reorganized from cavalry to field artillery. His new unit was initially a 75mm gun unit and later a 155mm gun unit. When the unit, 190th Field Artillery was designated a 155 mm gun unit, an officer from the 36th Field Artillery Regiment at Fort Bragg, NC, (the only 155mm gun field artillery unit in the active US Army) was sent to indoctrinate the unit in the service of this big gun.

It was an old WWI French GPF. The number of the unit is significant as will be seen later.

In this time period he met and was married to his first wife for a brief time.

The regiment was called to Federal service January 13, 1941 and was initially stationed at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. It was later moved to Camp Sutton, NC, and then overseas to Northern Ireland in 1941, and later on to England in 1942. On March 1, 1942, Captain Curtin was promoted to Major and reassigned from command of A Battery to the regimental staff as S-2, Intelligence Officer, 190th

Field Artillery Group. The unit had been redesignated an artillery group. This was for the locating and the assignments of the newly arriving 28th US Infantry Division to stations in Wales, United Kingdom. During the invasion of Europe he was on detached service with the V Corps Artillery Headquarters and assigned as liaison with the 1st US Infantry Division Artillery. He landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France at H+1 hour on D-Day, 6 June 1944 with the 16th US Infantry Regiment of the 1st Division and was almost seriously wounded by shrapnel and blast from an incoming mortar shell. He still carries fourteen shrapnel fragments in his leg.

As the Allied Forces approached Paris, he came across soldiers of the US 4th Infantry Division who said they were ordered to wait for the 2nd French Division arrival, since the French unit would have the honor of liberating the city. He didn't wait, and instead proceeded into the city and his unit was greeted as the liberating heroes by throngs of happy French.

After crossing the Rhine River, he along with a military government representative, a former member of his unit, "captured" the Fortress of Ehrenbreitstein. It had served as the Army of Occupation Headquarters after WWI. "Captured" is so indicated because the fortress prided its self on never having been defeated by an enemy. In this case, Curtin said he simply took possession from its civilian guards, thus preserving the tradition.

While stationed in Germany he told this story to German officials at a dinner and as a result, he was later given a large painting of the facility. The fortress held treasures stolen by the Nazis from the previous owners.

As the war drew to a close, Curtin found himself in charge of caring for the welfare of large groups of displaced persons awaiting return to their homelands. Opposite him, waiting to surrender, was a Germany Cavalry unit which had been fighting on the Russian front. Both the DP's and the Germans were hungry.

Curtin had bread available, but no meat, so he made a deal with the German commander to slaughter a horse a day and exchange meat for bread. This continued for some time. Subsequently, the German unit was turned over to the Russians since it was them they had been fighting. As they departed, the German commander rode up and turned over his horse to Curtin. Curtin kept the horse until he departed to the US at the end of his tour of duty. Curtin saw to it the German commander was kept as a US prisoner as a reward for his actions.

Curtin ended the war in Europe in Pilzen, Czechoslovakia. He received the two awards of the Bronze Star Medal for Valor, the Purple Heart Medal, French Croix de Guerre Medal. Additionally he received five battle stars and an arrowhead for the 38 months he spent at war in Europe.

Upon separation from active service, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel at the age of 27. After the war he returned to the employee of Bell Telephone Co of Pennsylvania as a field engineer. Simultaneously, he organized and served as commander of the 200th Field Artillery Battalion, (155mm Howitzer) in the Pennsylvania National Guard. His unit was called to active Federal service again on January 23, 1951. (10 years and 10 days since the first call up). The unit was stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. While he was there, he volunteered for service in Korea where we were at war. In Korea he was assigned first as commander of the 48th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm), 7th Infantry Division, a direct support battalion for the 32nd Infantry Regiment. He was promoted to S-3 Operations Officer of division Artillery. He served in that position until the end of hostilities. For this service he received an additional Bronze Star Medal and 3 battle stars on his Korea Service Ribbon.

Upon returning to the United States, he was assigned to the Department of Army General Staff, G-3 Operations Section at the Pentagon. He met and married May Elizabeth (Libby) Harvey.

He was given his choice of next assignment and selected a short tour in Vietnam under LT General Sam Williams where he was Chief of Plans, MAAG, Vietnam. Due to the illness of his mother he requested assignment in Headquarters Second US Army at Fort Meade, Maryland where he supervised the reserve components of seven states.

In February of 1959, he was promoted to full colonel. His next assignment was a return to Europe where he was Executive Officer, V Corps Artillery for one year. He was moved to command the 36th Artillery Group in Babenhausen, (the same unit which provided advice when he received the new 155mm gun). The 36th Artillery Group consisted of a 155mm howitzer battalion, an 8" inch howitzer battalion, an Honest John Rocket battalion, a Corporal Missile battalion, a Sergeant Missile battalion and a 280mm Gun battalion. The wartime mission of the group was to serve as the corps artillery for the III German Corps.

Upon return to the US, he was assigned to Headquarters, Fifth US

Army stationed in Chicago, Illinois. He served as Deputy for Reserve Forces and as Army Chief of Staff, a two star position. Upon the unexpected retirement of the then current chief of staff, he was selected as a temporary replacement and served in that capacity in the ensuing years. He remained in that assignment until mandatory retirement at 30 years commissioned service. He retired from active military service at Fort Sheridan, Illinois in 1970 having served the full range of Army activities. He was a part of CMTC, ROTC, USAR, ARNG, Active Army and DAC.

He remained associated with the US Army in its civil service as a GS-14 where he served an additional 10 years.

Service schools include the Basic, the Advanced, and refresher courses at the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma and the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He graduated first in his class in all these schools.

His immediate family includes his wife Libbye, son Thomas and daughter Georganne. His hobbies were golf and horseback riding. He was Master of Pohick Valley Hunt. They hunted fox with hounds (dogs) while riding *horses*).