

# The General's Attention

by Harry Steingrubey, 399-C

I was a private in the 100th Infantry Division when, on 10 August 1944, the unit was alerted for shipment to the European Theater of Operations (ETO). Lieutenant General Lear, Army Ground Force Commander, was scheduled to spend two days inspecting the Division for combat readiness.

The first event scheduled was a briefing of all Division field grade officers (captain, on up) by General Lear on the impending move. Drawing guard duty for this occasion, I was posted in the entrance hall to greet the General and his staff with a military rifle salute as they entered.

The building was rocking with conversation and laughter as the assembled officers socialized awaiting the general's arrival. His reputation as a tough, no-nonsense officer preceded him. He had recently been responsible for the court martial of a truckload of soldiers he had observed wolf whistling at a girl on a golf course they were passing. This had made national news!

There was no mistake. The approaching cavalcade, which I spotted through the open door, bore the awaited guest. Every military person within sight of the main vehicle was snapping to attention! An escorted open-air touring sedan with flags waving from the fenders and a license plate full of *stars* stopped in front of the building.

My adrenaline was rising. I snapped the M-1 rifle to attention and stood rigid as the entourage approached the entrance. The General's staff preceded him—lowest rank first—captain, major, and as I counted the *stars* on his epaulettes in passing—3—he was directly in front of me. This was the famous General!

The ruckus in the building had not subsided. The staff officers were well within the main area and the General was about to enter, but no one had called the assembly to ATTENTION!

Military protocol demands that all lower rank come to "attention" when a senior officer enters the area. and this was no mere senior officer—this was General Lear, the top "gunny" in the Army ground forces! Who would be court martialed this time?

My reaction was immediate. Mustering what adrenaline was left and in the best command voice I could muster, I shouted over the tumult, "TEN HUT!"

Every officer in the building jumped to attention—the overturning of chairs was the last sound preceding an eerie silence. It seemed for a few seconds the world had come to a complete stop. During this quiet moment, the General, with his aide, backstepped a few feet, and looking me squarely in the eyes, said "Good job, soldier." Instructing the aide to recommend a one-stripe promotion for me, his "AT EASE" started the world turning again as he entered the hall.

That PFC stripe was not forthcoming, but it wasn't important. I still have the unforgettable experience: a private calling every high-ranking Division officer—including it's General—to attention and meeting the legendary General Lear eye to eye. For a brief moment, I had *his* attention.

July 2000 Association Newsletter