

## JOHN M. WRIGHT, JR.

A distinguished soldier whose shining qualities of leadership, patriotism, and courage were annealed by more than three years as a prisoner of war of the Japanese in World War II; a far-thinking and innovative pioneer in the development of air assault forces and tactics for the Vietnam War; a commander whose first thoughts were always for the soldiers he led; and a lifelong and preeminent leader of the Boy Scouts of America, John MacNair Wright, Jr. has served his country with distinction, integrity, and an unswerving commitment to the ideals expressed in the West Point motto: Duty, Honor, Country.

Jack Wright graduated from West Point in 1940. Commissioned in the Coast Artillery Corps, he was assigned to the 91<sup>st</sup> Coast Artillery, Philippine Scouts, an element of the Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bays. He served in a four-gun 155mm battery until the Japanese final assault to defeat Corregidor, at which time he was designated "Battery Wright" with one 155 mm roving gun and authority to move this battery to any position on Corregidor to deliver effective fire on Japanese targets on Bataan. Battery Wright fired the last artillery round in the defense of Corregidor. For his gallantry under fire during this desperate period, Lieutenant Wright was awarded a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

Captured on Corregidor by the Japanese, he was a prisoner of war for three years and four months, enduring the worst kind of depraved, inhuman, and demoralizing conditions. Near the end of the war he was moved from the Philippines to Japan, and then to Korea, surviving the sinking of one POW ship, the total destruction of a second ship, and the safe arrival of the third ship at Moji, Japan. Although there were many officers senior to Lieutenant Wright, he was frequently chosen by the senior American POW to occupy the most difficult leadership positions. A fellow POW said of him, "Throughout this ordeal, Jack Wright was an inspiration to all under the most trying of circumstances."

He was liberated in September 1945. After a year of hospitalization, he transferred to the Infantry and qualified as a parachutist. In 1948, he became the Military Attache at the US Embassy in Paraguay. Back in the United States, he attended The Infantry School and then commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 508<sup>th</sup> Airborne Regimental Combat Team at Fort Benning, Georgia.

During the Korean War, Lieutenant Colonel Wright was assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, where he served as 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regimental Executive Officer, Division G-1, and Division G-4. After returning from Korea, he earned a Master's Degree in Business Administration at the University of Southern California, and was then assigned to the Department of the Army Staff. In 1961, then Colonel Wright graduated from the National War College.

After assignments in Germany as Chief of Staff, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; G-3, VII Corps; and G-3, Seventh Army; he was promoted to brigadier general and assigned as Assistant Division Commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division (Test), an experimental unit formed to test and evaluate airmobile concepts at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Brigadier General Wright contributed significantly to the development, refinement, and implementation of air assault tactics and doctrine for this new division. In order to know and understand the capabilities of the primary means of battlefield mobility for this new combat doctrine, he qualified as a helicopter pilot. In 1965, the division was reorganized as the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Air Mobile), and deployed to Vietnam.

Returning to the United States, he was promoted to major general and assigned to the Army Staff to conduct a study, "Aviation Requirements for the Combat Structure of the Army." This study

became the blueprint for the future development of Army Aviation. In 1967, he became Commanding General of the Infantry Center and Commandant of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1969, he returned to Vietnam to command the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. For his brilliant leadership, professionalism, and personal courage, he was awarded a second Distinguished Service Medal, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and 47 Air Medals.

Promoted to lieutenant general, Jack Wright was appointed Comptroller of the Army. In this, his final active duty assignment, he had a significant impact on the rebuilding of the Army and the recruiting, training, and retention of quality soldiers. In 1972, he retired from active duty and was awarded a third Distinguished Service Medal. A year later, he earned a Master's Degree in International Affairs at George Washington University.

In retirement, Jack Wright turned to his second major interest – serving the youth of America through the Boy Scout movement. An Eagle Scout, he was deeply involved with Scouting as a volunteer throughout his military career. He served as Scoutmaster, Explorer Advisor, District Commissioner, District Chairman, and Council President. He participated in national and world jamborees, and served as technical advisor to the Boy Scout Association of Vietnam while Assistant Division Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam.

Now out of uniform, he became a professional Scouter and for the next ten years he served as Director of Research and Development, National Director of Programs, and National Director of Exploring for the Boy Scouts of America. Under his direction, the Exploring program's membership reached an all-time high of 800,000. The impact of his influence, example, and overall leadership on the young men and women of Scouting was unprecedented.

General Wright is the recipient of the coveted Silver Beaver and Silver Antelope Awards for distinguished service to Scouting, as well as the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award for outstanding service to the Army and the nation. Elected to the Army Aviation Hall of Fame in 1986, he later was awarded the George Washington Honor Medal by the Freedom's Foundation at Valley Forge.

Throughout a lifetime of service to his country, General Wright made permanent and valuable contributions to the security and freedom of the United States. His personal courage under unimaginable conditions, his dedication to the welfare of the American soldier throughout his career, his lifetime commitment to the welfare of the youth of America, and the example of leadership and integrity he set, are in the finest traditions of the United States Military Academy.

Accordingly, the Association of Graduates takes great pride in presenting the 2007 Distinguished Graduate Award to John MacNair Wright, Jr.