

Rise of local 'farm kid' allowed him to serve nation for decades

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON

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Although he may be best-known in Vermillion for having served as dean of the USD School of Law from 1980-1988, retired Maj. Gen. Walter D. Reed had a long career with the U.S. Air Force that took him all over the world.

Reed sat down recently with his wife Dorothy, son Joseph and the Vermillion Plain Talk to discuss some of his accomplishments.

Although he eventually became the judge advocate general at the U.S. Air Force headquarters, Reed started in 1943 as an enlistee in the Army Air Corps' aviation cadet program.

The Iowa native went to navigation school, where he became a celestial navigator and was assigned to a B-29 bombardment group in Kansas.

"You had to learn how to find your position by taking angle shots of the stars, and you had to take two or three stars to (find) your position," Reed explained.

As a bombardier, Reed became familiar with the Norden Bombsight.

"It's a device that you look through and see the location on the earth, and it would compute angles that you should use to drop bombs to hit a particular spot," he said. "The Norden Bombsight was a highly technical and highly secretive device that was very accurate. It was very closely watched during the war, because no other country had anything quite that good."

The device was located in the nose of the aircraft.

"It actually controlled the aircraft," Reed said. "The pilot would give control to the person operating the sight, and he could control the direction of the aircraft and make sure it was lined up properly so that when the bombs were dropped they would hit whatever you were looking at."

Reed was released from active duty in February 1946 without having seen combat. He was recalled to active duty in February 1951.

"By that time I had finished law school and become an attorney, so I quit flying and entered the Judge Advocate General's (Corps). That was a better job, I thought," he said.

In 1952 Reed was assigned as assistant staff judge advocate at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico, and was transferred to Korea for a year as staff judge advocate of the 18th Fighter-Bomber Wing.

He served with the Judge Advocate

General's Corps for 35 years.

"The Judge Advocate General handled all legal services for the Air Force," Reed said. "We handled discipline, court-martials and what we called legal assistance."

"On each base there was a legal office for servicemen that had a legal problem where they could come and get legal advice, they would get documents prepared, power of attorney, wills. We did all that. That kept you busy," he said. "Also, we took some satisfaction in helping people."

After he left Korea, Reed served from November 1953 to August 1958 at the Air Force Missile Test Center at Patrick Air Force Base, FL, first as assistant staff judge advocate in the legal office of the Military Justice Division, and later as legal staff officer with the Military and Civilian Affairs Division, Office of the Staff Judge Advocate.

The next four years were spent with the Air Force's headquarters in Europe in the Directorate of International Law.

Among his accomplishments in this capacity, he served as legal adviser to the Ballistic Missile Committee, which negotiated the establishment of NATO bases in Italy and Turkey and the installation of medium-range missiles in Turkey.

"(Years later) when we had the Cuban Missile Crisis, one of the agreements between Kennedy and Khrushchev was, Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba ... and the United States removed the missiles from Turkey," Joseph Reed said.

In 1962 Reed entered McGill University in Canada to study international air and space law, in which he eventually earned his LLM.

"It's an advanced legal degree over and above what you'd normally get out of law school," Joseph Reed said.

Reed then went to Virginia and worked in the International Law Division at the Pentagon.

"He used to tell a story to us about one Sunday in the mid-'60s," Joseph Reed said.

"During that time, the military were actually flying missions over Viet Nam, but they had the U.S. markings on the planes covered up so it wouldn't appear to be a United States plane. He told me that the chairman of the joint chiefs wanted to know what would be the international legal ramifications if they removed the covers on the markings."

The ramifications were simple, Walter Reed said.

"You have to take responsibility for what you're doing," he said.



Maj. Gen. Walter D. Reed

From August 1967 to August 1969, Reed was assigned to the American embassy in Bangkok, where he served as the legal advisor to the U.S. ambassador to Thailand.

He later served as assistant staff judge advocate at Headquarters Air Force Systems Command at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. In April 1970 he was assigned as chief of the International Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General in Washington, D.C.

In 1973 he became director of civil law and became assistant judge advocate general later that year.

Reed was appointed the judge advocate general of the Air Force and promoted to the

grade of major general on Oct. 1, 1977. He retired from the Air Force in 1980, at which point he moved to Vermillion to serve as dean of the law school.

He retired completely in the early 1990s.

Reed's career took him a long way, Dorothy Reed said.

"You go where the job is," she said. Joseph Reed commented on his father's diverse experiences, saying, "He had a very long career with the Air Force, and rose from the ranks of private to major general."

"You did really well," he told his father.

"For a farm kid," Walter Reed said with a smile.

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